



TODAY: Cortland County

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

Sesquicentennial Celebration

SUNY College at Cortland reaches its 150th anniversary. Pages 4-5

City Park Upgrades

\$500,000 grant improves access for persons with disabilities. Page 7

Boosting Regional Tourism

Meghan Lawton is the new head of the Convention & Visitors Bureau. Page 8

Plenty of Great Weather Left to Enjoy Cortland County's Offerings

It is sad but appears so true: summer's downhill slide seems to begin about a day after the last July 4 fireworks explode in the nighttime sky.

Fortunately, perception is not reality; there is plenty of great weather left to enjoy all that Cortland County has to offer.

Inside you'll learn more about what the City of Cortland is doing to enhance the warm weather experience for young people as significant investments have been made in the city's parks. From Suggett Park's new splash pad and playground equipment to

new playground equipment at Dexter and Beaudry parks, tremendous strides have been taken in improving what was already one of the region's top municipal park systems.

You'll also be introduced to Meghan Lawton, the new director of the county's Convention & Visitors Bureau. Meghan, a Cortland native, succeeds Jim Dempsey after his long and distinguished career at the CVB helm. Tourism is a vital component of the local economy and we should all be encouraged that promoting visits to our

county remains a priority.

Finally, this issue features SUNY Cortland as it celebrates its 150th anniversary in Cortland County. Perhaps taken for granted, the college has and continues to have a central role in defining who we are as a community. We think you'll find the piece interesting.

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

We spend a lot of time these days talking about our downtown districts, whether it is a resurgent Homer Main Street or the ongoing revitalization of Downtown Cortland. We talk about them because each—as well as those in Marathon, Cincinnatus, and elsewhere—are vital to the community's economic well-being.

In Homer, an energetic and visionary group of businesspeople have worked together to renovate storefronts, recruit small business and promote the quaint, historic nature of its main street. Capital investment will continue, with a capstone project soon replacing an historic structure destroyed by fire two years ago. Downtown Homer is now a destination for shopping, dining, and relaxation.

Downtown Cortland is undergoing a dramatic facelift as well, thanks to an explosion of capital investment in its historic buildings soon to be accelerated with funds received through the \$9.7 million Downtown Revitalization Initiative. Those dollars will leverage another \$5 to \$7 million in private investment to get the projects done.

The centerpiece of the proposal is the city's \$5 million retooling of Main Street from Groton Avenue to Tompkins Street. The project means a complete rebuilding of the street including underground infrastructure, paving, curbing, sidewalks, lighting, and much more.

It's a reinvention of the city's most important street and a perfect complement to other forward-thinking investments now being made there.

The decision to recommend the traffic pattern change as part of the project is not the product of guesswork. Urban planners tell us that one-way conversions are happening across the nation, calming vehicle speeds and creating pedestrian-friendly environments that help attract businesses, visitors, and residents. Given the often-heard critiques of what's wrong with Downtown Cortland, isn't it time for a fresh approach?

Change can be hard, and that is especially true when it is so much easier to leave things as they are. But communities thrive when they take action to address challenges, and when their leadership remains laser-focused on the goal and is undeterred by the headwinds they are sure to encounter along the way.

Downtown Cortland is reinventing itself. We need the courage to see it through.



Garry L. VanGorder
Executive Director/CEO

5.1%

County's June
unemployment
rate

10

Years since the
unemployment rate
has been that low

500

Fewer people in
the Labor Force
than June 2017

Update of Cortlandville's eight-year-old comprehensive plan is a key document guiding future growth.



Above and ghosted background photos by Andrea Piedigrossi, Cortland Youth Bureau

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On the cover: SUNY Cortland alumni, students, faculty and staff gathered on the football field during Homecoming 2017 to create a giant 150 in honor of the school's upcoming sesquicentennial.

Photo by Wayne Hansen

Main Street

Gutchess Park on Pace

Work is progressing on schedule for phase 1 construction of the Gutchess Lumber Sports Complex in the town of Cortland. Two fully-turfed baseball fields and related amenities will be online and ready for play next spring, town officials say. Events recruited to the complex by the Cortland Regional Sports Council include high school, collegiate, and tournament play. The fields may also accommodate other activities in the expansive outfield areas.

The next phase of the project is expected to include construction of four multi-sport playing surfaces, accommodating lacrosse, field hockey, soccer, and more.

Youth and sports tourism is now a \$15 billion industry across the nation, and when complete the Gutchess complex will play a significant role in the county's ability to tap into that market. With more than 12 years of experience bringing major sporting events to the community, including the state Senior Games, the CRSC is primed to showcase the new facility as a viable option for large state and regional events now held hours away at other locations.

Led by the town, the park project is a collaboration comprising the state, the City of

Cortland and its youth bureau, the Cortland County Business Development Corporation, the CRSC, Thoma Development Consultants and many others.

Crescent Commons Open House

The newly renovated Crescent Commons was the focus of a recent Chamber of Commerce "Business After Hours" event highlighting both the facility's new commercial space and its one- and two-bedroom market rate units.

One major tenant, Family Counseling Services, is already in the space, and project developer David Yaman reports that a quarter of the 47 apartments has already been leased well ahead of any marketing campaign for them.

The \$16 million project by Yaman and Housing Visions of Central New York was supported by the state of New York and the Cortland County IDA, among others. The historic building, acquired from an out-of-country owner several years ago, was in desperate condition and faced further deterioration as it sat largely unheated in the harsh local winter climate.

"This project is underestimated with re-



spect to its importance in the community," says IDA executive director Garry Van Gorder. "It stabilized an historic building, it stabilized a neighborhood, and provides much-needed, modern space for both working and living."

Greek Peak Planning Improvements

The Cortland County Industrial Development Agency has taken preliminary action supporting a \$1.9 million capital project at Greek Peak ski resort. Final approval of sales tax exemptions worth about \$153,000 is pending a late August public hearing in the Town of Virgil.

The project is part of the resort's ongoing initiative to enhance the skier experience and drive more visits to the mountain. Scheduled improvements include trail snowmaking and infrastructure enhancements, the acquisition of two grooming machines, replacement of a dated chairlift, improvements at its water park, new base building lighting, expansion of the Taverna, upgrades at the reservation desk and replacement of certain furniture, fixtures, and equipment.

The resort must maintain 80 full-time jobs over a five-year term as part of the agreement, and the IDA reserves the right to recover the exemption if those employment thresholds are not met.

Previous capital projects at Greek Peak have been completed and all employment requirements have been met as the resort continues to grow and establish itself as one of the region's top tourism destinations.



Photo provided by Clough Harbor and Associates

Construction of the Gutchess Lumber Sports Complex in the town of Cortlandville is well underway, with the phase 1 construction work of two fully-turfed baseball fields to be completed this fall, ready for use next spring with the arrival of baseball season.

Success Story

Sesquicentennial Celebration



The 150-year story of how the humble Cortland Normal School of 1868 evolved into the nationally respected SUNY Cortland of 2018 is a tale of vision, determination and community engagement.



Throughout its 150-year history, SUNY Cortland has never lost sight of its role as a part of the Cortland County community. An example of this connection is the annual Big Event, during which college students, faculty and staff join the rest of the Cortland community in neighborhood cleanups which may include raking, gardening, trimming hedges, painting, and other tasks.

Photo provided by SUNY Cortland

This year, the State University of New York College at Cortland celebrates its 150th birthday.

It's quite an accomplishment, especially considering that when the institution was founded in 1868, the original plan was simply to create a place that would produce educators to teach in area schools.

Back then it was called Cortland Normal School and there was a total of 10 students in its first graduating class. Today, more than 80,000 alumni call SUNY Cortland their academic home.

From these modest beginnings, SUNY Cortland quickly found itself on a trajectory of sustained growth, accomplishment and community engagement.

Within 40 years, the institution had introduced its first two-year program of

instruction beyond the high school level. After a 1919 fire destroyed the original school, a larger facility was constructed, dubbed Old Main, while simultaneously the teacher-training program was extended from two to three years.

years. Three years later, Cortland Normal School became Cortland State Teachers College, providing four-year academic programs leading to a bachelor's degree. Master's degree programs were added soon after.

“SUNY Cortland has always been a proud member of the Cortland community. We are always looking for opportunities to strengthen and enrich our hometown.” —Erik J. Bitterbaum, President, SUNY Cortland

Based on the continued success of its programs and graduates, in 1938 the teacher-training program was extended to four

Through the 1940s and '50s, buildings were added, additional faculty were hired, and the student body continued to grow.

Recognizing the importance of what the college had become, in 1961, New York State renamed the school SUNY College at Cortland and it assumed the role of a comprehensive college of arts and sciences.

The 1960s saw continued expansion of the college with the addition of more academic buildings and programs, including the introduction of a liberal arts curriculum. In fall 1963, tuition was charged for the first time. The fee was a staggering \$400 for the entire year.

In the years that followed, many inroads continue to be made. To name but a few: The college's 100th anniversary was celebrated; study abroad was introduced; an Interfaith Center was established; the Center for Educational Exchange was created to enhance teacher-preparation programs through networking with elementary and secondary schools in Central New York; a college-wide Honors Program was established; the athletics Stadium Complex was opened; the School of Education was established; a bachelor of fine arts degree was created; and the college received accreditation from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education for its teacher-education programs, making Cortland home to the largest nationally accredited teacher-education program in New York State.

Part of the success of SUNY Cortland is that as the institution grew, it never lost sight of its role as part of the Cortland County community.

"A key reason the college even exists is because in the beginning, residents of a rural village wanted it to be the location of a new type of school, a normal school, to educate people to become teachers for the region," explains Frederic Pierce, director of communications at SUNY Cortland. "These

residents made the case, formed a committee and created the school that would become SUNY Cortland. Tens of thousands of students have graduated since, many of whom continue to live in the area and contribute to the economy and the region."

It's difficult to understate the close relationship that exists between the college and the community. Pierce notes that on three sides of the college, local neighborhoods abut the campus boundary. "Half of our students live in these neighborhoods," he says. "A majority of our students participate in community service, volunteering in after-school programs, in neighborhood cleanup, getting involved in health education—all to make the community a better place."

Beyond the campus neighborhoods is the downtown area, with many thriving businesses that were created and are managed by SUNY Cortland alumni and are frequented by SUNY Cortland students and guests. Then there are the faculty and staff who work on campus and live in the greater Cortland area, paying taxes and spending dollars at local businesses.

"SUNY Cortland is a major economic engine for the area and the county's biggest employer," Pierce says. "Residents participate in campus events, take classes here, and enjoy our many arts and sports programs."

"SUNY Cortland has always been a proud member of the Cortland community," adds college president Erik J. Bitterbaum. "We are always looking for opportunities to strengthen and enrich our hometown. The college was created here 150 years ago because the community felt an educational institution like ours would be an asset. Today, a century and a half later, we strive to ensure that our neighbors continue to feel that way."

Economic Impact

In a single year,* SUNY Cortland generated more than \$251 million in regional economic activity (Cortland, Broome, Cayuga, Onondaga and Tompkins counties). This activity was a result of more than \$135 million in direct spending by the college, its employees and its students.

Student expenditures accounted for 34 percent of the economic impact of the college, contributing more than \$46.3 million in direct spending and generating an impact of \$85.8 million in the local economy.

Employees of SUNY Cortland injected more than \$36 million directly into the regional economy, with an economic impact of \$67.2 million or 27 percent of the college's overall impact.

Visitors to the employees and students of SUNY Cortland account for approximately 4 percent of the total impact of the college, with an impact of \$9.7 million generated as a result of \$5.2 million in visitor direct spending.

Purchases of the college, its auxiliary services, agency accounts and Student Government Association account for approximately 15 percent of SUNY Cortland's economic impact on the Central New York economy. Together their approximately \$20 million in purchases inject \$37 million into the regional economy.

The college's critical maintenance construction expenditure of \$24 million accounts for nearly 18 percent of the economic impact of the college, injecting more than \$44 million back into the region.

The college spends \$3.7 million in utilities, generating an impact of nearly \$7 million.

*Source: The Economic Impact of SUNY Cortland on the Central New York Regional Economy



Left: In 1923, students gather in front of the newly constructed Old Main building.

Photo from SUNY Cortland Archives

Resources

County to Require Solar PILOTS

The Cortland County legislature has passed a new local law requiring that solar developers participate in a Payment in Lieu of Tax (PILOT) plan that would reduce costs for project sponsors over full taxation while also assuring a revenue stream for the county.

As an incentive for the development of renewable energy sources, state law now provides a 15-year property tax exemption for solar project developers unless taxing bodies opt out of that arrangement. Legislators moved quickly to do that in efforts to get ahead of several large projects rumored to be under consideration in the county.

Other county taxing entities may also require PILOT arrangements and will have the opportunity to join in the county plan.

REDC Round 8 Projects Now under Review

The Central New York Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) is now reviewing project proposals for Cortland, Cayuga, Madison, Oswego and Onondaga counties as the state's annual economic development competition moves through its eighth year.

The Central New York region has won top honors for its submissions in five of the program's first seven years, bringing more than \$600 million to 617 projects across the five counties. This round of the REDC initiative will award more than \$750 million in state funding and tax incentives, including up to \$150 million in capital grants and up to \$75 million in Excelsior Tax Credits for projects and activities identified by the REDCs as regional priorities in their communities. Additionally, over \$525 million from state agency programs will be awarded through the CFA process.

A number of major Cortland County projects have been supported by REDC program grants over the years, including the expansion of the McNeil & Company downtown corporate headquarters, the historic rehabilitation of the former Crescent Corset factory on south Main Street, the renovation of the former Bowker's downtown shoe store to a new business facility, and the Gutches Lumber Sports Complex now in development.

Program winners are announced by Governor Cuomo in December.

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

Access for All

A \$500,000 State grant helps Cortland Youth Bureau enhance accessibility of local parks

Backed by a \$500,000 Empire State grant and following a year and a half of development, this summer the Cortland Youth Bureau unveiled renovations to several city parks that greatly enhance access for persons with disabilities.

Playground areas at Suggett Park at Homer Avenue and Madison Street and Dexter Park on Elm Street have both been upgraded. Suggett features new equipment such as an inclusive glider which permits access for wheelchairs and an accessible whirl that spins in merry-go-round fashion. Wider ramps, new rails, an accessibility swing and generational swing are just some of the innovations included in Suggett Park's improvements. Dexter now has generational and therapeutic swings as well.

Suggett Park has a poured-in-place rubber surface that is highly durable, permeable, slip-resistant and softens impact, while Dexter Park's playground area is covered with Fibar, a versatile, wood-based engineered mulch.

Additionally, Suggett Park now has a Splash Pad with water buckets, spray cannon, spinner wheels and other water features. A computer software program keeps the system operating from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. through a simple push-button control that operates every 10 minutes.

Renovations also recently began for accessible play areas at a third site, Beaudry Park, on Scammell Street.

"We are incredibly grateful for the help we received from the Cortland Common Council, Cortland Mayor Brian Tobin and Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton (125th Assembly District) in getting the state funding to improve the accessibility of our parks," says Youth Bureau Director John McNerney. "Suggett Park is the first and only fully all-inclusive playground in all of Cortland County."

The Cortland Youth Bureau has received "Inclusion Champion" and "Inclusion Program of Excellence" awards from the New York State Parks & Recreation Society for its work in fostering accessibility. Staff also participated in Inclusion U training through the Inclusive Recreation Resource Center (IRRC) at SUNY Cortland, an organization which promotes and sustains participation by people of all abilities in inclusive recreation activities and resources.



Above and left: Kids wasted little time in testing out Suggett Park's new Splash Pad and other inclusive playground upgrades which debuted this summer.



Left: Cortland Mayor Brian Tobin and Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton cut a ribbon to mark the opening of Suggett Park's inclusive playground, as Youth Bureau Director John McNerney and a group of excited Cortland kids look on. Tobin and Lifton were integral in getting a \$500,000 state grant to fund the improvements at several local parks.

All photos by Andrea Piedigrossi, Cortland Youth Bureau

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

 Printed on recycled paper

Cortland County Convention & Visitors Bureau Names New Executive Director

Tourism professional Meghan Nulty Lawton, 32, has been named executive director of the Cortland County Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB), replacing Jim Dempsey, who recently retired.

Lawton comes to Cortland from Wyoming County in Western New York, which is located southwest of Rochester and east of Buffalo.

During her time in Wyoming County, Lawton worked for two years as vice president of marketing and public relations for Campground Owners of New York (CONY), an association dedicated to the promotion, growth, improvement and development of privately owned New York campgrounds.

Prior to her work with CONY, Lawton spent more than five years as vice president of tourism and as a tourist promotion agent for the Wyoming County Chamber of Commerce & Tourism.

As a tourism promotion agent, Lawton has extensive experience working with the state's "I♥NY" advertising program which has been promoting tourism in New York since 1977.

"I am super excited by this opportunity and am looking forward to utilizing my tourism skills to draw guests to the region."

**—Meghan Lawton, Executive Director,
Cortland County Convention & Visitors Bureau**

Lawton's arrival in Cortland County is in fact a return home: She is a 2003 graduate of Homer High School and a 2007 graduate of SUNY Cortland, where she earned a degree in communications with concentrations in public relations and advertising. She and her husband, Tim, are looking forward to relocating to Cortland County.

"Meghan has a strong tourism background and she knows the market as her roots are Cortland," says Mary Coye-Robillard, pres-

ident of Cortland County CVB's board of directors and assistant vice president/branch manager at the Cortland office of Tompkins Trust Company. "We are very excited she is on board. Meghan will no doubt be managing and guiding the promotion of Cortland County as a leading destination."

Lawton says she is in the process of getting a handle on past and current initiatives and learning all she can about the attractions that

draw visitors to the central New York region. Among her top areas of focus will be the group tour market, as in large-group tour busses, to boost tourist flow.

"A lot has happened and there have been many changes since I was here," she says, "so I'm in a bit of a learning curve right now. But I am super excited by this opportunity and am looking forward to utilizing my tourism skills to draw guests to the region."

Tourism is a \$72 million industry in the Cortland county region, supporting close to 1,800 jobs which generate a \$34+ million payroll. It is also responsible for annual visitor spending of more than \$15 million on lodging, \$6 million on recreation, \$31 million on food, \$14 million on retail and services, \$5 million on second homes and \$9 million in assorted taxes.

The Cortland County CVB works to enhance the general economy of Cortland County and its cities, towns and villages through promotion of tourist activities, conventions, trade shows, special events and other related and supporting activities.

The CVB office is located at 37 Church Street, Cortland, NY. For more information, phone 607-753-8463 or visit the web at www.experiencecortland.com.



Meghan Lawton