

The Evening Sun, presents Progress Edition 2019. A look at the community's recent past and future.

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SUCCESS STORY

Holy Family School: Excellence and Growth Since 1922

Holy Family School has a near-100 year history in Norwich, and today draws families from across Chenango County. These families appreciate the individual attention, academic excellence, and focus on service and values that make Holy Family such a nurturing environment for its students.

Thomas Sorci joined HFS in September 2018 as the school's new principal. He brings years of experience as the head of Catholic schools in New Jersey, Alaska, and Arizona. "Each school I've been at has been unique, but the one constant has been the focus on faith," says Mr. Sorci. "My job is to build on that faith, to promote the moral education of our students, and to challenge them academically."

Academics are indeed a strong draw for families. Students show consistent academic achievement and the smaller class sizes allow teachers to provide extra assistance or enrichment for students who need it. The curriculum is well rounded, offering technology, Spanish, art, music, and physical education in addition to traditional subjects like math, ELA, social studies and science. Mr. Sorci notes, "Our parents appreciate that Holy Family is a peaceful school where students are respectful of their teachers and each other. It keeps the focus on learning."

Learning doesn't stop in the classroom. Extra-curriculars include robotics, musical instrument lessons, choir, art club and sustainability club. Field trips and volunteer opportunities bring students out into the community to learn about the world around them. The school has a brand new playground, as well.

"Students today need to be prepared for the challenges of technology and curriculum. We do that. But we also do something more: we prepare them to be moral citizens who make good decisions and serve others and the community. That's what makes Holy Family stand out," says Mr. Sorci.

Holy Family serves students in pre-school through sixth grade. Financial aid is available in grades K-6 to help make tuition affordable to all families, and the school is open to students of all faith backgrounds. Transportation is available to some families and the school offers before and after care to enrolled students.

"Holy Family students develop an incredible foundation for their future," says Mr. Sorci. "The sky's the limit for these boys and girls."

SUNY Morrisville's Norwich Campus marks 50 years



SUNY Morrisville State College Norwich campus Director Lindsey Lefevre became director of the Norwich Campus in June of 2018 and since then has been working to ensure the college continues to move forward as a resource in its community, contributing to the overall vision of Chenango County, and lead on education in the county." (Zachary Meseck Photo)

ZACHARY MESECK
The Evening Sun

NORWICH – After 50 years of growth and educational leadership in Chenango County, Morrisville State College - Norwich Campus continues to announce new programs and partnerships within its community.

According to SUNY Morrisville State College Norwich Campus Director Lindsey Lefevre, 2018 was a year of several major accomplishments for the Norwich Campus including its first Associate of Applied Science degrees in nursing graduating class of 15, upcoming commissary options for staff and students, and the addition of an Agricultural Economics program that is geared towards students coming from high school. All these developments are scheduled to begin in the spring of 2019.

As an alumni of the Norwich Campus, Lefevre said she grew up in Chenango County and cares deeply about the future of the college and the education her college provides to its community.

"We had approximately 350 students enrolled at the

Norwich Campus in 2018, which has been pretty consistent with the last couple years," she said.

She added that approximately 80 percent of the Norwich campus students reside in Chenango County, with another 10 percent living in Otsego County, and the rest from a variety of places.

"We are continuing to work towards increasing those numbers in the next couple years by offering diverse programs and partnering with our community."

Lefevre said one of the ways the college is getting involved in its community is with its partnership with Liberty Partnership, which is an at-risk youth program.

"Liberty Partnership is affiliated with the college, and in 2018 they used the campus for several events including a community fun night, a clothing drive, and game night," she said. "Local organizations like Liberty Partnership are part of an advisory board on campus, so they always have a say in what's going on in the college."

She added that Liberty Partnership serves

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Nimble technology and family values, Blueox grows from the roots

TYLER MURPHY
The Evening Sun

An energy products and services company, Blueox is passing into the hands of a new generation, embracing nimble technology and the values that define a home-grown family business.

Founded in Oxford more than five decades ago the company has grown into a humble but growing competitor in the local energy market as one business with two parts: energy services and retail, operating 10 convenience stores.

"Key people here have paid all the dues necessary to succeed. We've struggle together for several years," said Blueox CEO Dave Martin. "We are probably as fortunate as any company in our area, we have the right people."

"2018 was a very strong year for us," said Blueox Director of Business Growth

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Blueox CEO Dave Martin, Director of Operations Jared Bartle and Director of Business Growth and Development Julia Miller. Blueox had a positive 2018, growing its energy and convenient store businesses. (Tyler Murphy photo)

As of the 2010 census, Chenango County's population was 50,477.

Blueox grows from the roots —

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and Development Julia Miller. “We have two sectors of our business, so the energy side has experienced some really strong growth over the last three years and that trend is continuing,”

According to Miller the Blueox fuel division grew by about 20 percent over the last three years, at a rate of about eight percent annually. The company made 30,281 fuel deliveries in 2018. Blueox also expanded propane capacity at its Oxford facility by 60,000 gallons in 2018.

The company primarily handles home delivery and repair service but also provides products to commercial businesses.

“Both have increased, we’re adding more customers and delivering more fuel, and we like to joke ‘regardless of the weather,’” said Miller.

She then added, “That’s how we now know we are really growing, because anyone can deliver more fuel when it’s really cold, or less when it’s really warm. Our goal is to deliver more fuel regardless of the weather.”

The other side of the business is the convenience store side, right now Blueox owns and operates 10 locations.

“In the beginning of the



A Blueox driver heads out on the road in January. Blueox employs more than 120 employees.

year we re-branded all those locations to be under the Blueox name and umbrella. So we recognized early on that the energy side had a fairly good reputation in this area,” said Miller.

Altogether the convenience stores served 2,147,002 customers in 2018.

“It is a trusted home-grown family business, and we really wanted to bring

that to the convenience store side, since Nice ‘N Easy was going away and we could either sell out or we could try and bring that brand on to the local town we service,” she said.

“So we spent this year really getting that into place, working on a lot of training, really looking to continue to develop those locations over the next couple years.”

Blueox has advantages operating a diversified business. In the summer convenience store sales peak and in the winter energy sales peak. “You can share resources, it helps with cash flow, from that perspective the two sides of the business really balance out,” explained Miller.

Blueox energy products include fuel oil, propane, diesels, gasoline, kerosene and home delivery services.

Though smaller than some corporate rivals, the company’s territory reaches almost from near the

Pennsylvania border into Madison county, north of Chenango. It spans from the rural parts of Cortland County to the Town of Morris.

The company added a few employees in 2018, including a full-time customer service representative and a service technician, both to account for the growth on the energy side of the business. They also hired a handful of seasonal drivers on the delivery side.

Altogether the company has more than 120 employees.

“We are pretty much in a state of constantly looking for people in any of those categories,” said Miller. “This year we are looking at how to continue the growth of staffing.”

Blueox Director of Operations Jared Bartle, who got into the business following his father’s footsteps, said he already knows the answer to temporary

staffing issues. He’s solved them before.

“I usually go jump in a truck for about a month,” he said. “If we need a driver, especially when it’s really cold and there aren’t enough hours in the day... there I go.”

“But that’s the beauty of a family business, we are so committed to making sure our customers are taken care of,” said Miller. “One of the owners will get in a truck and make deliveries seven days a week for three or four weeks straight to make sure we service everyone we can.”

Bartle said working the company’s regular duties has helped give him a wider perspective on the how the company operates and what, or who, is right for the job.

“I can tell you right now our guys are committed,” said Bartle recalling an especially frigid run he joined the drivers on.

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"It was really bad weather and we had trucks on the road that couldn't get to where they could fill the tanks up. So the drivers were literally - with five gallon jugs at a time - taking fuel from the truck to the tank and carrying it all the way back, trying to fill the tanks enough. That's how committed they were," said Bartle.

"Was it ideal, was it perfect? No. Did it get the job done? Yes," he said.

While growth and expansion may be a positive, it also creates its own challenges.

"It's not easy to grow. Having the resources, you need at the right point in time, namely, people resources," said Miller.

She said it can be hard to find qualified people.

"They are out there. We have some really good team members," she said.

The company often trains new technicians, an advantage of this is it helps develop the good habits the business wants workers to have.

Being a smaller company in the energy market Blueox has embrace a "nimble" philosophy of business. By embracing technology the company has been able to expand without losing community ties.

"Our customers may be surprised to find out we are really a leader in the industry for using technology," said Miller. "All these functions are automated which allows us to continue to grow without having to add people to do manual processes."

About five years ago the company invested in technology to give it real time information about deliveries. The program can also send notices to customers, if they choose.

"So when delivery happens at your home we know instantly on the comput-

er. Having that technology in place has allowed us to implement a daily communication system that's going to let you know at 6 o'clock the night before that you're getting a delivery," explained Miller.

strives to distinguish itself and as community rooted and family-run.

"Being small, that makes it a lot easier to be nimble. Even with our continued growth we don't want to become the same as that

Some other rising challenges the industry faces at the state level are changing regulations and mandates.

"They have a lot of mandates- a lot on the environmental side, which is good but some others, I wish peo-

convenient store side of the business.

"The increases happen so fast it doesn't really give us the opportunity to award people," she said.

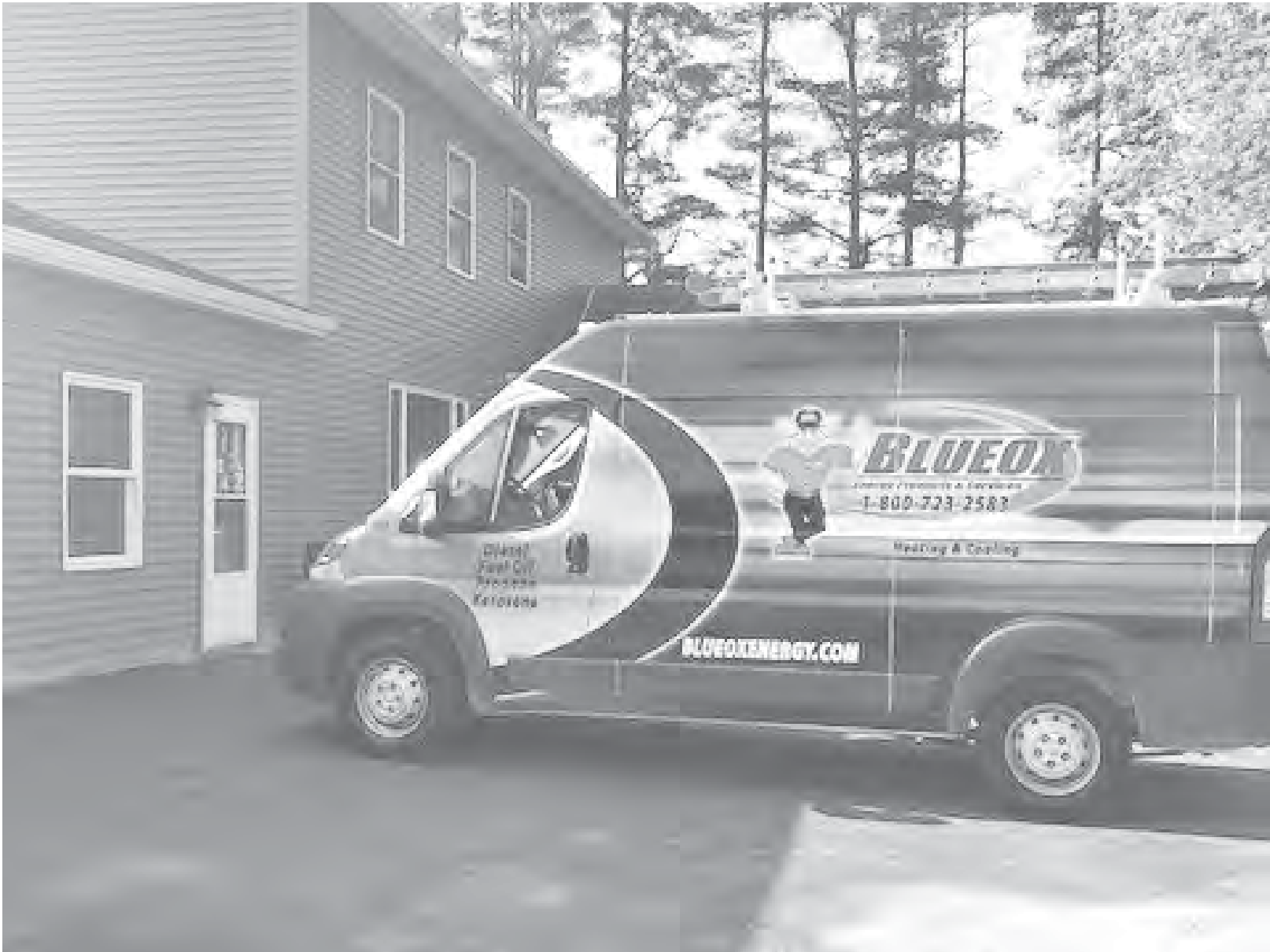
When these changes happen the company either

companies to enact a predictive scheduling mandate. The mandate would require the company to make employee's schedules three or four weeks in advance, explained Miller. Anytime any employee works outside the predictive schedule, such as providing cover for a routine call-in, would also require the business to pay for at least four hours of work, no matter how long they work.

"The underlying thoughts of these regulations are not necessarily bad, it's not consulting with the small businesses they affect, and that's were things can fall apart. Because the amount of overhead it takes to manage these programs will be what we can't sustain in the long run," she said.

"We want to be a responsible employer who gives employees notice for their shift, if someone is inconvenience we want to be able to take care of them because it's the right thing to do, not because the government says we have to. That's where things get frustrating," said Miller.

Bartle added, "This is the world we live in, you have to react, you have to be nimble. If you're a responsible employer who already takes care of these things, then they just eliminate your options and add to your costs really."



A Blueox driver makes a service delivery in 2018.

Bartle explained how this benefits both customers and the company.

"This helps reduce our delivery cost a lot because we have a lot of COD customers who pay for the delivery at the time of the delivery,

and if we go there, to a customer's house and it costs about \$4 per mile to run the truck," he said.

"So if there is a lot of having to go back out there because you couldn't make a delivery it can cost a lot. This helps us avoid that. Now customers get a reminder, and they can be like, 'Oh wait I've got a delivery coming,'" said Bartle.

Miller said the company

corporate company."

The company sees these improvements as vital to its competitive survival. They said installing these tools are a must to survive in this day and age.

"The tools are what keeps our frontline freed up so our people can solve real problems," said Miller.

One local challenge facing the company as it tried to expand and remain competitive is a general lack of cell phone service in Chenango. Several pieces of technology depend on it, such as the remote meter reader and drivers' worker pad, that they use to electronically keep track of deliveries.

"You go like five miles in that direction or that direction and it's gone. You could be out all day making deliveries with hardly any service," said Bartle. He said the company has to use a mathematic formula to predict customer usage in many cases.

ple making some decisions had a better understanding of the true ebbs and flows of business," said.

The company feels the impact of minimum wage increases especially on the

cuts costs or decreases revenue. Sometimes there is no choice but to pass some of the costs to the consumer.

The energy side is also facing new legislation in 2019 that would regulate

"Being small, that makes it a lot easier to be nimble. Even with our continued growth we don't want to become the same as that corporate company." Blueox Director of Business Growth and Development Julia Miller

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SUNY Morrisville —



SUNY Morrisville's Edge program allows high school students to take college credits at no cost to the student, and last year approximately 180 students took part in the program. (Zachary Meseck Photo)

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approximately 400 youth in the area.

Lefevre said the college is taking a number of different steps to help increase enrollment and program diversity, and one way they've reached out is by continuing to offer the edge program.

"The Edge program is something we've been doing for several years that allows high schoolers to take college classes and receive credits," she said. "We have 35 high school students who participate in our on campus program, and we have about 145 students who are taking classes in their high schools."

She added that the coun-

ty pays for the tuition of the high school students, and typically the school districts pay for the students' textbooks.

"We've had students enroll in the Edge program and knock off a semester of their education in advance. That can be a considerable amount of savings for those students."

She said by introducing students to an inviting campus that's close to home with small class sizes and affordable tuition, she hopes students will see the advantages to the Norwich Campus, which is planning on working to make the college experience more enjoyable for students in 2019.

Lefevre said as part of a

big push towards providing a better college experience for the Norwich campus students, the college is partnering with a local business, the Wild Owl, to create a commensary with the hope that students will take advantage of fresh and locally made food that they can pay for with cash, credit or debit card, or with funds on their student ID cards.

"This was a big initiative for us, we really wanted to begin offering food services to our students because a lot of our students have to leave between classes for food, and I really wanted to make sure they could stay here if they wanted to," said Lefevre. "Mike La Croce is an alumni of Morrisville, and

he approached me with the idea of having this service available to our students."

She said additions like these can make a big difference in the lives of students who are spending hours each day at the Norwich Campus, and by partnering with a local restaurant it's a win-win for students and the Wild Owl. She added that while the community grows, the college is facing issues on a state and national level with high school graduation rates on the decline.

Lefevre said because high school graduation rates have been on the decline, the college decided that it was important to present students with a more diverse education, and began a partnership with Bassett Healthcare.

"With Bassett Healthcare, we offer an LPN to RN program, and they work under a grant," she said. "In this program we allow students to work in the hospital and in the classroom to make the most of the experience."

She said the program began in the fall of 2018, and 35 students have signed up for the program. The college is also partnering with manufacturing employers in the area including Unison and Corning, to help develop students interested in those fields.

"We've worked with these companies to ensure that we're offering the training needed, because there is a gap currently with applicants and what those companies require for training before they can be hired," said Lefevre. "We're very much still in the development stages, but we hope to have a full program ready for spring of 2019."

She said Morrisville State College has had a Norwich Campus since 1992, and the current building finished construction in 2005.

"We've also established a human services institute developed by Doctor Julie Burton to help with professional development and to address community needs," said Lefevre. "The development of the Human

Services A.A.S. degree on the Norwich campus was specifically developed to respond to a need expressed by the Chenango County community."

She said at the time of its development in 2007, the Human Services A.A.S degree was in response to the needs expressed by approximately 75 human service agencies around the anticipated shortage of providers in the area and an anticipated shortage in trained, qualified human services providers.

"The development of the Human Services Certificate continues this tradition for SUNY Morrisville in responding to the needs of the region and in direct response to an expressed need from human service providers for the development of a pathway to a more educated, skilled employee workforce," she said. "The Human Services Certificate will provide 21-credit hour program of education and training to direct support professionals who provide direct services, personal care assistance and case management to individuals who are diagnosed with an intellectual and/or developmental disability or an emotional, psychological or behavioral disorder."

She added that this is a population of people that are dependent on others for support, and their quality of life is directly dependent on the quality of education and skills that their direct support staff has attained.

Lefevre said according to reports of the New York State Department of Labor, the growth rate of this human services sector of social assistance is expected to continue to grow at a rate of 16.5 percent annually, with personal care aides growing at the highest rate in this sector at 21.7 percent. "For example, according to several area nonprofits (Springbrook and Pathfinder Village), the need for direct support professionals far exceeds their ability to recruit and retain high quality staff," she said. "This is in line with the current turnover rate for direct support

professionals in New York State at 25 percent of the workforce leaving the position within one year and an eight percent vacancy rate."

In addition to the certificate, Morrisville's Human Service Program is developing a Human Services Institute.

She said the Institute will become an additional resource for professional development and continuing education as well as for human service leadership, and both the certificate and institute have gotten support through a Performance Improvement Fund grant through SUNY.

"These dollars have already provided support for a two-part professional workshop and for a grief conference planned for spring 2019," said Lefevre. "The Institute will also be involved in a research project around developing an intervention for grief and loss for adolescents and young adults."

She said this is being done in collaboration with the Gorman Foundation and Catholic Charities in Madison County, and is one of several improvements the college is making.

She added the college is also improving their security in 2018, by updating their security plans and by working with the main campus police to see how they can improve.

"That being said, we try to keep our campus as open and inviting as possible to ensure that the community can use the facility as a gathering space," said Lefevre. "The Chenango County Board of Supervisors has been incredibly supportive, they made it clear that they want to ensure that this institution flourishes."

"We have a slogan, which is, 'We're the college in your community, start smart and stay local,' but our focus always has been and will continue to be a resource in this community, to ensure that we're contributing to the overall vision of Chenango County, and to continue to take the lead on education in the county."

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The SUNY Morrisville Norwich campus is located at 20 Conkey Ave in Norwich, New York, and according to college officials, approximately 350 students enrolled in classes there throughout 2018. (Zachary Meseck Photo)



In 2018 the first Associate of Applied Science degrees in Nursing were awarded to the 15 students who graduated SUNY Morrisville Norwich campus's nursing course. (Zachary Meseck Photo)



Morrisville's Norwich campus is upgrading its commissary options in 2019 by partnering with the Wild Owl, in hopes that it'll provide healthy tasty food to students that they can pay for using funds on their student identification cards. (Zachary Meseck Photo)



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