



Photos by Roger William Theise

TODAY: Cortland County

TODAY: Cortland County is the Business Development Corporation's newsletter promoting industry and business growth in Cortland County.

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Wintertime in central Upstate New York is a real love/hate affair. It's the best time of the year for many, who enjoy nothing more than a day on the slopes, a tour on a sled, or sitting in front of a warm fire. For others, it's merely to be endured. Regardless of where you fall on the issue, the signs of spring are no less welcome as the sun hits melting snow at a different angle, the days last longer, dormant wildlife makes a reappearance and maple sugar producers begin (or resume) tapping trees and boiling sap.

The production of maple syrup and maple products is a big industry in Cortland County, and if you've ever attended the Marathon Maple Festival you know that it is celebrated thoroughly. Inside this issue

you'll learn more about just how impactful the industry is here and how one local producer makes it a family affair.

Aside from our regular features, we're also profiling the city's efforts to improve a major gateway to the downtown district as well as how a local farm is tapping into the locally grown "food to market" phenomenon.

Hello, sunshine!

The BDC is Cortland County's principal economic development organization working for economic and community growth. Together, its programs, projects, and services aim to support existing businesses while promoting other job-creating opportunities across the county.



Garry L. VanGorder
Executive Director/CEO

It should surprise no one that business owners and not-for-profit leaders generally do not support Governor Andrew Cuomo’s push to raise the state minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Least surprised is Cuomo, who during a February promotional bus tour for the initiative said that “it is not a shock and awe statement that employers do not want to pay employees more.”

Perhaps not. But the reasons for such reluctance go a bit deeper than the insinuated preoccupation by business owners to maximize profit at the expense of the workforce. For many businesses upstate, notwithstanding Cuomo’s proposed five-year phase-in, the rock-bottom concern is whether they could even stay *in* business.

The reason? Aside from the strain of a mandate to pay new, inexperienced workers \$15 per hour, many employers would also face critical decisions about pay for incumbent workers who may be at or near the new minimum after years of service. Combined with the new minimum, that so-called salary compression would have a significant and potentially threatening impact on a business’s viability.

Adding insult to injury, a new minimum wage standard of \$15 an hour in New York could also create competitive disadvantages with out-of-state businesses paying less for their help.

Cuomo’s proposal cuts a broad path and impacts every business sector, from small business to not-for-profit, from manufacturing to health care and agriculture. Annually rated among the worst in the nation for its business climate, New York is poised to earn another dubious distinction as home to the highest minimum wage in America.

Business interests are equally concerned about the governor’s simultaneous but much less publicized push to require a 12-week family leave benefit for new parents and those caring for ill or dying relatives.

During his statewide campaigns to push these initiatives, Cuomo has insisted that new leave and minimum wage standards will “restore opportunity and basic decency” to workers and families who are struggling to get by. At the same time, he says, a new minimum wage will pour billions into the New York economy.

Those are laudable goals, but the price to reach them might just be too high for businesses already struggling in a New York State economy recovering far too slowly north of the metropolitan area.

On the cover: Four generations of Ensigns are involved in the sugaring business, including (left to right) dad, Randy; granddad, Arthur; Josh; nephew, Trentin; and mom, Joann.

\$9
Current NYS
minimum wage

67%
Proposed increase
over current minimum

2.3 Million
Workers impacted
by minimum wage
increase



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Chill-a-Bration 2016

The ninth annual Chill-a-Bration event in downtown Cortland was a big hit again this year as hundreds of people took advantage of great weather to stroll Main Street and check out some great offerings by participating businesses and restaurants. More than 800 special mugs were sold for the event and visitors came from as far away as Hudson Valley, Rochester, and the Scranton, Pa. area. The annual Chill-a-Bration event is produced by the Cortland Downtown Partnership.

Winners this year include:

1. The Deli Downtown
2. Community Restaurant
3. Pig Vicious BBQ
4. Hairy Tony's
5. Whole Heart Café

The CDP sponsors Chill-a-Bration, A Taste of Downtown and other special events in the district to promote downtown Cortland's vitality as an arts, entertainment, and dining district.

Downtown Dining Carries Weight

According to the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance, Cortland County's sales tax receipts for the March–May 2015 reporting period decreased 1.49 percent from \$180,390,078 to \$177,701,544. Those same statistics show, however, that at 7.6 percent, downtown Cortland restaurants continue to contribute strongly to county-wide sales tax collections from that industry. Collections from restaurants and eating places trailed only auto sales, 14.4 percent; gas and convenience stores, 10.8 percent; and general retail stores, 7.9 percent, in sales tax power.

“Downtown Cortland is evolving, but that doesn't mean it isn't still an important and contributing component of the local economy,” said BDC executive director Garry VanGorder. “We're seeing capital investment up and down the street, and while retail isn't what it once was, Main Street still carries a lot of weight.”

Pennello Named to State Post

Governor Andrew Cuomo has named Cortland native Matthew Pennello as Special Assistant for Legislative Affairs. Pennello has worked in public service since 2010, most recently as the governor's regional representative for the Mohawk Valley. Prior to working at the executive chamber, he was the assistant for central New York intergovernmental affairs and federal policy for the NYS Department of Labor. He has also worked in the Department of Law of the Syracuse Corporation Counsel. Pennello received his B.A. in political science from SUNY Cortland, where he earned a Research Fellowship studying the effect of terrorism on modern constitutional theory.

City to Pursue Downtown Grant

The city of Cortland will be taking a shot at a piece of the \$100 million “Downtown Revitalization Initiative” announced earlier this year by Governor Andrew Cuomo.

Under Cuomo's plan, one downtown in each of 10 Regional Economic Development Council regions across the state will be selected for receipt of the funds, aiming to help attract and retain residents, visitors, and businesses in the hearts of their communities.

The Central New York REDC comprises Cortland, Cayuga, Madison, Oswego, and Onondaga counties. The city's plan will be the product of a collaboration among city hall, the BDC, Thoma Development Consultants, SUNY Cortland, and others.

“There are a number of initiatives already underway and in planning that can fit well into our plan,” said BDC executive director Garry VanGorder. “We think we can be competitive, and win or lose, we're building a roadmap for progress in the city.”



Deli Downtown owner Jeanne Catalfano (left) and manager Ryan St. Denis are pictured here with the Chill-a-Bration trophy, presented to the creator of the best chili as voted upon by visitors. The Deli Downtown won for its Pork Chill-A-Verde entry. More than 25 businesses and organizations took part in the annual event.

success story

Maple Sugaring Time

As spring approaches, the Ensign family, and dozens of Cortland County families just like them, tap this natural resource as part of a flourishing cottage industry

A mild winter has resulted in an early start to maple sugaring in Cortland County, as farmers, landowners and hobbyists alike trudge woodlands, tap trees and let the sweet sap flow. Among these seasoned sugarmakers is 30-year-old Josh Ensign of Marathon, a third-generation maple sugar producer who learned the craft from his father, Randy, and grandfather, Arthur. Arthur Ensign first got involved in sugaring on his dairy farm back in the 1940s.

Today, the Ensigns make maple syrup and related products on their 250-acre beef cattle farm, which includes 20 acres of sugar maples. In 2015, the Ensigns produced a



Josh Ensign examines a section of plastic piping that runs sap to the sugar house shed.

record 435 gallons of syrup. Their goal in 2016 is to surpass 500 gallons.

As Josh Ensign explains, quaint images of maple trees with dented metal buckets hanging off the sides are fast becoming a thing of the past in the maple sugaring business, replaced by technology that is making sap collection and syrup production far more efficient.

“In our operation, each tree gets a fresh drill hole, where we insert a plastic spout,” says Ensign, who tapped 1,150 maple trees in 2016. “The spouts are connected to plastic piping with a vacuum system that draws the sap through lines to our sugarhouse shed. A pump carries the sap from the shed to the main sugarhouse for boiling.”

“Boiling” is the process of removing water from the sap through evaporation. “It takes about 50 gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup,” Ensign says. “We have a wood-fired evaporator that processes 300 gallons of sap per hour, which equals six gallons of syrup.”

The Ensigns bottle most of the syrup for immediate sale and store the remainder



This stainless steel evaporator is used to reduce the raw maple sap into syrup and sugar. The Ensigns hope to produce more than 500 gallons of syrup this year.



Josh and Randy Ensign stand by the woodshed that houses the fuel used to fire the sugar house evaporator and boil down the maple sap into syrup and sugar.

in 40 gallon stainless steel barrels for bottling throughout the year. Along with syrup, they make maple cream—a maple spread with the consistency of cream cheese; maple candy—firm maple sugar molded into leaf shapes; and granulated maple sugar. They market under the brand name Ensign Family Maple Products.

Prices range from a high of \$47 for a gallon of maple syrup to \$1 for a pack of three maple leaf candies. “We sell most of our products right from the farm,” Ensign says. “We also sell through a couple of local

stores, at the New York State Fair and at the Maple Festival in Marathon.” (See related story.)

Maple sugaring is truly a family operation for the Ensigns: granddad Arthur, now 91, supervises in the sugarhouse; dad Randy, 63, handles boiling; Josh taps trees, gathers sap, runs lines and makes repairs; and a mixed bag of fourth-generation Ensigns ranging in age from 3 to 17, as well as other family members, pitch in where they can. “It is a great family business that brings us all together,” Josh Ensign says.

Festival Time

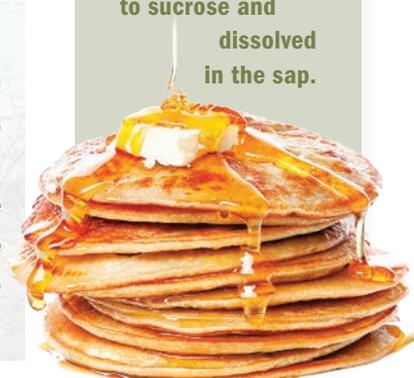
The 2016 Central New York Maple Festival will be held April 2-3 in Marathon as part of Maple Weekend, when more than 150 maple producers across New York State invite visitors to learn more about how maple sugaring is done. Pancake breakfasts, crafting demonstrations, wagon rides and the crowning of the 2016 Maple Festival Queen are just some of the activities that take place during the event. For more on the CNY Maple Festival, visit maplefest.org. For more on Maple Weekend, visit nysmaple.com.

Maple Sugaring in New York State

In 2015, New York State reached its highest level of maple sugar production in 70 years, with the state’s 2,000-plus maple farmers producing a modern record of 610,000 gallons of syrup from more than 2.3 million taps across the state. That total is expected to be surpassed this year. According to the USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service, the amount of maple syrup produced in New York was up 10.1 percent from 2014 and 4.7 percent from 2013. New York State is the nation’s second-ranking producer of maple syrup. Vermont, at 1.39 million gallons, is the top producer.

MAPLE FACTS

- New York State is home to the largest resource of tap-pable maple trees within the U.S.
- There are more than 2,000 maple sugar-makers in New York, the vast majority being multi-generational family operations.
- New York produced a record 610,000 gallons of maple syrup in 2015.
- The aptly-named sugar maple is the most widely tapped maple tree. Other commonly tapped trees include the red maple, black maple and silver maple.
- Sugar is produced in the leaves of maple trees during photosynthesis. It is transported into the wood and stored during winter, mostly in the form of carbohydrates. It is then converted to sucrose and dissolved in the sap.



Cortland FTZ Can Help Local Businesses

Local businesses may want to learn more about Cortland County's Foreign Trade Zone grantee designation (FTZ #290) by the U.S. Department of Commerce. Participation in the program could mean significant savings for companies seeking to level the playing field with foreign competition.

Foreign Trade Zone benefits for qualified companies may include:

- Duty Exemption – Avoid duties on imported components re-exported as a finished product;
- Duty Deferral – Potential savings on finished product duty rate if your finished product is ultimately shipped domestically;
- Duty Reduction – Final products produced in FTZ #290 may be eligible for a lower tariff rate than their component parts; and
- Duty Elimination – Elimination of duties on waste, scrap and rejected or defective parts.

Cortland County's FTZ was approved in May 2014 and is administered by the BDC as the grantee on behalf of the county. All five Central New York counties offer FTZ benefits to their businesses using foreign suppliers. The Cortland FTZ is one of 16 in New York State and 230 nationwide.

Under the zone, which was established in proximity to the U.S. Port of Entry at Hancock International Airport, companies can qualify for tariff and tax relief allowing them to lower their cost of operations, create and retain employment and make new capital investments.

The U.S. Foreign Trade Zones program was created by the Foreign Trade Zones Act of 1934.

Find out more about how FTZ #290 might help your company by calling the BDC (607/756-5005) for more information today!

Cortland County BDC Revolving Loan Fund Program

The BDC facilitates business recruitment and retention in many ways, including the management of its \$500,000 revolving loan fund.

Dozens of loans have been granted over the years as an alternative to or complement to traditional loan financing. While our underwriting is designed to protect the agency's investment, it is also structured in a way that recognizes the challenges new and existing small businesses face in today's competitive marketplace.

Eligible borrowers include for-profit manufacturing, professional, service, and commercial businesses. Retail businesses will also be considered on a case-by-case basis. Eligible applicants include sole proprietorships, partnerships, corporations, and limited liability corporations. At least 50 percent of a project cost must be provided by the borrower (bank or private financing, borrower equity).

Loans are capped at \$100,000 or 50 percent of eligible project costs, whichever is less. The minimum loan amount is \$10,000. For complete details call our office at 607/756-5005 or see the website at www.cortlandbusiness.com.

Businesses have access to numerous resources at the local, state, regional and federal level to help them succeed. In addition to Cortland County's Business Assistance Programs, here are other resources to help your business:

Cortland County Government

60 Central Avenue
Cortland, NY 13045
www.cortland-co.org

County Planning Department

37 Church Street
Cortland, NY 13045
www.cortland-co.org/Planning/index.html

Cortland County Health Department

60 Central Avenue
Cortland, NY 13045
cchd.cortland-co.org/

City of Cortland

25 Court Street
Cortland, NY 13045
www.cortland.org

Town of Cortlandville

3577 Terrace Road
Cortland, NY 13045
www.cortlandville.org

Town of Homer

31 N. Main Street
Homer, NY 13077
www.townofhomer.org

Village of Homer

Homer, NY 13077
www.homerny.org

For more resources visit us online at cortlandbusiness.com/resources/



Residents in Cortland County and Across Upstate New York are Embracing Community Supported Agriculture and the Benefits it Provides

For more than 25 years, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) has been a popular way for consumers to buy local, seasonal food directly from a farmer.

CSA is, in essence, a partnership between a local farm and members of the surrounding community: The farm pledges to grow food for the community and the community pledges to support the farm. This is accomplished by consumers purchasing “shares” and becoming members of the farm. In return, the farmer provides a weekly assortment of fresh vegetables to each shareholder from June to early November.

Today it is estimated that there are more than 4,000 CSAs in operation. Among them is Cortland County’s Main Street Farms, which is based in Homer and operated by Allan Gandelman, a former social studies teacher who in 2011 chose to give up the classroom and begin tilling the soil.

Initially, Gandelman’s crop consisted of greens grown in greenhouses through aquaponics—a system that combines raising fish in tanks and uses the fish’s waste to feed the growing plants. He quickly outgrew his one-acre operation in Homer and, in 2013, expanded to a second acre on South Avenue in Cortland, where he grew traditional soil-planted vegetables. Gandelman eventually converted this plot into greenhouses as well, and set his sights on further expansion—in a much bigger way. This year he will be growing 30 additional acres of vegetables on land leased from Reed’s Seeds on Route 215 in Cortland.



As Gandelman’s acreage has grown, so too have his CSA partnerships: In 2016 he will be producing vegetables for more than 300 customers.

“Over the season we offer more than 50 different varieties of vegetables and herbs,” Gandelman says. “The boxes change weekly with the seasons so in the spring you can expect salad and cold hardy greens, the summer brings tomatoes and peppers, while the fall has squash, potatoes and hearty roots.”

Gandelman’s customers reside throughout upstate New York and his team deliver produce by truck to areas spreading from Syracuse to Binghamton.

Main Street Farms also partners with businesses and delivering vegetables right to their front doors. “Companies with wellness programs recognize that providing fresh, organically grown produce for their employees is a smart fit,” Gandelman says. “In some cases, the businesses subsidize the cost of CSA membership. In others, pools of employees purchase shares and have the vegetables delivered to their offices.” A minimum of five memberships is required for a Cortland business to receive delivery.

There are many pluses to being a Main Street Farms CSA member. “All of our produce is locally grown and picked the day before delivery, so it is very fresh,” Gandelman says. “Members receive a box a week for 22 consecutive weeks at a cost that is 25 percent cheaper than in a store. And our selection is excellent—we harvest more than 50 kinds of organic veggies throughout the growing season.”

For more on CSA and Main Street Farms, visit mainstreetfarms.com or phone 607/218-2101.

CSA Benefits

For farmers:

- Get to spend time marketing food early in the year, before 16-hour workdays in the field begin
- Receive payment early in the season, which helps with the farm’s cash flow
- Have an opportunity to get to know the people who eat the food that is grown

For consumers:

- Receive ultra-fresh food, with all the flavor and vitamin benefits
- Be exposed to new vegetables and new ways of cooking
- Have an opportunity to visit the farm during the growing season
- Develop a relationship with the farmer and learn more about how the food is grown
- Kids more likely to eat food from “their” farm

—Source: LocalHarvest.org



Phone: (607) 756-5005
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cortlandbusiness.com

Cortland County offers the best in small town living with easy access to some of the nation's top metro centers.

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Progress Continues on Improvements to the City of Cortland's Northeast Gateway as Part of the City's Comprehensive Plan

In 2012, the City of Cortland introduced a Comprehensive Plan as a guide for planning future land use and development and establishing strategies to address a range of issues facing the city.

Among those issues was the need to make street-level improvements to the Northeast Gateway to the City of Cortland beginning at Interstate 81/Exit 11 and the adjacent Clinton Avenue Corridor (NYS Route 13) from Tioughnioga River Bridge to the Downtown Historic District.

This gateway is the most commonly used route for visitors to Cortland, and is currently made up of an unattractive mix of excessive signage, pedestrian-unfriendly amenities, rough landscape and, until recently, commercial properties.

The city engaged C&S Engineers of Syracuse to undertake a public design process which allowed residents and other interested parties the opportunity to provide input on design options for the area. Thoma Development Consultants managed the plan's development and serves as city liaison, while a 12-member steering committee of local residents has been overseeing the consultant's work.

A Public Design Workshop was conducted in fall 2015 to gather community input. In February 2016, the public was given an opportunity to ask questions and offer feedback on conceptual plans during a presentation at the Blue Frog Café at Marketplace Mall.

The result is proposed streetscape improvements that allow this area to serve as a gateway into the City of Cortland, help brand the city, and entice traffic toward the downtown area. (View the examples at

cortland.org/city/commdev/Sheet3_Vision-Elements.pdf).

Once the plans are finalized and approved, the City of Cortland will have a clear idea of design elements which may be completed by local civic and nonprofit organizations, interested citizens, or the city itself.

"We have already secured funding for the project through grants and no-interest loans," says Mack Cook, administration and finance director for the City of Cortland. "We are now trying to increase the amount of funding on the grant side, which is currently at 43 percent."

If all goes as expected, groundbreaking for the Northeast Gateway will be in March 2017. "After that, the project should take about three years to complete," Cook says.



Bird's eye rendering of conceptual roundabout configuration at Clinton and Church Streets

Courtesy C&S Companies