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NBT celebrates another award-winning year in 2023



NBT President and CEO John H. Watt, Jr. thanks the NBT team after being recognized with an award by Commerce Chenango for the company's contributions to the community in 2023. (Photo from NBT)

ZACHARY MESECK
EVENING SUN

NORWICH - NBT Bancorp Inc. celebrated another year of growth last year after receiving recognition for being a business of distinction by Commerce Chenango, being named one of Central New York's best places to work, and making the list of Forbes World's Best Banks.

NBT Bank offers personal banking, business banking and wealth management services from locations in seven states, including New

York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine and Connecticut. The bank and its parent company, NBT Bancorp Inc., are headquartered in Norwich, NY. NBT Bancorp had assets of \$13.31 billion as of December 31, 2023 and is traded on the Nasdaq Global Select Market under the symbol NBTB.

The company continues to grow organically by focusing on the needs of the individual communities it serves. As NBT pursues opportunities to grow its company, optimize the experience of its customers and

employees and build on its rich culture, it does so from a position of strength as a stable and well capitalized company. The company has more than 2,000 employees total, with nearly 500 of those based in Chenango County.

Expanding operations in 2023

From December 2023 through the end of January 2024, NBT will have opened three new retail banking offices within its footprint, including Pittsfield, Mass., West Hartford, Conn., and the much-anticipated

branch in Oakdale Commons at 625 Harry L Drive in Johnson City.

"NBT is excited to be part of the revitalization taking place at Oakdale Commons," said Director of Retail Banking Tom Sutton. "We are constantly evaluating business and retail trends in our communities, and this new location will provide a convenient extension of our services in this high-traffic area."

In August, NBT Bank completed its merger with Salisbury Bank. The merger added 13

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The Chenango SPCA had a great year for adoptions, with 438 cats and 138 dogs adopted out. They also had their best month in their recorded history for adoptions, with 100 pets adopted in the month of October. (Photo by Sarah Genter)

Adoptions are the name of the game in 2024 for the Chenango SPCA

SARAH GENTER
EVENING SUN

CHENANGO COUNTY — The Chenango SPCA spent the past year making changes, planning for the future, and of course, caring for the animals of Chenango County.

The shelter was first founded in 1907, and its current location at 6160 County Road 32 in Norwich was acquired by the organization in 2000. Today, the Chenango SPCA has a staff of 11 part-time employees and one full-time director, as well as a handful of volunteers to care for the animals that come in and help them find loving, forever homes.

To achieve this goal, the shelter spent 2023 making some changes to improve their care for the animals, as well as make it easier than ever for individuals to adopt. With new state mandates on the horizon, they also plan to spend 2024 preparing for the future.

Development and support

In early 2023, the Chenango SPCA said goodbye to long-time Executive Director Annette Clarke, and brought on their new Executive Director Patrick McLaughlin.

McLaughlin's background is in the education industry, with several years working at East Catholic High School in Manchester, Connecticut, where he taught for five years before becoming the director of campus ministry. He also gained experience with fundraising and the nonprofit world during his educational career.

Despite being new to the animal care field, he hit the ground running when he joined the SPCA and was able to implement positive change and hit milestones in his first year as director.

One significant change for the organization was beginning to do spay and neuter surgeries in-house, which McLaughlin said significantly cuts costs.

"We did receive a grant to do more spay and neuter surgeries here in the shelter, so we've actually doubled the frequency that we're able to do that. As a result we can spay and neuter more of our own animals more quickly and more economically than by taking them to private vet clinics," he said.

Thanks to the grant, the SPCA is able to bring in veterinarians twice a month, who spay and neuter about 15 to 20 animals in a day. Although their partnership with Pet Street Station Animal Hospital provides them a facility to have animals spayed and neutered at reduced rates, McLaughlin said it is still more affordable to perform them right at the shelter.

Community support also played a key role in the SPCA's

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The New Berlin Cultural Center: 'It takes a small village'

KELLI MILLER
EVENING SUN

NEW BERLIN — The New Berlin Cultural Center celebrated their first year anniversary on September 18, 2023 at the parish hall of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church on Main Street.

Over the past year, the space hosted several yoga classes, cooking classes, sewing classes, art classes, dance classes, and musical theater.

Center Director Andrea Keller said it has been an effort by everyone that participated in the events. She said she may be the creative hook but New Berlin Mayor Peter Lennon is like the flame that says "we're going to get this," and "we're going to accomplish that."

She said "It's all about the support of the entire village, it's the eight village singers, it's Mayor Lennon, who believes and works to do right and constantly gives of himself. The mayor's wife, every basketball player, every senior citizen, everyone; the entire village comes together to make something valuable."

Keller said the ideas for the Cultural Center programs and classes came easy, but they



The Cultural Center offered youth cooking classes, teaching hands on learning, and exploring new recipes. (Submitted photo)

needed a place to hold the events. She said she asked the Village of New Berlin Mayor Peter Lennon for help. She said he approached Pastor Steve at St. Andrews and questioned if there may be any opportunity to utilize space in the parish hall.

Lennon said, "We're very thankful for Pastor Steve, he spoke with his parish and they

gave their support and said yes."

Keller, a professional dancer, artist, and teacher, alongside her husband Jeff, who was a long-time professional singer and performer on Broadway, used their experience and creativity to offer classes and activities at the Cultural Center.

Keller said, "I'm all about culture, cultural activity."

2023 started with a concert and cabaret shows, blessing of the animals, baking class, easter activities, a summer school feeding program and sign tree activity, a Halloween event, and wrapped up the year with a Christmas show and tree lighting.

Keller said the first cabaret

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The New Berlin Cultural Center: 'It takes a small village' -

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show was filled to the brim and the second show was stretched into three nights because of the demand for the event.

Her husband Jeff teaches the village singers how to develop as singers and accept themselves. She said the kids were so happy with their singing and this leads to the butterfly effect.

"One of the beautiful things about the cabarets are the performers lives have changed for the positive," Keller said. "All different ages having something new in their life, and the younger ones that were a little shy became filled with belief in knowing they are someone."

Keller said the summer program was an amazing few weeks. The youth worked on their summer art project, creating inspirational "sign-trees" with words and phrases they chose on the first day of the program. Painting and carpentry were taught by Dee and Paul Stein and when the trees were finished, they were placed around the village.

"It was magnificent because the children came for the first day and met me, 'the crazy person' and they became curious to know a little more about the 'crazy person' and then they became stimulated and then the parents had to visit and see what their children were talking about," said Keller.

She said every morning she went dressed as an artist or the artist's painting and the children were asked to research on the artist or the painting. Daily, after each program, the kids would go home, do their research and return the next day



Dance Classes were filled at the Cultural Center in New Berlin. (Submitted photo)

to share the information they found.

Keller said the mayor was continually involved with the center's activities through the year. She said he felt he must be an example for others to follow and would roll up his sleeves and carry props, help out with activities, and was always looking for additional ways to involve the community.

Lennon said, "One of the nice things about the summer program was that it was tied in with the school feeding program and the kids listened to

Keller, taking from her instruction and began to understand the value of the program."

"The participants learned to clean up litter in the park even though they didn't create it, and were taught to appreciate their surroundings," he added.

Keller said the students were respectful while doing their activities and projects, and everyone was so proud. The Tree signs were signed by all that participated. She said the youth love to show their names off on the back of their tree project.

She said the kids can add this to pump up their resume, showing they worked at a summer camp and the parents were appreciative, knowing their children were doing something positive, while they were at work.

Keller said, "This brings positivity. If we didn't have a way to express ourselves, we would wither; be nothing, be rather bored. The cogs of the wheel can produce gigantic things."

"There were students that

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Cultural Center Director Andreia Keller spearheads activities and creates opportunities for local residents to expand their boundaries and learn new concepts in cooking, sewing, art, dance, and more. (Submitted photo)

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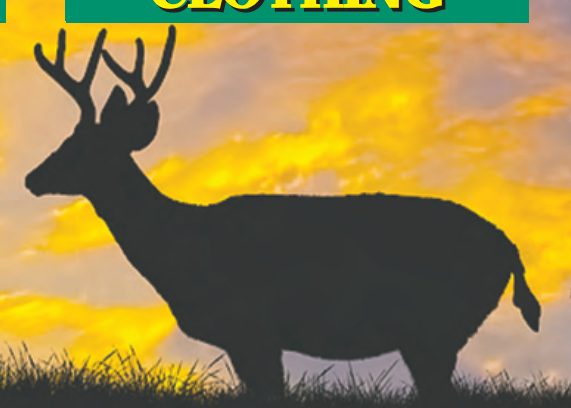
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The New Berlin Cultural Center: 'It takes a small village'

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needed kindness, needed to understand they were just as important as the other," she added, "So, at the end of the summer programs third week, their hearts had changed and sweet moments and hugs were shared."

Lennon said, "We've also built a strong relationship with Unadilla Valley School and Principal Brendan Coyle is very excited about the upcoming astronomy presentation. We're building our alliances and the school is more than happy putting out flyers, etc."

He said the maturing relationship has all the ingredients in the making of something very special.

Lennon explained how the Center's programs changed one of their residents, Ryoko Lewis. He said Lewis has lived in the area for a number of years but was known to stay to herself until she started teaching yoga classes at the Center. She has opened up and become a very big part of the community.

"She has quite a following," said Lennon.

Keller said, "She bloomed, she was like a flower; like an orchid, and bloomed."

Lennon added, "Her husband is a nationally-known economist and just co-authored a book with Steve Forbes."

He said her yoga classes are very popular and she teaches at the Cultural Center on Mondays and Tuesdays at noon and Wednesday nights.



The Village Voice Singers recently performed at the New Berlin Cultural Center at St. Andrews (Submitted photo)

"Many of these people had never met each other before the activities, and now you can't keep them apart," he said.

Personal growth and acceptance

Keller said there is a variety of social class, religion, laws, and the mish-mash of all of it, has been trying. She said she wants to get into the minds of the youth to help them understand that all people are more alike than not. She wants all people to know they are the same inside.

Lennon said, "What Andreia is doing here is beyond the kids. We're all looking for a good feeling after an event. We're all New Berlinites, no matter what age, background."

Keller said she had personal challenges to work through. Before moving to the village, she said she used to live in

an apartment complex, where you're not really involved with your neighbors.

"You don't really get to know who lives right next door," she said. "Because of that, I had to learn to show up to events and say, okay, this is you and this is me and we will see each other again, and so on."

She added, "I realized we were going to help each other with gardening, going to events together, and being accountable to one another. It has been different than how I used to live."

Keller said they are also looking for other places to hold programs and events.

"It's about morals, and respect and there are a few activities that may not fit into the church surrounding that wouldn't be proper. We don't want to be offensive," said Keller.

She said making decorations out of recycled goods is something she likes to, but filling a room at the church and leaving those items stacked up in the corner, waiting on the activity, is just not respectful to the church.

Lennon said, "We are going to continue to have events at St. Andrews, concerts and things like that but there are other activities we would like to have in other locations in the village and we are looking for other options like open rooms where we can bring in an art class or something like that."

"We're looking to find as much space as we can. One facility may have special lighting or a backyard that can hold special events such as post events or gatherings," he added.

"Father Steve at St. Andrews wants to remain a major part

of the cultural scene but agrees growing the Village of New Berlin into a cultural village is important," said Lennon.

Transitioning, dreams, and events for 2024

The first Cultural Center event for 2024 will be held on February 22 at 7 p.m. at St. Andrews in partnership with The Beardslee Homestead.

Keller said, "This is an amazing young astronomer, Leo Greco, and he will present a free pre-eclipse lecture and series of photos that will help prepare observers for the upcoming solar eclipse on April 8, in Central New York."

She said celestial/space inspired snacks will be provided.

Lennon said, "Another upcoming event will be the Easter egg hunt on March 30. It's going to be a little different this year and we'll be bringing in the Cultural Center to help out."

"Rather than just having chocolate in the eggs, we're going to put in some prizes instead. We'll have tickets to events, art supplies, and more in about 25 or 30 eggs. We're hoping to not fixate so much on the food, candy part of it," he said.

He stated they also want to create a fund for the youth, to award them for their works and show appreciation for their time and efforts. He said it will be nice to recognize their talents and added that this is another way to build up New Berlin.

"The Cultural Center will be transitioning to fewer classes for the youth because some of the classes had only three kids in them. Also, they don't want to compete against school actives or for profit entities," said Lennon.

He said the focus is to bring energy to the youth, so they will be able to expand their interests

further and take opportunities.

Keller said there are many events planned and a few hopeful events in the making.

Keller hopes to have beautiful tea parties for the ladies and lectures for women on personal matters and more. She also wants to bring manners back and teach the importance of proper eating and how to enjoy a meal. She said above all, she wishes to teach others to be grateful.

Another hope Keller has is to put her 400 Barbies on display as they are educational dolls. She hopes to display them in an exposition.

Lennon said, "Think car museum- creating a scene with what was going on with society when this Barbie came out and why the doll shifted from one look to another."

She said her collection consists of all races, many countries, all professions and even includes her most recent addition, an army Barbie.

Keller has an additional dream for the Cultural Center in 2024. She said being a dancer from Brazil, and helping create one of the largest dance festivals in the world, has given her a deep desire to bring something similar to the village.

"This will not be a competition, you just come and do some workshops and it's beautiful," she said.

Lennon said it all goes back to building the cadres of volunteers, getting an entire village to feel like this is their connection.

"I think we're at the point where this is starting to snowball. It's a special place," he said.

For further information email cultural.sta@gmail.com



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successful year. Zappone Subaru participated in the Subaru Loves Pets program in October, which allowed participating shelters to receive \$100 per adoption, up to a total of \$3,100.

"With the knowledge that we would be receiving that funding, we drastically reduced our adoption costs so that we could motivate people to adopt. We reduced prices from \$155 for dogs to \$31, and from \$100 for cats to \$13," said McLaughlin. "That's a huge reduction, and we were only able of course to provide an 80 percent discount because we knew we had money coming in from a business supporter."

The reduced adoption fees had a major impact on their adoption rates for the month. McLaughlin said of the 15 years they've been keeping records, October had their highest amount of adoptions with a total of 100 cats and dogs adopted.

The shelter saw a great year for adoptions overall. Of the 447 cats and 251 dogs brought in to the shelter in 2023, 438 cats and 138 dogs were adopted back out. McLaughlin said many of the dogs were also runaways that they were able to reunite with their owners.

The success of 2023 seems to have carried over into the new year as well. In addition to helping hundreds of animals find homes, the high adoption rates also sparked a local anonymous donor to support the shelter's efforts. In early 2024, the Chenango SPCA received a donation of \$20,000 to reopen their Safe Haven Fund for Animals, which makes adoptions free while funds last.

"She was very encouraged by our high adoption numbers in October; we hit 100 adoptions in October which is the highest ever for us, at least since we've been keeping records," said McLaughlin. "So she was thrilled with that and contacted me about reinitiating the Safe Haven Fund, so we could basically make it possible for people to come and, as long as they're approved, money doesn't have to stand in the way of their adoption."

The hope is that adoption rates will spike again while funds last, which McLaughlin said will show the Safe Haven Fund is successful and hopefully elicit more donations to the program in the future.

"Based on our usual data for adoptions this will certainly not last a year. It'll last a few months, and so I think a metric that we're using to assess how effective the program is is to see if the adoption rate increases," he said. "If the adoption



Members of the George Rider Hook and Ladder Company supported the Chenango SPCA in early 2024 by assisting with the labor of repairing their dog kennels. They also donated \$800 to the \$2,300 total cost of materials. (Submitted photo)

rate increases then we say, yes, that was successful, and that helps our chances of getting another donation for the program in the future. If adoptions stay at the same rate then we'll say, for whatever reason that might not be working and it might not be renewed."

McLaughlin said one of the major benefits to the Chenango County area is the willingness of the community to do what they can to help, which was evident when members of the George Rider Hook and Ladder Company spent a day repairing dog kennels at the Chenango SPCA.

"The repairs were really concentrated on the back wall of our kennels. So each dog is in a kennel that has tile side walls and it had a certain kind of plastic backing on the back wall that over 20 or so years had been worn down by various dogs," McLaughlin explained. "So we put up new paneling that hopefully will last a little bit longer and be a little bit more water tight, and safer for the dogs."

He said volunteers were able to complete the repairs in just one day, which mitigated potential challenges with relocating the shelter animals during the project.

"They got the work done in one day. That was amazing to me as well because if it had been a multi-day project then the concern of what to do with the dogs while the work is going on would have been very difficult for us to address," said McLaughlin. "But since they were able to get it all done in a single day, we could relocate the dogs throughout the building for that day and then put them back in the kennels in the

evening."

The support and hard work of the Hooks saved the SPCA from having to pay for the labor of the repairs, which just left the cost of materials. McLaughlin said the Hook and Ladder Company and individual volunteers donated \$800 to the total \$2,300 cost of materials.

"In house we don't have the skill set to get it done, and paying to get it done would have really been a challenge for us. So they were the perfect route to fill that void at just the right time," McLaughlin said.

The shelter has kept momentum in early 2024, and they hope to continue to make even more improvements, plan for the future, and adopt out more animals as the year goes on.

Plans for 2024

"The name of the game in 2024 is really going to be adoptions. Getting animals into new homes as quickly as possible," said McLaughlin. "We do everything for them that we can here in the shelter, but at the end of the day this is not the place that they belong. They belong with families and it's our job to make sure that we can find families for all of them."

McLaughlin said he hopes the reactivation of the Safe Haven Fund will create a boost in adoption rates, which in turn may elicit further donations to the program, and keep adoption rates high.

"Hopefully we can continue to have really high adoption rates and get the animals out into homes if we can take the cost issue off the table," he said. "There are plenty of people in the county who can provide a good home and are going to be loving adoptive pet parents,

Wyder is often able to train employees beyond general care of the animals and maintenance of the facility.

"A trajectory might look like, you start off mainly focused on cleaning, feeding, walking, things like that. Let's call those routine animal care tasks," said McLaughlin. "With time you might start to move more in the behavioral direction and start working with animals to be more sociable, or you might start moving in sort of a more medical direction and take on a little bit more responsibility for managing medications and things like that."

He also hopes support from the community will continue through 2024. With no government funding, the Chenango SPCA relies on fundraising efforts and community volunteering to keep the shelter going.

"I definitely think that one of the benefits of this area is the vibrancy of the community, the willingness to pitch in," he said. "Sometimes there is strain on our economic resources, but in terms of the resources of community support and willingness to pitch in and help us to actually get things done, this community is fantastic for that. There's a real strong sense of volunteerism and wanting to be involved in the good work that we do."

Community support will be needed perhaps more than ever in the coming years, as the shelter is now facing a major capital project in response to new state mandates.

Companion Animal Care Standards Act

In December of 2022, Governor Kathy Hochul signed the Companion Animal Care Standards Act into law, which McLaughlin said will "drastically change the way things work in the animal sheltering industry throughout New York State."

The mandate is based on the Guidelines for Standards of Care, which is a set of guidelines for shelter animal care from the Association of Shelter Veterinarians, and will "provide comprehensive standards of care for municipal shelters, not for profit humane societies, SPCAs and animal shelters, and not for profit animal rescues."

It outlines several measures that must be implemented in all New York State shelters and rescues by 2025, including mandates related to licensing with the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets' Division of Animal Industry, personnel training, record keeping, facility standards, animal housing, sanitation, management protocols, animal hus-

bandry, veterinary care, behavioral protocols, transportation standards and vehicle requirements, and foster care provider requirements.

"It's going to require some very specific changes to the building so that we have large enough accommodations for all our animals. It's also going to require changes related to sound proofing and air circulation, and also to the amount of time that humans spend with each animal each day," said McLaughlin.

He said the shelter spent much of 2023 assessing their facility and making plans for what they need to do to comply with the Act, whether that's facility additions, remodels, or both.

In July, she SPCA had a team of veterinarians from the Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program at the Cornell College of Veterinary Medicine visit and assess the shelter. They provided recommendations on changes to the facility and how the shelter is run, to get the Chenango SPCA in compliance with the changing laws.

"They made a number of recommendations and there will have to be some substantial changes to the way things work around here. It's a little bit scary because it's a pretty big organization, and our work kind of renews on a daily basis because some animals come in and some animals leave. So institutional, large-scale change in terms of time spent with people and the physical changes to the building, it requires a lot of planning," McLaughlin explained.

The SPCA will also need to decide on what exactly will be done to the facility and find contractors to complete any remodeling sooner rather than later. McLaughlin said their hope is to support local businesses, but ultimately it will come down to whether or not they have availability in the next two years.

"We're going to have a lot of need pretty quickly I think," he said. "We want to keep our services as local as possible because we are very grateful to benefit from the generosity of a lot of local companies, and also because if we're going to give substantial business to a design firm or a contractor, we want to do that locally, of course."

Making these changes will also require a significant amount of funding. McLaughlin said in past years the Higley Foundation has helped the organization make improvements to the current facility, and he hopes local foundations will continue to support them during

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the capital project. Grant options are being explored, including the Companion Animal Capital Fund, which was established by the state to provide up to \$500,000 to shelters for remodels, expansions, and other capital projects related to the new mandates.

However, even if the Chenango SPCA is awarded the grant, it's still unclear just how much of the capital project costs it will cover. Compounding the issue is the ever-rising cost of supplies and services, which have already put a strain on the shelter's resources.

Navigating challenges

With no government funding, the Chenango SPCA relies heavily on the generosity of the community. Fundraising and donations help the shelter to purchase supplies, provide veterinary care to the animals, and keep the facility operating.

However, due to inflation it's only costing more to run the shelter. With inflation impacting the community as well, McLaughlin said it's become harder to ask for donations.

"A lot of our supporters are retired people on a fixed income. It's incredibly generous as all of their expenses are going up and their income isn't really rising to meet that need, that they continue to give to us. The question is, how do you take that and move forward in

a very large way to something like a big capital project?" he said.

"I think nonprofits in general have been hit pretty hard by inflation because whatever costs a nonprofit has, those costs have gone up, but the donors that we rely on for support have also had their costs go up," he continued. "Asking them to give more is a very, very difficult thing to do. Some of them can do it, many of them can't. Many of them send us \$100 a year, and asking them for \$200 is just not going to be possible."

In an attempt to cut costs, McLaughlin said they recently made the tough decision to cut back their hours to four days a week.

"Since we are a community-supported organization that relies on fundraising, we often have to scrimp and save and be very careful with the money that we do have. As a result of some of that, we've made the tough decision to reduce our hours," McLaughlin said. The shelter is now closed on Mondays, in addition to Thursday and Sunday. "We'll obviously still have staff in here to care for the animals, but the cost of being open five days a week had become a little bit too much for us. Hopefully we can go back to that, but it does depend on our income, basically. So that's a challenge."

Although the decision will help financially, McLaughlin said there is a concern of a ripple effect that will impact adoption rates.

"The idea that we will facilitate adoptions while being open one fewer day a week makes the adoption part even more challenging," he said. "So we're going to have to try and schedule our appointments in four days instead of five, and hopefully we can generate enough walk-in traffic on those four



Patrick McLaughlin was appointed as the new Chenango SPCA Executive Director in early 2023, replacing long-time Executive Director Annette Clarke after her retirement. (Photo by Sarah Genter)

days to keep the animals moving into their new homes as quickly as possible."

Despite these challenges, the Chenango SPCA is charging ahead. Going forward, McLaughlin said he hopes to spread the word even more about the shelter and what they do to try to gain new supporters, rather than asking current donors for more.

"We have to diversify our support, and frankly we need to find people in our community who can become excited about our work who maybe right now don't know what we're doing at all, and hopefully we can expand our donor base instead of trying to ask the current donors to give more and more and more, because that's not going to be sustainable," he said.

"I've gotten the sense that there's a group of people here in the county who are very loyal to us, and very dedicated to our work. But I think there's a very large group who, for one reason or another, just don't have very

high awareness of what we're doing or how necessary it is, how much help we're able to provide to the animals, and the more we can tell that story and make the general public aware of us I think the more likely we are to find new friends and new donors."

The SPCA will also be raising money through their annual fundraisers, including the Fur Ball in February, which made its comeback last year after a hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The event was a huge hit with more than 100 attendees, and McLaughlin is hoping for even more this year.

Woofstock made its return last year as well, and will be held again this fall. The summertime will bring the annual Paws and Pints fundraiser, an outdoor event with music, food, games, and refreshing beer at Hidden Springs Brewhouse in Norwich.

The SPCA will hold garage sales through the summer months as well, where used items are sold for whatever pur-

chasers can afford. McLaughlin said he's also exploring the possibility of adding a casino night fundraiser to their repertoire of annual events.

In addition to attending fundraisers or donating, there are other ways area residents can help. The SPCA is in contract with Chenango County municipalities to house stray dogs that are picked up by animal control, and McLaughlin said at certain times of the year the amount of dogs seized are more than the shelter can take in.

One of the ways dog owners in the area can help lighten the load is by preventing their dogs from becoming strays by microchipping and licensing their dogs, as well as ensuring they're wearing ID tags.

"That's a big help because dog control officers are allowed to return a dog to its home if it's got a license and wearing its tag and all that. If it's not, then they're supposed to seize it," McLaughlin explained. "You can get a dog easily and no one knows that you have a dog that

you haven't licensed. And plenty of people don't realize that they're supposed to license a dog, because really when you're considering getting a pet, whose first impulse is to look up the law? No one's."

On the governmental end of things, McLaughlin said any government subsidies would be a huge help to the organization.

"We receive no subsidies or anything from any level of government. It might seem like a pipe dream, but if that were to happen it would be a huge help to us. The fact that there is no such support at the moment can put some strain on us," he said. "I don't know enough about how the wheels of government turn around here to know if that's likely or even possible, but in terms of what they could do that would be a pretty big help."

Although the Chenango SPCA has faced some challenges, and has some big changes on the horizon, the staff is not giving up. Every day they work hard to care for the animals that come through their doors and find them loving homes, which is their ultimate focus.

McLaughlin said although working at the shelter can be challenging, and even emotionally draining at times, seeing an animal recover from hardship and find their forever home is the greatest reward there is.

The Chenango SPCA is open to the public from noon to 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, and from noon to 7 p.m. on Tuesdays.

For more information, visit ChenangoSPCA.org or the Chenango SPCA Facebook page. To contact the shelter, call 607-334-9724 or email cspcainfo@chenangospca.org.

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Business SPOTLIGHT

Chenango County Historical Society

JESSICA MOQUIN

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CHENANGO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NORWICH – In 2023, the Chenango County Historical Society (CCHS) experienced remarkable revitalization thanks to a renewed focus on preserving important community landmarks and presenting meaningful local narratives.

This approach has breathed new life into the museum, attracting wider audiences, securing essential funding, and ensuring that the heritage of Chenango County is able to be shared with both contemporary audiences and future generations.

Recognizing the historic and interpretive significance of prominent cultural locations, CCHS focused on restoration and preservation initiatives last year. Thanks to tremendous financial support from local foundations and the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA), CCHS was able to hire a qualified firm to address the masonry repointing issues facing the museum's flagship facility, Ward School No. 2, using historically appropriate techniques. Another significant CCHS building, the "Watchmen Tower" at Norwich's One City Plaza, was selected by Riegel Restoration of Sidney for historic restoration of all three windows in this late 19th century railroad structure. An Earth Day collaboration, "Historic Homes Are Green Homes" featuring preservationist Andrew Roblee, was hosted in collaboration with Sherburne's Friends of Rogers. Sponsored by Sidney Federal Credit Union, this program encouraged preservation and conservation with a guest lecture and an interactive tour of the historic "Stone House," part of Rogers Center in Sherburne – Chenango County's only (and New York State's oldest) environmental education center.

Recently revamped exhibits feature interactive elements, multimedia presentations, and engaging narratives designed to bring history to life for visitors, sparking curiosity, and fostering a deeper connection with the past. Some of these refreshed displays included:

"Hometown Health" interpreting how Chenango Memorial Hospital, the Norwich Pharmacal Company, and NBT Bank have supported well-being throughout our community and beyond

"Signs of the Times: Flavors of Yesterday" featuring a collection of vintage Chenango County signs highlighting advertising ephemera related to local grocery stores and restaurants

"Sixpence in Your Shoe: A Glimpse at Chenango County Wedding Traditions" offering nearly 200 years of wedding history rooted in Chenango County

"The Raymond Corporation, A Century of Innovation," an award-winning exhibit celebrating more than 100 years of innovation through Lyon Iron Works and the Raymond Corporation in Greene

CCHS continued to be a hub for engaging public programs. The revitalization of CCHS is a testament to the power of his-

tory to connect us to our past, inform our present, and inspire our future. Annual community programs hosted throughout last year not only shared knowledge, but also created a sense of community around local history. Signature programs included:

December's "Holiday Open House" – In addition to perennial favorites such as snowflake artist Jim Baldwin, the Cottage Bakery cookie decoration station, and the debut of the 2023 "Parade of Trees," new activities highlighted museum milestones. Earlier in the year, CCHS had the opportunity to license the use of a vintage postcard image for an upcoming episode of "Mysteries of the Abandoned: Hidden America" on the Discovery Channel. In keeping with this theme, Chenango County Historian Henry Drexler presented on "Abandoned in Chenango County." In celebration of the museum's Community Gallery exhibition, "Sixpence in Your Shoe: A Glimpse at Chenango County Wedding Traditions," Bull Thistle Bridal hosted a "Pop Up Shop." Opening in July of last year in Oxford, Bull Thistle Bridal has become Chenango County's "go-to" shop for discounted women's formal wear.

November's "National Author's Day" – This free community program, held in collaboration with SUNY Morrisville's Human Services Institute, featured guest authors Anne Hanson, Jim Ford, Sharon Donaha, and Thomas Travisano who shared about their writing process and what is involved in becoming a published author; the celebration culminated in an evening reception honoring writers of the annual CCHS Journal.

While the June "Path Through History Weekend" offerings were what museum visitors have come to expect - with an exhibit opening, annual CCHS Journal launch, Chenango's Heritage "Wall of Honor" reveal, and Elinor Robb Troicke Memorial Scholarship presentation - the October "Path Through History Weekend" featured expanded programming. Thanks to generous support from the Friends of the Museum District, CCHS participated in "Museums & More!" by hosting a wide variety of activities. The day included interactive demonstrations with a blacksmith and other historic artisans, the Chenango Canal Association, David Moyer of Birchwood Archaeology, and a special event station with the Chenango Valley Amateur Radio Association. Festival performers included Bells & Motley, Chris Thomas and the Haudenosaunee Smoke Dancers, and Lincoln's Legacy.

Our educational programming – including school field trips for local districts, visits from The Place and other youth-oriented organizations such as the Liberty Partnerships Program – centered on Chenango County heritage. For the 2023 season, much of our instruction focused on the legacy of local artists, both contemporary and historical, including illustrator Suzanne Bloom, willow master Bonnie Gale, sculpturist Alice Hudson, and musician Jenni Larchar. The museum also developed new initiatives to encourage historical research and writing, including a seasonal "Writer's Workshop," designed to help aspiring authors generate articles for our annual Journal publication.

CCHS continued our active partnerships with other historical societies, libraries, and cultural institutions to extend the reach of preservation efforts and strengthen the local history network. A few of these collaborations included:

- Afton Arts & Crafts Festival – exhibiting art by Danny McCarey, regionally-known caricaturist and political cartoonist whose work was syndicated through Chenango County's The Evening Sun newspaper

- Colorscape Chenango – hosting "Historic Architecture in Norwich" and "Local Treasures Revealed: Living Among History" with interactive guided tours about local businesses and public structures

- Guilford Day – sharing local stories and distributing complimentary copies of the commemorative Guilford Bicentennial (1795-1995) publication to festival participants

- Hometown Heroes Commemoration – serving as a lead collaborator to honor local service members through an individualized banner program, with a special recognition event held on Flag Day

- International Museum Day – "History Where You Eat" – including a walking tour of Earlville and featuring a behind-the-scenes experience of the Earlville Opera House, Chenango County's only surviving Gilded Age theater

- Lt. Warren E. Eaton Airport Day – showing films of gliding pioneer Lt. Warren E. Eaton, for which Chenango County's only airport is named

- Smyrna Feed Tractor Show – featuring live demonstrations of working vintage industrial heritage equipment manufactured in Norwich by the Ireland Machine & Foundry Co.

- South Otselic Fishing and Heritage Day – offering the opportunity to weave bracelets made from Gladding paracord – a modern product made in South Otselic on factory equipment over a century old – the same equipment which Gladding originally used to produce the fishing line for which South Otselic became known

With the hiring of a full-time archives and collections coordinator early last year, CCHS committed to digitizing significantly more historical material than ever before. Through continued partnership with Colgate University's Upstate Institute, the "Chenango Stories" oral history initiative expanded to include "Migrant Labor Camps Along the Chenango River Valley." These efforts not only safeguard community treasures, it makes them accessible to a wider audience through online databases and exhibits.

Many cultural organizations have recently seen a shift in audience engagement. CCHS has been strategic in developing new approaches in order to better serve our communities. By embracing a renewed focus on the preservation and presentation of local history, CCHS has ensured that the rich tapestry of Chenango County's heritage will continue to be woven for generations to come.

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NBT celebrates another award-winning year in 2023 -



In 2023 NBT Bank was named one of Central New York's best places to work, making the list of Forbes World's Best Banks. (Photo from NBT)

Continued from page 61 ▶

banking offices to the NBT franchise in complementary markets, including northwestern Connecticut, the Hudson Valley region of New York and southwestern Massachusetts. NBT's merger and integration with Salisbury Bancorp in 2023 expanded NBT's footprint in complementary markets, increased its customer base, and enhanced its team.

Leadership said it also strengthened the bank's position as they look to support the exciting opportunities for long-term organic growth along the Upstate New York Semiconductor Chip Corridor.

They said planned transformational semiconductor chip fabrication investments in New York State present an incredible opportunity for their customers and the communities they serve. They added that NBT is uniquely positioned to support this regional growth, with their branch network ideally situated

along the chip corridor from greater Syracuse through to the Hudson Valley. NBT Bank now has 153 banking offices across their seven-state footprint.

NBT takes pride in fostering multiple partnerships with dedicated community organizations. Whether supporting the amazing work at Commerce Chenango—including their initiatives aimed at promoting local businesses—to being a friend of the arts by partnering with the Chenango Arts Council and sponsoring the NBT Bank Summer Concert Series in downtown Norwich each summer with the Chenango Blues Association, NBT is always looking for ways to connect with its community.

Investing in employees

NBT strongly advocates for providing the tools and resources to enhance the growth, development and satisfaction of its workforce. This includes implementing supportive elements into everyday activities, such as

a coaching model for employees and managers to share two-way feedback, and mentoring opportunities for individual growth. In 2023, they also launched LinkedIn Learning for our 2,000 employees. This enabled on-demand access to training and education for employees to develop the right skills to grow their career.

NBT also offers a variety of formal programs to support employees in professional development and career advancement, including:

Professional Development Program – provides participants with opportunities to continue their professional development through additional training and skills development.

Management Development Program – provides high potential college graduates with fast-tracked opportunities to gain broad knowledge of the business of banking and develop critical skills for becoming future leaders of the company.

PATHS Program – provides



NBT Bancorp is headquartered in Norwich, and has long been a primary employer and supporter of the local community. (Photo by Tyler Murphy)

employees with three or less years of experience in the financial services industry with the opportunity to explore career options based on their strengths and create a development plan to help reach their career goals.

Emerging Leaders – prepares qualified employees for future leadership positions.

Star Impact – prepares high potential, experienced leaders to assume expanded leadership responsibilities.

As an employer, NBT recognizes the talent that its local youth has and leadership said they are proud to offer many different career paths in Norwich and throughout NBT's seven-state footprint. Since 2005, NBT has annually employed college-aged students through its Student Associate Program. Each year, about 50 students earn valuable professional experience during their summers with NBT, and some even return to work part time during their school breaks.

In addition to NBT's

Student Associate Program, they also have a **Management Development Program** to provide participants with a broad knowledge of the business of banking and develop future leaders in their company. Development includes technical and soft skill training, cross divisional work experiences, performance coaching, mentoring and special projects, and regular access and exposure to senior and executive level management. The program is designed to fast track high-potential talent while providing the opportunity for professional growth and career development.

Welcoming a new CEO

On May 21, 2024, John H. Watt, Jr. will step down as NBT's President and Chief Executive Officer and be succeeded by Chief Financial Officer Scott Kingsley as President and Chief Executive Officer of NBT Bancorp. In addition, Joseph Stagliano will be promoted to President of NBT Bank, N.A.,

and Annette Burns, NBT's Chief Accounting Officer, will be promoted and assume the role of CFO on May 21.

Watt was appointed President and Chief Executive Officer of NBT and NBT Bank, N.A. and became a member of the Company's Board of Directors in 2016.

"I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to lead NBT and to work with the team I truly believe is the best in community banking," said Watt. "I am proud of the way we serve our customers and communities and how we have continued to create long-term value for our shareholders. The Board has been very supportive of our strategy, and I am also thankful for their guidance over the last seven years."

Those who are interested in learning more about NBT Bank may visit its website at www.nbtbank.com for additional information.

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