



TODAY: Cortland County

The newsletter of the Business Development Corporation promoting industry and business growth in Cortland County

Natrium Products, Inc.

This Cortland bicarb business is booming!
Pages 4-5

Bill McConnell, Crush Founder

When he isn't manning the cockpit, he's crushing it on the baseball field. Page 7

Thomas Turck, New Superintendent

A local principal is the new superintendent of Homer Central School District. Page 8

Natrium Products, Inc. Quietly Works Away on the City's East End

We like stories about good, but perhaps underappreciated, businesses in Cortland County, and our feature this month on Natrium Products, Inc. hits that nail on the head. We think you'll enjoy learning more about the company and what it's up to on the city's East End.

We're also profiling a couple of leaders in the community: Bill McConnell, a Lafayette native and former Gulf War F-16 pilot who founded and manages the Cortland Crush, a summertime baseball league for college players; and Tom Turck, the new

superintendent of schools in the Homer Central School District. Both men have interesting stories to tell and typify the broad talent we have in the Cortland community.

Summertime is vacation time in Central Upstate New York, but work continues on a number of important projects in the community including the Gutchess Lumber Sports Complex in Cortlandville and the proposed new Contento's construction and demolition recycling facility in the city. The projects are vastly different but highlight

continued capital investment in Cortland County that creates jobs and drives revenue.

We expect the state's announcement on the Downtown Revitalization Initiative projects any day now, and will have complete coverage of those projects—and what they mean for downtown and the greater community—in our next issue.

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

The Front Desk

With Phase 1 construction of the Gutches Lumber Sports Complex now officially underway in south Cortland, Cortland County is poised to become a significant player in one of the fastest growing sectors of the American economy: sports tourism.

Youth sports in particular is now a \$15 billion industry as parents shuttle their kids around the country for weekend tournaments, hotel stays, and related spending on food and attractions. And a major factor in luring those visits? Facilities.

At the 100-acre Gutches Park, Phase 1 comprises two completely turfed baseball fields and related amenities that can accommodate youth and collegiate play. That will be important for attracting multi-team tournaments and events and will be a major calling card for play during our notoriously wet spring seasons.

Subsequent phases will mean installation of up to eight multisport fields for lacrosse, soccer, field hockey, and more. In all, the facility will come in at \$15 to \$18 million and will establish Cortlandville and Cortland County as a premier destination for traveling sports play.

Importantly, Cortland County has some experience in this arena. Now in its 12th year, the Cortland Regional Sports Council (CRSC) has leveraged SUNY Cortland's outstanding athletic facilities and

other top high school and collegiate playing fields to bring championship events and more than \$25 million in economic impact to the county. But as successful as that approach has been, the CRSC often finds itself scrambling for playing fields when collegiate events take preference. That impacts the quality of the events, and it limits their potential growth.

Cortlandville town leaders and the Gutches family deserve a lot of credit for swinging the deal making the park site available, and the town has been exceptionally visionary in helping to capitalize on this major investment in the community's future. The state of New York and private donors have also gotten on board, with local agencies like the BDC and the CRSC also heavily involved.

There is a lot of work to be done before the baseball fields open for play next spring and as planning and funding discussions continue for subsequent phases. But the park holds significant promise to one day deliver major dollars to Cortland County.



Garry L. VanGorder
Executive Director/CEO

\$15B

Estimated national economic impact of youth sports

2

Turfed baseball fields in Gutches Phase 1

8

Multisport playing surfaces in Gutches Phase 2

Looking for some summer fun? Check out www.experiencecortland.com!



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On the cover: Bob Kemp (left) and Tim Herman are the founders and principals of Natrium Products, Inc., a baking soda company they've operated in Cortland since 1989.

Photo by Roger William Photography

Main Street

Seven Valleys Health Coalition Gets EPA Award

Cortland County is one of 16 communities selected by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to participate in Local Foods, Local Places (LFLP), a federal initiative helping communities reinvest in their neighborhoods and improve quality of life as they develop the local food economy.

Through LFLP, a team of agricultural, environmental, public health and regional economic development experts will work directly with Seven Valleys Health Coalition, the City of Cortland and other community leaders to support the intersection between local agriculture, food access, and improvements in the health of Cortland.

"We decided to apply for Local Foods, Local Places so the process can help the Cortland Food Project committee bring activities and ideas already underway together, filling in gaps we may be overlooking, especially as we target the City of Cortland as a smaller focus area," said Susan Williams, Project Manager for Seven Valleys Health Coalition.

Hunger, agritourism, connecting farmers with food pantries, farm to school programs, a year-round, indoor farmers' market and commercial kitchen, increased urban agri-

culture, and use of SNAP and WIC benefits to purchase healthy local foods are some of the priorities the Cortland Food Project is hoping to discuss at the LFLP planning sessions scheduled for July 30th and 31st in Cortland.

Mayor Brian Tobin said that the project is a "natural fit with all of the community development work happening in the city with the Downtown Revitalization Initiative, NYS Brownfield Opportunity Area initiative and recent EPA award to Cortland for brown-field planning."

"The Cortland Food Project committee is a countywide effort which recognizes that supporting local agriculture is helpful as an economic development tool, but we are also interested in increasing access to fresh, local healthy foods for local residents," Williams said. "We are blessed here in Cortland County with expansive agricultural lands containing quality soils and plentiful clean water. We recognize we cannot take that bounty for granted. We must act to protect and even improve it."

The 16 Local Foods, Local Places communities were chosen from more than 75 applicants, with Cortland being the only awardee in New York State in 2018.

New Recycling Center Underway



Breaking ground for Contento's new construction debris recycling facility in the city of Cortland are, from left to right: project partner and counsel Jerri Ann Cerino, State Sen. James Seward, Cortland Mayor Brian Tobin, proprietor Anthony Contento, Jerry Contento, and BDC executive director Garry L. VanGorder.

Senator Jim Seward and Mayor Brian Tobin assisted in groundbreaking ceremonies May 29 for Contento Recycling's new \$750,000 construction debris recycling center on Pendleton Street in Cortland. When complete later this year, the facility will be the first of its kind in Central New York.

The company's Anthony Contento says the facility should help Cortland County become a statewide leader in sustainable development as it salvages as much debris as possible from demolition sites and diverts it from the landfill.

New York State is contributing \$145,000 to the project, with the city of Cortland providing another \$100,000 from its Community Development Block Grant program. The new facility could create as many as eight new jobs over the next few years.

Contento's has been providing professional demolition, hauling, and material processing and recycling services since 1950. During the peak season, the company can have from 20 to 30 demolition projects lasting from a few days to a full year.

When fully operational, the new recycling facility is expected to process 250 tons of recycled materials a day. "This is an incredible opportunity for us and a real benefit to the region," Contento said.



The town of Cortlandville broke ground May 29 on the first phase of its \$15 million Gutches Lumber Company Sports Complex project. Pictured here, left to right, are: BDC executive director Garry L. VanGorder; town council members John Reynolds, John Proud and Ted Testa; Gutches Lumber Company President Matt Gutches; State Sen. James Seward; Cortland Regional Sports Council Executive Director Machell Phelps; town councilman Doug Withey; town supervisor Richard C. Tupper; and Gary Gutches, immediate past president, Gutches Lumber Company.

Success Story

Natrium Products, Inc.

This quiet little baking soda producer may have just a tiny fraction of the market, but it has a huge impact on the businesses it serves.



Tim Herman (left) and Bob Kemp are the founders and principals of Natrium Products, a successful sodium bicarbonate/baking soda producer located in Cortland. They are shown here with one of their products, pharmaceutical grade bicarb, which is used in hemodialysis—a medical procedure that filters fluid and waste products from blood and corrects electrolyte imbalances.

Photos by Roger William Photography

It fluffs up pancakes, fizzes Alka Seltzer®, deodorizes refrigerators and scrubs kitchen sinks. It extinguishes fires, soothes insect bites, settles upset stomachs and helps purify swimming pools. And that's just for starters.

If you haven't guessed yet, we're talking about sodium bicarbonate, more commonly known as baking soda—a naturally occurring alkaline substance which is found in all living things and helps maintain a healthy pH balance. The basic building block of baking soda—soda ash—is found naturally in the Earth and is mined to produce baking soda. The substance has an endless array of uses in products for cleaning, deodorizing, leavening, buffering, fire extinguishing, abrasive blasting and more.

Located at 58 Pendleton St. in Cortland is

Natrium Products, a baking soda producer that has supplied sodium bicarbonate to its customers since 1989. Tim Herman and Bob Kemp are the founders and principals

(a major American company with operations at that time in the chemical, aerospace, automotive, oil and gas industries)," says Herman. "Allied was a major producer of soda

"We are so passionate about what we do that some clients refer to us as 'bicarb geeks.' I can't think of a greater compliment."

—Tim Herman, Natrium Products

of Natrium (a Medieval Latin word meaning "sodium") who began the business when they saw a demand for the product in the northeast U.S.

"Bob and I are chemical engineers and at the time were working with Allied Chemical

ash and calcium chloride, and had a side company which made sodium bicarbonate for Church & Dwight Co., a big American manufacturer of household products which it markets under the Arm & Hammer™ brand."

In 1984, Allied Chemical sold its bicarb

business to Church & Dwight Co. and eventually shut the New York-based plant down. Soon after, Church & Dwight Co. shuttered its regional sodium bicarbonate facility as well. As a result, there was no longer a source for sodium bicarbonate anywhere in the U.S. Northeast.

Herman and Kemp saw a real business opportunity and approached Allied Chemical about buying the potassium bicarbonate building. Unfortunately, Church & Dwight Co. got it instead. Nonetheless, the two knew they had a solid business model, and began casting elsewhere for a plant that would suit their needs.

“Our search initially brought us to Syracuse, but we couldn’t find what we needed,” Herman says. “So we expanded our search, and with the help of the Cortland County Economic Development Agency and Thoma Development Consultants found a couple of promising locations in Cortland. We finally chose the old F.H. Cobb Company facility.”

The principals designed the plant based on market need, while capitalizing on what they saw as three key operational strengths: location (saving on freight costs), size (their operation matched up better with

smaller corporations), and product type (focusing production on a higher percentage of courser/granular product).

“There are basically five players in the industry, for a market that produces more than a million tons of product a year,” Herman says. “Church & Dwight Co. is the largest; we are the smallest, producing about 15,000 tons, which is less than 2 percent of the market.”

Natrium’s markets consist of pharmaceutical, water and waste treatment, chemical distributors, sodablastering, and food, animal feed, cleaning products, other consumer products, and other markets. Their client base is primarily located east of the Mississippi and throughout the Northeast, as well as a few nationwide. Natrium Products currently has 25 employees.

“We’re experts in the field and take very seriously what we do,” Herman says. “We are continually refining our operation to meet the needs of customers and the markets we serve. When we meet new customers, our approach is not to simply sell to them, but to go in and learn how they use our product and see if there’s a way to improve

on that. This has served us well. We may lose a customer for economic reasons, but never because of service.

“When we started, people thought we were crazy going up against the big guys,” says Herman. “But we’re still here, because we’ve been in the business long enough to know what our customers need in product, service and pricing. Our goal is to be so reliable that they have no reason to switch.

“And when I talk about ‘we’ here, I’m not just talking about Bob and myself,” he says. “I’m also referring to our extraordinary team of employees and to our board.

“We’re so passionate about what we do that some clients refer to us as ‘bicarb geeks,’” Herman says. “I can’t think of a greater compliment.”



This Natrium Products hourglass uses baking soda instead of sand to demonstrate the clump-free quality of their product.

How Sodium Bicarbonate is Made

Soda ash is initially mined, refined and shipped by train to Natrium Products from the city of Green River in Sweetwater County, Wyoming. At the Natrium Plant, the soda ash is dissolved in a water solution and put into a large holding tank where carbon dioxide (CO₂) is bubbled through it. (The CO₂ is purchased from ethanol plants that produce it as an off-gas.) The resulting sodium bicarbonate precipitates out of the solution to become a thick paste called “slurry” which is dewatered in a centrifuge to extract any remaining water. The dry bicarb is then screened into various granulations and grades before it is bagged for sale.

North America Sodium Bicarbonate Market Numbers*

MARKET	SHORT TONS	MARKET PERCENTAGE
Animal Feed	288,000	30%
Food	221,000	23%
Flue Gas (used in alkaline scrubbers to help purify gases released from power plants)	75,000	8%
Hemodialysis (a medical procedure that filters fluid and waste products from blood and corrects electrolyte imbalances)	71,000	7%
Cleaning Agents	67,000	7%
Personal Care/Pharma	63,000	6%
Other	183,000	19%
TOTAL	968,000	

*2016 market figures

Resources

Cortland County Gets AEI Funding

Cortland County will receive funding for two projects as part of the \$30 million Alliance for Economic Inclusion (AEI) anti-poverty initiative in Central New York. Founded in 2017, the AEI comprises 24 community leaders from within the region's five counties chosen to represent the diversity of governments, businesses, schools and economic opportunities and challenges.

The Cortland County Community Action Program's "Getting Ahead" initiative will receive \$150,000 over the next two years to address the needs of employers, low income job seekers, and the people who work on helping people gain and keep employment. The project will use evidence-based strategies to help low income people develop and practice work-related competencies, work with employers to improve on-the-job retention, provide new training for counselors and job coaches, and improve the career development.

Cortland and organizations in Onondaga, Cayuga, and Oswego counties will also share grant resources over the next two years as part of the On Point for College Initiative, which will seek to alleviate poverty through pathways to college and careers. The program will scale up college access and success services through pilot outreach projects across the region.

Onondaga County will administer the project funding upfront and then will be reimbursed by the state. Funding for the first round of the initiative totals \$6.9 million, with the opportunity for the chosen projects to earn further funding in subsequent years.

"New York will continue to empower communities, creating and expanding economic opportunity in every corner of this great state," Governor Andrew Cuomo said in his June 4 funding announcement. "These projects address the needs of this region's most vulnerable communities, producing meaningful change and helping all of Central New York continue to rise."

AEI is being funded through the \$500 million CNY Rising Upstate Revitalization Initiative plan submitted by the Central New York Regional Economic Development Council, which was tasked with addressing poverty in Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, Oswego and Onondaga counties.

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 visit 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.

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

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

County Planning Department
37 Church Street
Cortland, NY 13045
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
cortland.org

Town of Cortlandville
3577 Terrace Road
Cortland, NY 13045
cortlandville.org

Town of Homer
31 N. Main Street
Homer, NY 13077
townofhomer.org

Village of Homer
Homer, NY 13077
homerny.org

Out and About

Team Spirit

Whether piloting air force jets or coaching tomorrow's baseball stars, Coach Mac gives it his all.

As a young man considering career options, Bill McConnell found himself exploring two promising paths: join the Air Force and follow in the footsteps of his father or pursue the dream of becoming a professional baseball player.

Baseball was his first passion, and from the start he was good at it. A four-year varsity player at LaFayette Central School, McConnell was chosen as a three-time all-county short stop in the Onondaga County South High School League. After graduating high school, he attended Mohawk Valley Community College and played ball with the Mohawk Valley Hawks, posting records in OPS, stolen bases and fielding. He was named captain of the team his second season there.

It was during this time that McConnell caught the eye of coaches at the University of Louisville, where he planned to attend after graduation from Mohawk Valley. "That ended when I broke my leg after my cleats snagged while I was tagging up from second going to third," McConnell recalls. He was left sitting out the rest of the season while looking for another university where he would continue his education.

That university wound up being SUNY Brockport, where McConnell earned a degree in physical education and led the baseball program in batting average while playing second base and outfield. McConnell's team also won the SUNY Atlantic Conference (SUNYAC) championship and the Eastern College Athletic Conference (ECAC) title during his time there. "My dream was to be drafted into the pros, and I felt I had a real shot," McConnell says. "I had top 10 stats and there was interest, but only being 5' 8" and 165 pounds, the recruiters did the math and passed me over for bigger guys whose stats may not have been as good but who they felt could be groomed into stronger players."

It was at this time that McConnell shifted gears and decided he would join the military. "My father was with the Air Force for 10 years and I had thought about training to be a pilot for some time," he recalls. "As it happened, I was first recruited to coach baseball at the Air Force Academy, which really excited me. But I was also selected for Air Force Officer Training School, which was too big of an opportunity to pass up."

Following officer training, McConnell was commissioned as a 2nd lieutenant and maintenance officer for the Air Force's new F-16 Fighter Falcons. From there he went on to pilot training, eventually becoming a pilot instructor, primarily as a Cessna T-37 jet trainer. "Finally I was assigned my own F-16 and for the next 14 years flew missions from U.S. and Europe bases," McConnell says. "I flew the first daylight combat mission for Operation Desert Storm, and 35 more Desert Storm missions after that."

In 1999, McConnell had reached the rank of lieutenant colonel and commander of the Air Force's 309th fighter squadron, and decided it was time to retire. He and his wife Ana chose to settle in McConnell's hometown of Lafayette. Meanwhile, McConnell took a job as a pilot

for Southwest Airlines, covering routes throughout the continental United States, the Caribbean and Mexico.

During his years with the military, McConnell stayed active in baseball through base-level teams and senior men's baseball leagues, and as a youth baseball coach. After returning to Central New York, he became a volunteer assistant coach at Fabius-Pompey High School and assisted in the Fabius Collegiate Wood Bat League from 2006 to 2009. He also

became head coach for CNY Thunder, a high-school level baseball team that trained and showcased players to college scouts. CNY Thunder, which disbanded in 2013, had a 95 percent success rate for placing players in college baseball programs.

During his years with the Air Force, McConnell was nicknamed Billy Mac by his fellow pilots, a name that soon morphed into Coach Mac as he became more and more involved with regional baseball. In 2014, Coach Mac took a proposal to the New York Collegiate Baseball League (NYCBL)—a summer wood bat development league for professional baseball that gives college players who have not yet signed a professional contract the opportunity to develop their skills at a higher level of play, gain experience, and be evaluated by scouts.

Coach Mac's pitch was to create a new team for the league, based in Cortland, called the Cortland Crush. "They were always looking for new teams to join the NYCBL and Cortland was a good location and the right size city to support a franchise," Coach Mac says. "We got tremendous support from the Cortland Youth Bureau and Regional Sports Council. The NYCBL liked our presentation and in 2014 gave us the go-ahead. And we're still going."

From the start, Cortland Crush proved itself to be highly competitive, finishing its first year 15-31, making the playoffs the following three years, winning the NYCBL Eastern Division championship in 2016, and placing second in 2017. Five of its players have gone on to the pros.

"Cortland is a great place for sports," says Coach Mac, who along with being head coach of the Cortland Crush is now NYCBL president. "It's the perfect area in summertime to bring young people from all over the country to experience our culture.

"We continue to receive wonderful support from area businesses and sponsors," Coach Mac adds. "The fans that come to games—kids, parents, seniors—make the team feel supported and right at home. This is a great community. We're very fortunate to be here."



Bill "Coach Mac" McConnell

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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Thomas M. Turck Named Superintendent of Homer Central School District

This spring, following a five-month search, the Homer Central School District selected Thomas M. Turck, 53, as the new superintendent of schools. Prior to this appointment, Turck was principal of Homer Junior High School. He succeeds the current superintendent, Nancy Ruscio, who is retiring after seven years in the position.

Turck is well prepared for the job, having worked nearly 20 years in the Homer district as principal of Homer Intermediate School and Homer Junior High School. Prior to his time in Homer, Turck was a vice principal at St. Therese Academy in San Diego, California, and an elementary school teacher at Morgan Road Elementary School in Liverpool, New York.

Turck holds a master's degree in educational administration from National University in San Diego and a bachelor's degree in speech communication from SUNY Geneseo. He earned New York State qualification in elementary education from SUNY Cortland and completed the New York State Superintendent Development Program at SUNY Oswego.

His wife, Jennifer, works at Cortland Regional Medical Center as director of business development and physician recruitment. The Turcks have three sons—all products of the Homer School District—Daniel, 21, a senior at St. John Fisher College in Rochester; Michael, 18, a graduating senior from Homer High School who will be attending Lycoming College in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, this fall; and Samuel, 16, a senior at Seven Valleys New Tech Academy.

Turck is a recognized community and educational leader who has devoted his career to advocating for students while cultivating positive, collaborative relationships on behalf of the district. "I am proud of the quality of people I've brought to the district," Turck says. "Our schools are run by high quality, positive folks who uplift our kids every day. You can have the best curriculum and facilities in

the world, but if the staff isn't top notch, the students will suffer."

As superintendent, Turck has immediate and long-term goals on which he'll focus. "There is a harsh reality we are facing—incidence of mental illness in kids is on the rise," he says. "And socioeconomic indicators show that the number of disadvantaged in the region has grown. I will assemble a task force to support these kids and their families and make a concerted effort to address these and other issues."

Turck is also developing a five-year strategic plan to guide the district in the years to come, and will work with the director of instruction to insure the curriculum is aligned appropriately so that students move fluidly from grade to grade.

"I've been in this community a long time, but that doesn't mean I know everyone," Turck says. "I'm very interested and open to developing more contacts for resources for our kids that provide learning opportunities outside classroom walls. Businesses and agencies in the community could really help with that and are welcome to contact me with input and ideas."

Thomas Turck can be reached through the Homer School District at 607-749-7241.



Thomas M. Turck

Homer School District By the Numbers

Schools: 4	Students: 1,847	366,000 square feet of instructional space (classrooms, auditoriums, gyms, etc.)
Elementary (K-2), Intermediate (3-5), Junior High (6-8), High School (9-12)	Teachers and staff: 420	
	Annual budget: \$42,055,168	