A lively year for Commerce Chenango positions them at-the-ready for 2017

BY GRADY THOMPSON
Sun Staff Writer

2016 was an eventful year for Commerce Chenango as they continued to address the evolving business and economic climate throughout Chenango County.

In a year that included a number of objectives and targets for those at Commerce Chenango, President and CEO Steve Craig says that there’s been plenty of progress and strides made in the right direction towards their goals in the past year to position them in favorable standing as they look ahead to the future.

“Our goals [in 2016] included the restoration of the rail line through the center of the county, the renovation of the downtown Norwich hotel, the growth of Chamber special events including the Soiree-in-the-Park and the College and Career Connection, and the re-establishment of the Chobani Chamber Challenge as a trail run in the state land west of Norwich,” said Craig.

Of these goals, a particular highlight of the headway made in 2016 by Commerce Chenango was the repair of long-standing damage to the NYS&W Utica branch rail line.

In conjunction with sister company Chenango County Industrial Development Agency (IDA), developmental partner Development Chenango Corporation, Chenango County, the New York State DOT, and the U.S. Commerce Department’s Economic Development Administration, Commerce Chenango was able to hire Frontier Railroad Services to restore serviceability to 45 miles of railroad track between Earlville and Chenango Forks.

In order to restore the track, several dozen washouts that...
When New York State closed Rogers Environmental Education Center in 2010, it was the Friends of Rogers organization who stepped up and intervened.

Fast forward six years later, and Friends of Rogers reports that nearly 15,000 people visited the center in 2016, and that’s just the people who visited the lobby.

“We’ve undergone a lot of change in the past six years, and all for the better,” said Friends of Rogers Executive Director Simon Solomon.

Today, Friends of Rogers operates on an annual budget of $250,000, and they continue to enhance their programs and partnerships to fully take advantage of all that Rogers Center’s 600 acres has to offer.

“We see ourselves as a community resource, a destination, and an eco-tourist attraction,” said Friends of Rogers Developmental Executive Jessica Moquin.

“We’re working diligently to really finesse our role as an economic driver in the community,” said Solomon.

Consequently, Friends of Rogers was recognized by Commerce Chenango as the 2016 Business of the Year.

The complete renovation of the Friends of Rogers lobby for the first time in 25 years was among the notable happenings of 2016. A donation from the Mid-York Foundation enabled the renovation that was unveiled at a ribbon-cutting featuring Commerce Chenango President and CEO Steve Craig on January 19, two days before Friends of Rogers’ chief winter program, the 39th annual Winter Living Celebration organized and hosted by Friends of Rogers.

The complete renovation of the Friends of Rogers lobby is a yearly free-will donation program that highlights the winter months at Rogers Center and typically draws over 1,000 people. This year’s program featured live music by the Susquehanna String Band, horse drawn sleigh rides, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, nature and outdoor living demonstrations, crafts, and refreshments.

The program precedes other large annual events organized by Friends of Rogers such as Earth Fest in May, the Wild Goose Chase in September, and Animals of the North area living demonstrations in October. There are also a number of smaller programs organized by Friends of Rogers every month.

Friends of Rogers employs two full-time employees in Solomon and Moquin, as well as two other part-time employees. They also rotate in environmental interns over the course of the year from colleges such as the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse, SUNY Cortland, and SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Cortland.

While the Friends of Rogers employees focus on the day-to-day operations, Solomon says that it is the support of their active and ambitious Board of Directors that keeps them in motion.

“We’ve evolved a lot over the last few years and increased the number of board members. Some have come and gone, but anyone who is or has served on the board has put in tons of effort,” said Solomon.

Moquin noted that their board members have a wide skill-set with geologists, marketers, even an attorney on board. “We rely on them and the huge depth and expertise they bring. They’re solid, strong, and engaged, and we’re seeing dividends being paid as a result,” said Solomon.

“After a lot of change in the past six years, and all for the better,” Friends of Rogers Executive Director Simon Solomon. "We've taken a strategic approach by increasing our programs and partnerships to fully take advantage of all that Rogers Center's 600 acres has to offer. "We see ourselves as a community resource, a destination, and an eco-tourist attraction," said Friends of Rogers Developmental Executive Jessica Moquin. "We're working diligently to really finesse our role as an economic driver in the community."
There were several activities, in the Village of New Berlin throughout the year that as Mayors, we were proud to be a part of. Some of these activities include: “The Helping Hands Project” a project that has stayed true to its original mission of helping others in our community who may need “a helping hand”. We had a record number of volunteers come into our community and help out on this year’s projects. Thank you to our committee (Gene, Tony, Betsy and Gary) and all who make this possible! The traditional Christmas Tree lighting ceremony and parade drew hundreds of people to the center of the village to experience this holiday kickoff once again. This first time continues to grow and is possible without the support of the UV School, community members, and businesses. Thank you to our committee (Justin, Rachel, and Giao), the Buse family, Frontier, Curtis Limber, the New Berlin Fire Dept. and the Village of New Berlin for all your help in making sure this event is a success every year. The Spirit of Christmas took place this year at the New Berlin Firehouse and we handed out food baskets and provided toys to families in the village and surrounding area that were in need. Thank you Marty, Jeff, Shirley, Bob, Tony, Mary Ellen, Mickey, the Levinson’s, and Gary for spear heading this effort. This year was with a heavy heart as Father Chuck Taylor who was a pillar of our community and helped establish “Spirit of Christmas” was not with us. Thank you Father Chuck for making our community a better one, you will never be forgotten. I will miss our Pittsburgh Steelers and Dallas Cowboys banner. Working with the UV Youth Baseball and Softball League throughout the spring and summer continues to be a pleasure. They hosted their annual tournament and the games drew people from throughout the area into our village.

The youth summer program provided both educational experiences and fun for many children in the village. This was combined with the free breakfast and lunch program in Hyde Park through a USDA grant. In May I had the honor of enceasing the Village of New Berlin’s Memorial Day cere- mony. In June the Village celebrated its bicentennial that was an entire day of activities capped off by a marvelous fireworks display! We had our first village luanch that was organized by a group of ladies and held on the side street by Hyde Park. There was entertainment there for all to enjoy along with bands playing on the corner of Main St and the Donna Frech dancers performed as well. The parade that followed was well received and many of the local business had open hous- es showcasing what they were all about.

Our New Berlin Fire Dept. continues to be strong and arguably one of the best fire departments in the county and in 2017 will be celebrat- ing its 150th anniversary! Our EMS continues to serve the village residents, the Town of New Berlin, The Town of Columbus, and the Town of Pittsford. We strive to create relationships and cooperation that we have with all of them. The businesses in and out- side the village continue to have a great impact on our local economy.

Inside the Village: Preferred Mutual remains one of the fastest growing businesses in their industry and continue to be actively involved with our village events and projects. Multiple meetings throughout the year with CEO Chuck Tall, continue to keep our relationship strong with the top employer in the Village. The Millford Academy is the number one (football) prep school in the country. We had 49 division one schools that recruited to our end of November, with the number one school being Michigan and Florida. My recent con- versation with Coach Chaplick was like a proud father talking about his sons. He has Millford Academy alumni involved in the AFC Championship (Tyler Hockenbury Pick six-Steelers) and Niko Koutivias (former New England Patriot player and now a member of their staff). Coach Chaplick and the Falcons went undefeated this season. Congratulations coach! NBT Bank – 2016 saw the departure of my good friend Brian Burton as he moved on to be the branch manager in Norwich. His work over the last 10 years is greatly appreciated and the list is too long but events like Youth Days, Helping Hands, and Dollars for Students come to mind where he volu- nteers his time and talent. We miss you Brian, but NBT of New Berlin is in good hands with the new branch manager Bill Edye.

The NY Pizzeria – They are celebrating their 5th birthday in 2017 and the Congratulations! They have built a tremendous business here in our quaint little vil- lage and draw people from near and far. Everyone knows their food is fabulous but above and beyond that they treat you like family and our entire community benefits from the way they generously give their time and talents to give back to their community.

Stewarts Shops- rem to the top Stewarts for their region. If they are open 99% of the time there are customers in this area and they continue to be generous to your youth pro- grams and give us funding to help subsidize our programs. We will be submitting this application for this funding and appreciate their generosity.

Donna Frech School of Dance- Celebrating 40 years of dance in New Berlin. Congratulations Donna!

Other businesses in the Village that continue to have success and add to our local economy include: Service Pharmacy, Lake Street Lures, The Spirit of Christmas, Donut and Coffee Shop, St and the Donna Frech School of Dance – Celebrating 40 years of dance in New Berlin, The Donna Frech School of Dance – Celebrating 40 years of dance in New Berlin. Congratulations Donna!

Outside the Village limits but having a significant impact on the community that continue to have success and add to our local economy include: Service Pharmacy, Lake Street Lures, The Spirit of Christmas, Donut and Coffee Shop, St and the Donna Frech School of Dance – Celebrating 40 years of dance in New Berlin, The Donna Frech School of Dance – Celebrating 40 years of dance in New Berlin.

“Over The Past Thirty Two Years We, At Chenango Vision Center, Have Adhered To Our Promise That “We’re Not Satisfied Until You Are.””

We prude ourselves on providing thorough eye health and vision examinations. In order to serve you better, we continue to educate ourselves on the latest advances in optometric care and on the newest products that can help improve our patients’ performance in their busy lives.

The businesses in and out- side the village continue to have a great impact on our local economy.

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In your own words

Michael Field, CEO, The Raymond Corporation
New Berlin celebrates bicentennial, mayor delivers updates on village -

Success Story
"We've aged as well as our finest wines"
Nazzitto's Wines & Liquors

Still great after 58! This would make a great catch phrase for Nazzitto's Wines & Liquors as 2017 marks their 58th year in business. Nazzitto's Wines & Liquors is one of the oldest operating wine & liquor store in Chenango County with the original liquor license dating back to the 1930's.

Frank J. Nazzitto moved his family to Norwich in 1950. Frank loved Norwich and felt it would be a great place to raise his nine children (8 girls, 1 boy). In 1959 Frank purchased Herman's Liquor Store which was located on American Avenue in Norwich. Frank, along with his wife Grace, ran the small store until 1976. In 1974 he was joined by his son John, and in 1976 they moved the family operation (now known as Nazzitto’s Wines & Liquors) to a new downtown plaza anchored by the new A&P Supermarket and new Rite Aid Drug Store. This plaza was located on South Broad Street across from NBT Bank. Nazzitto's remained in this plaza for 25 years until the year 2000 when the A&P Supermarket left Norwich and Rite Aid moved to it’s new location. In 2000 John Nazzitto, now the sole owner and operator after Franks death in 2000 when the A&P Supermarket left Norwich and Rite Aid moved to it’s new location.

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Always expanding their inventory with new wines and spirits Nazzitto's has one of the largest selections anywhere in Chenango County. Nazzitto’s features wine and spirit tastings which gives customers the opportunity to “Try before they buy” when it comes to weddings, graduations, parties or any other celebrations their 58 years of experience is most helpful in choosing the right wines and spirits. Nazzitto’s also “Specializes” in “Special requests”. If they do not have the product you want in stock, they will order it for you.

Providing the best customer service, having the most knowledgeable and friendly staff, and offering a great selection of wines and spirits is just part of a family tradition that has continued Nazzitto’s Wines & Liquors success since 1959.

Submitted Photo
A shot from New Berlin’s bicentennial celebration.
Thank you to everyone who made 2016 a memorable one for the Village of New Berlin.

A shot from New Berlin’s bicentennial celebration.

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having another stellar year! Some of the National and International headlines put New Berlin in a positive light and our community continues to benefit. We appreciate our strong relationship with you and appreciate your generosity. In 2016 Chobani was once again in tune with our community and its needs. They donated product and money to help families in the village and throughout our area. In December they gave away hundreds of cases in the village. Words can not express our genuine concern for how things are in the village and the surrounding area as well. When I met with Mr. Golden back in the fall, he asked how my father (Gary Potter) was doing and it caught me off guard. Despite all of the success he remains humble and kind. thank you Mr. Golden for all you do for our Village and for taking the time to meet with me.

-NCYM - Although its location is across the river and in another county NYCM remains a generous donor to all of our village functions and our village benefits from their outreach and volun-
terism. Thank you NYCM for your continued generosity.

-Dollar General - Dollar General was eager to pitch in for village events and activi-
ties. They helped out with the Spirit of Christmas among others.

The Village of New Berlin remains on solid ground and is fiscally sound. The com-
mittment of our board mem-
bers and the village clerk continue to keep us on this path. In 2016 we took a close look at the villages water sys-
tem and are trying to be proactive with some system upgrades that we anticipate will be coming from state and federal mandates. We have engineers and grant writers involved and will be pursuing grant funding for these upgrades.

Overall 2016 was a year of prosperity for businesses, having to say good bye to loved ones, saying goodbye but not farewell to friends , continuing traditions, making new traditions, and carrying out our fiduciary responsibili-
ties. But as I reflect even closer it was a year about relation-
ships. This is another note that I can put into my mental jour-
nel of being Mayor “never underestimate the power of a relationship”.

The Perfect Handmade Gift...
Chenango says they’re ready for the year ahead

Chenango says that they have a clear plan to focus on building the local economy through diversification and job creation. This includes working with community leaders to increase the size and number of payroll checks earned, cashed, spent, and ultimately invested throughout Chenango County. "The chamber part of our organization was founded with the goal of being the voice of Chenango County."

Other initiatives by Commerce Chenango that were to take place in 2016 included devising a way to provide natural gas to the Raymond Corporation and the Village of Bainbridge, and the continuance of quality loans through Chenango's three loan programs. "We are working with a number of Chenango County natives eventually to make the area more attractive as professionals. Craig says that these positions are filled by community leaders and residents of the county.Over time, this erodes the viability of some of our small businesses, which are in the retail and service sectors because of challenges that are earned in Chenango County are spent elsewhere," said Craig.

In an effort to counter this trend, Commerce Chenango says that they have a dedicated team in the process of trying to increase job opportunities throughout the county. When asked if it could be expected that some of these initiatives would be implemented in 2017, Craig says, "2017 could see some of these projects cross the finish line, but we can’t reveal specifics at this point for reasons of confidentiality."

Whether or not the proposed metal-processing plant in the Town of Sherburne would be among these job opportunities remains unclear. "The added processing of farm products is a major economic issue in much of upstate New York. I would say it would be part of that," said Craig. "It is an excellent opportunity in the best location, though, and an open entryway to the market." Looking ahead to 2017, Craig says that the Chamber will continue to look at projects that are important for the area that currently runs from the bottom up. Business leaders in the area say that these types of projects are critical to building the local economy and are essential to building the area’s business community. "Our staff was instrumental in winning funding for a gas pipeline spur from the Constitution Pipeline to the Constitution Pipeline,” said Craig. "This funding will help to establish a gas pipeline in the area that will ultimately bring natural gas to the Village of Bainbridge, the Raymond Corporation and provide natural gas to the hotel."

Craig said, "We are working with community leaders to increase the size and number of payroll checks earned, cashed, spent, and ultimately invested throughout Chenango County."

"The chamber part of our organization was founded with the goal of being the voice of Chenango County."

The underlying goal of it all, Craig says, is to increase the size and number of payroll checks earned, cashed, spent, and ultimately invested throughout Chenango County. "The chamber part of our organization was founded with the goal of being the voice of Chenango County."