



Economic Development

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Quality of Life

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Seizing Opportunity

30 DAY USE:
23% of girls in grades
11-12 reported drinking
in the past 30 days

BLACKOUTS:
12.9% of 11-12th
grade girls
reported blacking
out from drinking

8.4% of 11-12th
grade girls
reported getting
into a situation
they later
regretted from
drinking

BINGE DRINKING:
20% of 17-18 year
old girls reported
binge drinking in
past month

GIRLS IN CORTLAND COUNTY OUTPACE BOYS IN DRINKING

Understanding the Situation

Data from the 2022 Cortland County Youth Survey draws attention to a troubling trend: a notable percentage of girls, especially those in grades 11-12, are involved in alcohol use and binge drinking. 17.2% of girls in grades 11-12 reported drinking in past 30 days compared 12.5% of boys. Girls are also experiencing various negative consequences associated with their alcohol consumption.

Girls are not merely experimenting with alcohol; they're consuming it in quantities that can cause severe harm. The data reveals that of the girls aged 17-18 who reported drinking, 15.0% admitted to binge drinking in the past month. As parents, educators, and community members, it's crucial to understand the severity of these figures. Alcohol can profoundly affect the developing teenage brain, potentially impacting cognitive functions, decision-making abilities, and emotional health.

According to the survey, girls report notably higher rates of hangovers (15.3% compared to 9% for males), blackouts (12.9% versus 4.8%), problems with their dating partners due to drinking (7.9% against 5.4%), and regrettable situations post-drinking (8.4% versus 4.8%). The data highlights clear gender disparities in the consequences of alcohol consumption among adolescents. This not only jeopardizes their health, but can also lead to poor academic performance, strained relationships, and high-risk behaviors.

Prevention Strategies

The focus should be on prevention, education, and early intervention. Here are some steps parents can take to help prevent alcohol use among their girls:


Open Communication: Foster an environment where your girls can openly discuss their thoughts and feelings about alcohol. Talk about the risks and consequences, and encourage them to share their experiences, concerns, and any peer pressure they might be encountering.

Set Clear Expectations: Make your stance on underage drinking clear. Establish rules and consequences about alcohol use.

Engage In Their Lives: Be involved in your girl's daily activities. Know their friends and their friends' parents. Encourage participation in sports, clubs, or other extracurricular activities that can provide a healthy outlet for their energy and interests.

Early Education: Initiate the conversation about alcohol early. Arm them with facts about alcohol, its effects on their bodies and brains, and the legal implications of underage drinking.

Seek Professional Help If Necessary: If you notice signs of alcohol abuse, seek help from a mental health professional immediately. Early intervention can prevent the evolution of more severe issues.



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The opportunity is in greater Cortland; let’s seize it

By EVAN GEIBEL
Publisher

The world is changing, in some ways very quickly, and the future success of the greater Cortland area depends on our ability to keep up with it.

Judging by the stories in this special section, our community is well-prepared for what comes next.

Preparing for this edition, the *Cortland Standard’s* journalists scrutinized our coverage area and found that businesses are growing and innovating, the breadth and availability of arts and entertainment are improving and many local organizations are looking at the world in new and exciting ways. Entrepreneurs, advocates, educators, health providers and community leaders are all focused on the future, and are aggressively pursuing new strategies and technologies and finding efficiencies by thinking about things differently.

Our reporters and editors talked to movers and shakers in business, health, education and other fields, teasing out trends and challenges and discussing how to move forward. This coverage is broader and more detailed than much of what we publish in the daily newspaper. But as always, it’s intended to help you make the choices you need to make in your life. Meanwhile, we also asked community and business leaders to tell you, in their own words, about what to expect from their respective corners of the world in the year — and decades — to come. We received a dozen thoughtful and insightful contributions, and I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I did.



Evan Geibel

Of course, we wouldn’t be able to provide you with all of this excellent information (so hand-somely packaged) without the support of our advertisers. These businesses and organizations want you to be informed, and I’m thankful for their support of and trust in the *Cortland Standard*. The advertisements themselves relay important information, too, about the vision and values of these local enterprises. I hope readers will let these advertisers know that they appreciate their support of quality local journalism.

And thank you for being a part of this community, and wanting to know more about it by digging into this special section. I’m supremely thankful for your support of this newspaper.

It’s my honor and pleasure to present Outlook 2025: Seizing Opportunity. It’s your guide to the future of our community, and how you can take part in the excitement. We’re starting to see the possibilities, and we want you to be ready.

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The Opportunity is Now!

As the new year unfolds and most of the expenses of the holidays are in the rearview mirror, many people might start to look ahead and begin to plan home improvement projects or even contemplate a move to a new home. While it might seem too early to be thinking about seeing “for sale signs” on front lawns buried by snow, now is the perfect time to start thinking about what might be possible.

The first best step is to ask the very important question: “What can I afford?” At the First National Bank of Dryden, we encourage our customers to start here. Most people don’t factor in, or are not aware of the insurance, taxes, or other variables that are factored into purchasing property.

In order to help paint the most accurate picture, we spend time with every prospective home buyer, taking them through each important step. Pre-qualification letters are more and more common now, and are often required before a real estate agent will show a home

to a prospective buyer. We help bank customers through this process so that they have the confidence of being prepared at the very first viewing.

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Everything we do at the First National Bank of Dryden is personalized. We take the time to get to know our customers and understand their needs and goals. We look forward to helping you in the year ahead, at one of our locations in Homer, Cortland or Dryden.

Byrne sees opportunity for 400 people working in South Cortland

By DOUG SCHNEIDER
Staff Reporter

dschneider@cortlandstandard.com

One of the most significant development proposals in 2025 changes almost everything about Byrne Dairy's plant in Cortland, from what it looks like from the air to the number of employees who'd be parking there.

The details of the four-phase, \$120 million investment that will some day expand the plant to employ about 400 people came out at a recent meeting of a small group of Cortlandville officials. The meeting — technically a "sketch plan conference" — involved four pages of a proposal from Onondaga County-based Byrne Dairy. Two were text of key elements of plans for the site; two others are aerial photographs of Byrne's site off state Route 13 in South Cortland.

The proposal impressed the chair of the town's Planning Board. "Their proposal had a lot of facts and figures, and it seems like they're ready to go," said Christopher Newell, who is also a county legislator. "I don't see any issues with their proposal."

Byrne, founded in 1933 in Onondaga County, has three manufacturing facilities in Central New York, including an extended shelf-life and ultra-high temperature pasteurization plant in DeWitt, an ice cream center in Syracuse and the Cortlandville facility. It operates warehouse facilities in Syracuse and East Syracuse, and the company's corporate headquarters are in LaFayette.

It opened a research and development facility last fall in DeWitt, and has a chain of more than 60 convenience stores and gas stations.

According to the Byrne plan, there are timelines for the project that include estimates about how long each of the four segments of the project would require, from the town granting their building permit, to completion. The proposal also includes tentative employment projections tied to the end of each segment of the project.

Planning Board members have said they expect Byrne to seek board approval in February. Newell said he has not heard any objections to Byrne's proposal.

GOAL: NEARLY 400 EMPLOYEES

- Increasing total employment — it's now about 116 — to 200, and then to 292 and then to 394 during the next phases of the project.

Byrne says those two phases include work that was technically

completed in 2022, when the company invested about \$25 million in the facility. That work enabled workers to retool and manufacture extended shelf-life products and shelf-stable dairy products. It also increased employment at the site to 116 people.

- Investing about \$44 million to add 82,600 square feet for processing, blending and other equipment in the next phase, then spending another \$42 million to add another nearly 70,000 square feet of additional processing, blending and batching space. That would bring the total investment in the project to roughly \$120 million.

Construction at the site would be done in several phases, phase 2A would be complete about six months after the town grants the permits, Byrne said, estimating the start of construction in March or April.

In total, construction of these first two phases would be complete in no more than 12 months after construction has begun.

The next phase, the \$44 million phase, would include upgrades to the water-treatment facility now on site, as well as electrical system upgrades. The beginning date, which would be determined by numerous business and economic factors, the company says, would take no more than 12 months to complete.

However, it did not set a start date. As was the case in the previous sector, various business and economic factors would influence when the final phase of this upgrade would begin.

That would be followed by a fourth phase, totaling \$42 million, adding more space for processing, blending and batching and filling. Like the third phase, no date for start or completion was set.

But when all is said and done, the workforce at the plant would total 394.

DELIVERING MORE THAN MILK

Byrne has a reputation for delivering more than Cortlandville envisioned.

The Byrne Dairy processing plant in Cortlandville opened in 2014 to make yogurt a \$50 million investment then, to create between 100 and 150 jobs.

Cortland County Industrial Development Agency had created the 135-acre industrial park, and Newell said the town had planned an area in which town officials "had envisioned a bunch of (small) start-ups, but (Byrne) bought the whole damn industrial park."

However, realizing Byrne could not compete in a saturated national and international cultured dairy market, the company announced in 2021 the \$25 million retooling of its Cortlandville facility, which was completed in October 2022. It installed extended shelf life product processing and filling lines in place of its cultured product lines.

Rather than traditionally pasteurized milk, which heats the milk to 140 degrees for 40 seconds, Byrne's process in Cortlandville heats it to 280 degrees for five seconds. The end product lasts much longer than traditional

pasteurization — it lasts 10 to 20 weeks with refrigeration.

The plant sources its milk from up to 25 miles away — and lists both Jerry Dell Farm in Dryden and E-Z Acres in Homer as milk suppliers. On a good day, milk travels as few as six miles to reach it. It has not sourced milk from additional farms as a result of the retooling, rather, the farms it sources from have added additional cows.

Byrne has already invested \$5 million on top of the initial \$25 million to buy new filling machines that have increased the facility's output.

SITE CHANGES PLANNED

The latest \$44 million project would require "considerable site-work changes" including:

- Building a new truck-access road
- Moving the truck scale from Osbeck Circle, and having the town abandon Osbeck Circle so the company can use the space the road now occupies,
- Moving the employee parking area and replacing it with a 277-vehicle lot off an access road from Byrne Hollow Crossing.
- Creating a new lot for truck loading, parking and staging.

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Jacob Mack/file photo

Stainless steel tanks containing thousands of gallons of milk at the Byrne Dairy production facility in Cortlandville, pictured in 2023. A \$25 million project then will be followed by a \$44 million expansion that could see up to 400 people working at the facility.

Byrne introduces Byrne Cortlandville 2.0

*Expansion begins in spring
to add about 150 jobs*

By **ASHLEY CASEY**
Contributing Writer

Byrne Cortlandville is planning to expand its extended shelf-life dairy plant in Cortlandville. The expansion of Byrne Cortlandville — a project we’re calling BCV 2.0 — will not only enable Byrne’s continued growth but will also boost job opportunities and agricultural investments in the Cortland area.

Byrne expects to break ground on BCV 2.0 in March or April. The majority of the project should be complete by the end of 2025.

The scope of the project is subject to change, but currently the plan is to build an addition of 100,650 square feet. This would allow for the construction of up to six additional production lines as well as cooler and warehouse space, doubling the facility’s output. Byrne also plans to expand parking with a dedicated truck lot.

For each new production line, it is anticipated approximately 25 jobs will be added.

Byrne is already adding to the workforce at BCV

ahead of this expansion. Positions for warehouse and filler operators positions as well as leadership roles are available. Byrne Cortlandville currently has 103 full-time employees in manufacturing operations, maintenance and quality assurance.

A job at Byrne offers employees a stable, well-paying career in manufacturing. The average hourly rate at Byrne is \$30.96, compared to the Cortland County average of \$22.45 an hour, according to ZipRecruiter.

The average BCV employee has 4.4 years of service with the company. Turnover at BCV is lower than Byrne’s company average of 17%. We pride ourselves on offering our team members internal development and advancement opportunities via robust training programs, apprenticeship opportunities, cross-functional team development and external partnerships.

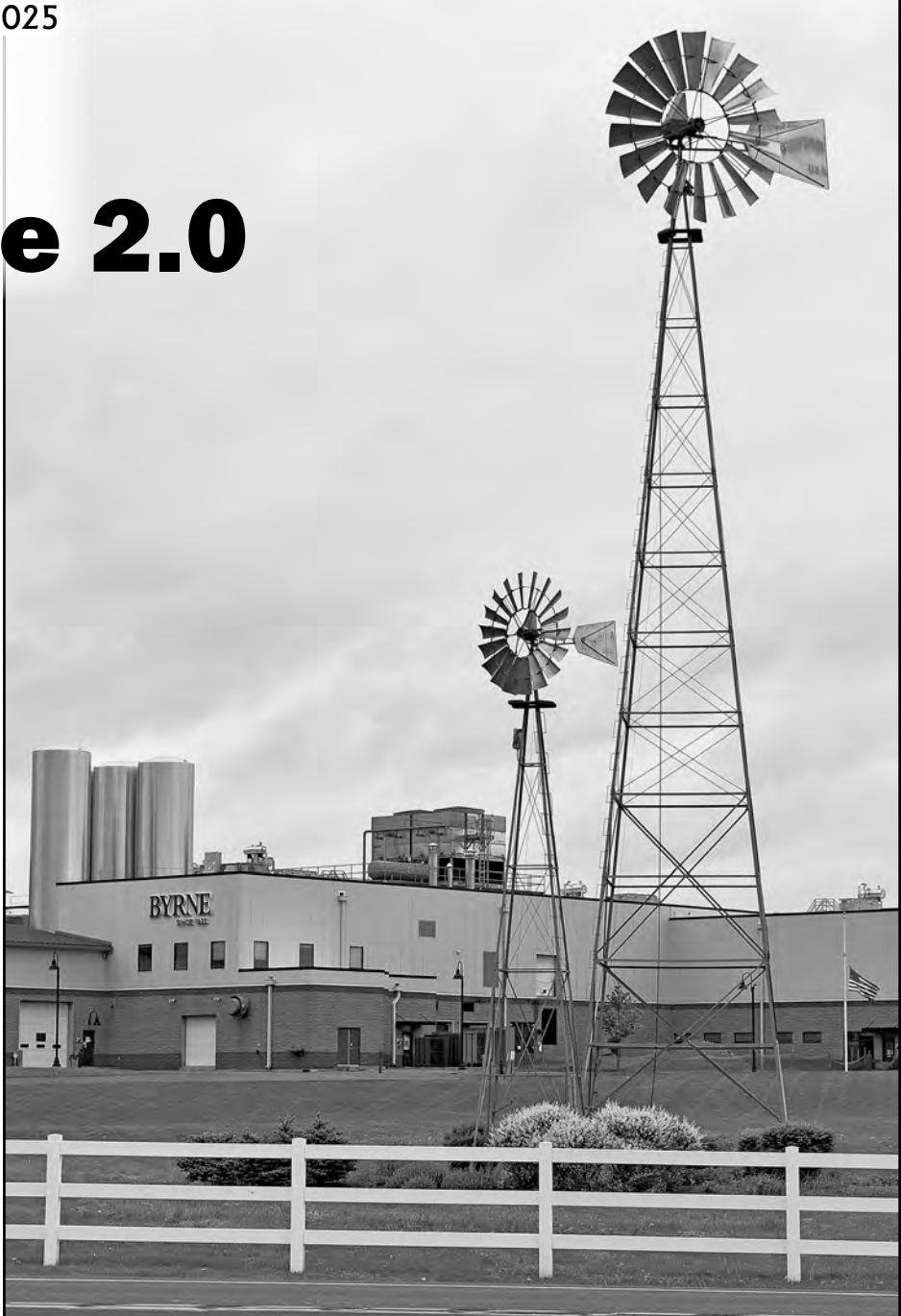
In addition to creating local jobs, BCV 2.0 will allow Byrne to expand its product portfolio. Through a select few of our private label customers, Byrne

will be launching its first line of ultra-filtered milk this year. Byrne may also examine opportunities in the plant-based nutritional and high-protein beverage markets. Of course, we are also continuing all while Byrne continues to improve its existing product portfolio of conventional milk, organic milk, half and half and cream.

As Byrne’s capabilities grow, so does its need for more milk. That means more cows and increased investment in local agriculture. Byrne’s partnerships with local dairy farmers are now more important than ever.

Byrne’s manufacturing success goes hand in hand with its retail accomplishments. There will be continued investment in Byrne’s retail platform. Currently, there are 80 Byrne Dairy & Deli stores, with plans to reach 100 stores by 2027.

As a family-owned company with deep roots in Central New York, Byrne’s dedication to the community extends beyond economics. We focus our community partnership efforts on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education to help cultivate a workforce that will succeed in modern



Todd R. McAdam/file photo

The Byrne Hollow dairy facility in Cortlandville now employs a bit more than 100 people. Byrne Dairy has announced a plan to add up to 150 jobs in a year-long expansion set to begin in the spring.

manufacturing. Relationships with local schools as well as professional organizations such as MACNY and the International Dairy Foods Association are key to our community engagement and workforce development efforts.

The expansion of Cortlandville is another sign of our commitment to being a pillar of the Central New York community.

Ashley Casey is a sales and marketing specialist for Byrne Dairy.

Opportunity is everywhere you find it

By **BOB HAIGHT**
Contributing Writer

Opportunities are all around us and to see our community take

advantage of them is one of the most fulfilling aspects of being associated with The Chamber. When the *Cortland Standard*

chose “Seizing Opportunity” as their theme for this year’s Outlook section, my mind immediately filled with thoughts, stories

and people doing just that.

From our building on Main Street in Cortland, not only have we had a view of all that’s happened in the past three years, but we’re able to see our building owners gutting, rehabbing, refreshing and rebuilding facades, and participating in the entire new look of downtown Cortland. Years ago, we predicted that after the work was completed, we’d have full store fronts and more people living downtown. Judging by the calls received in our office and the tours we’ve given to entrepreneurs, it’s on the way to becoming reality. And while Cortland is the most populous area in our county, it’s not the only place with people seizing opportunities.

A short drive to Homer and soon we’ll see dramatic work being done thanks to the efforts the village put into securing its own Downtown Revitalization Initiative. Transformative work while keeping the historic character of our village. Thank you to the village leaders for still allowing me to say “our” even though I moved into the countryside a short time ago.

Still a great visit.

Our other towns and villages have similar opportunities being seized as we speak.

Manufacturing leaders seizing opportunity include Byrne, iSpice, Square Deal, Forkey, Pall, Gutches, Cortland Plastics, Bestway, Cortland Biomedical, Cortland Line, Homer Iron Works, New York Hemp Oil, Pyrotek, and the list goes on and on. Agriculture is alive, well and growing in our region. Tourism is stronger than ever and is being boosted by every ball game being played at Gutches Park.

Education at our K-12 schools along with SUNY Cortland and TC3 continue to bring economic activity to our area while they produce graduates for all of us to be proud of. And while they attend class on campus, it’s easy to see them active in our community with The Great Event and we love to cheer them on during all their sporting events. We have great student athletes in our front yard, and all of them are seizing their opportunities.

Thinking about all those opportunity seizing people and organizations we also need to look at the bottlenecks that are holding us back. That’s another aspect of

Chamber work. We’re cheerleaders for all that’s good in our area but know it’s essential to address what needs to happen next to continue the trends. That brings me to our Chamber causes of early childhood education, housing, workforce development, and diversity and inclusion. We see these as the bottlenecks holding us back and choose to dive in and address where we can.

Our legislative priorities will also be focusing on these same areas and this year we’re prioritizing early childhood education as No. 1 because it’s where we can make the most impact to support our local economy.

When parents want to work, want to contribute, but can’t because of the lack of affordable, quality childcare, it’s an issue for all of us. The problem isn’t complicated, it’s quite simple. When we can’t afford to pay our educators what they deserve because we can’t charge our working families what that would cost, we can’t employ enough educators. Simple, expensive but simple. We’re working with state and local leaders to devise a local plan to work on just that. Our local heroes, our children’s educators, all work well together and we’re talking about a few thousand children, not tens of thousands. Our state is interested in looking at how we can do it in Cortland as an example for more communities. Stay tuned on that one.

Housing, we don’t have enough. Simple, right? Cortland lost out on a doctor and family moving here because they didn’t see a house for them to live in at the time of the job offer. The Chamber takes that personally. The IDA/BDC is looking at funding opportunities to do a countywide study to see where housing can be built in communities that are looking for growth. That study will be a tool to attract building from our host of quality local developers. We’ll support the IDA/BDC and the developers in those efforts.

There’s a ton more I can say. How about this? Join me at The Showcase on March 29 at the JM McDonald Sports Complex and we’ll talk more.

Bob Haight is the president and CEO of the Cortland Area Chamber of Commerce.



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Seizing the opportunity is a group effort in Cortland

By SCOTT STEVE
Contributing Writer

As we settle into 2025, and reflect on the progress our community has seen over the past few years, it is truly difficult to overlook how our community comes together to seize opportunities. It has been inspiring to see how we have successfully tackled challenges, embraced change and literally laid the groundwork for a promising future.

Our success has been a true team effort, and I am optimistic of what more we will be able to accomplish through collaboration and shared dedication.

Cortland remains committed to public safety, continually evolving its emergency services with cutting-edge technology and equipment. Recent upgrades include new street and body-worn cameras, drones, license plate readers and new emergency vehicles, providing first responders with advanced tools to better serve the community. With a low violent crime rate and swift emergency response times, Cortland remains a safe and welcoming place for residents and visitors alike, with ongoing improvements highlighting our commitment to safety and effective emergency response.

Our community has also seen significant improvements in healthcare access; ensuring residents receive high-quality medical care close to home. Cayuga Medical has relocated and expanded its primary care facility to include several specialties and services, such as pathology and physical therapy, enhancing comprehensive care options. Guthrie has opened its new Renzi Health Campus, providing additional medical services, reducing wait times and improving overall access to healthcare. Guthrie plans to bring advanced cardiology care to the community and their continued expansions will not only improve patient outcomes, but will attract top-tier doctors, nurses and support staff, strengthen-



Kevin T. Conlon/file photo

A crew paves a section of West Court Street in Cortland in 2023 in a major street and infrastructure improvement project. Now the city is looking at its water capacity and safety as selling points for development.

ing our local healthcare network and ensuring long-term medical excellence.

Our crown city is uniquely positioned to attract new businesses not only geographically, but also with the abundant natural resources we have available.

Current data show that we utilize a mere 1.1 of the 14.1 million gallons per day of running water the city has access to between just three of our wells. This surplus crowns us as an ideal location for industries that rely on water-intensive operations, such as data centers and processors that rely on substantial water access to maintain operational temperatures, animal feed processing plants that require large-scale hydration for conditioning and production, and other businesses in the food and beverage, agriculture and manufacturing industries.

Not only are the necessary resources readily accessible,

commercial and agricultural real estate opportunities are also available for purchase within our county, providing businesses with the option to reduce costs and increase convenience by conducting multiple levels of their operations in a single locale.

Additionally, Cortland's wastewater treatment infrastructure ensures that businesses have access to reliable and sustainable water management. The city currently processes 5.5 million gallons of wastewater per day, with the capacity to handle 9 million gallons per day—a figure set to grow even further with planned upgrades made possible by a \$2.2 million grant. Ongoing improvements will enhance treatment capacity and efficiency, supporting industries with needs to process other solids and organics. This commitment to improve infrastructure makes Cortland a prime

destination for businesses seeking a sustainable and scalable location to establish or grow their operations.

An exciting expansion is set to take place in one of our neighboring counties to the north, as Micron — a leading American semiconductor company specializing in the production of memory and storage solutions — prepares to build a new facility in Syracuse. This transformative opportunity for the region will solidify the area as a hub for advanced manufacturing and technology.

In response, the city is actively collaborating with educational partners, including Cortland High School, Board of Cooperative Educational Services, Tompkins Cortland Community College and SUNY Cortland, to develop specialized education and training programs tailored to prepare students for this growing indus-

try. We are working closely with the Workforce Development Office to ensure that these initiatives provide residents with access to the skills and certifications necessary to secure high-quality careers close to home. This strategic partnership not only strengthens Cortland's workforce, and reinforces its role in driving economic growth and innovation for years to come.

The city of Cortland is thriving, and our future is brighter than ever. By staying focused on our inclusive and collaborative culture, sustainability, community engagement and economic development, I am confident that we will achieve even greater things. The best is yet to come, and I am honored to be on this journey with all of you.

Scott Steve is the mayor of Cortland.

Cortland partners with Cayuga for grant to expand broadband

Editor's note: This story was compiled from a series of stories published in December 2024.

By DOUG SCHNEIDER
Staff Reporter

dschneider@cortlandstandard.com

The Cortland County Legislature voted in in December to partner with Cayuga County on a \$26.1 million project, funded by grants, to expand broadband internet service to parts of the two counties that now lack it.

In Cortland County, that would serve about 50 miles of road now without Internet service; in Cayuga County, it's about 139 road-miles without access.

The counties would need to pay the initial startup costs — \$3 million in Cortland County and \$7 in Cayuga County — but those would be reimbursed. Cortland County would issue a bond-anticipation note to fund the \$3 million, officials have said.

David Bottar, executive director of the Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board, attended Thursday's meeting. He said after the meeting that both counties resoundingly supported the partnership; Cayuga's legislature had only one "no" vote.

"Now, we get to work," Bottar said.

The project would establish CNYNET, an open-access fiber network to serve 6,671 locations. It will form CNYNET Inc., a non-profit local development corporation, to own and manage the network.

Cortland County has nearly 390 miles of road and 1,500 residents with no access to broadband. The grant could fund 50 miles of broadband access in Cortland and 139 miles in Cayuga.

The money would come to the counties as a grant, and the initial investment the counties made — about \$7 million in Cayuga's case and \$3 million from Cortland — would be reimbursed. The county intends to borrow the money by issuing a bond anticipation note, but the money it pays would be reimbursed, officials said

The grant is part of \$140 million in awards from the ConnectAll Municipal Infrastructure grant program, Gov. Kathy Hochul announced. In total, it would extend the fiber-optic network by more than 1,200 miles and brings to \$214.7 million in grants and 2,000 miles of broadband infrastructure, funded mainly by the U.S. Treasury Department.

The county intends to borrow the money by issuing a bond anticipation note, but the money it pays would be reimbursed, officials said

"We'll be able to get the loan back with interest," Legislator Beau Harbin (D-Cortland) who has been the county's point person for the grant, said at a December committee meeting. "It's a win, win, win for the county."

Finance and Administration Committee members unanimously endorsed the proposal Tuesday.

Legislator Eugene Waldbauer (R-Cortlandville) said the proposal appeals because it offers significant value for Cortland County, yet requires the county to risk minimal funds.

"So we'll get (\$3 million) of work for \$10,000 to \$20,000 a year?" Waldbauer said. "I'd rather find out I was wrong for spending \$15,000," than choosing to miss an opportunity to capitalize on \$3 million of improvements.

Finance and Administration Committee Chair Cathy Bischoff, (D-Cortland) said the amount Cortland County might have to pay out of pocket is likely no more than \$70,000, but that the county would be reimbursed for interest on bond-anticipation notes it issues.

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Seizing opportunity:

Housing as the foundation of Cortland's growth

By JAMIE YAMAN
Contributing Writer

As Cortland County looks to capitalize on its growth potential, one critical piece of the puzzle remains clear: housing. The community faces an urgent need for quality housing across all segments, from affordable and work-force housing to market-rate and high-end options.

Without the proper housing infrastructure, Cortland County risks losing out on the very people and talent it needs to sustain growth. People who, without suitable options here, will look to neighboring communities like

Ithaca, Binghamton or Syracuse for homes that meet their needs.

The simple truth is a thriving community is built upon a strong foundation of accessible and diverse housing options. Housing affects everything from work-force retention and local business success to the vibrancy of our downtown. When people cannot find the housing they need here, they are forced to look elsewhere. According to recent census data, nearly 2,100 housing units in Cortland County are vacant, yet we still hear that the market is not meeting demand. So why is there this disconnect?

The answer lies not in quantity, but in the quality and diversity of the housing stock. Most of those vacant housing units currently available in Cortland County are outdated, often poorly maintained, and do not meet the needs of today's consumers. These units fail to provide the quality, standards and amenities that would attract people from surrounding areas. Meanwhile, the demand for well-located, functional housing, across all price points, has continued to rise.

Cortland County's housing stock is not just about quantity, it's about creating options that



Todd R. McAdam/file photo

Cortland has more than 2,100 vacant units of housing, but shortages all the same because the housing doesn't meet the needs of the consumers.

align with the needs of the people we want to attract. Local employers like Byrne, which plans to expand its plant in south Cortland and triple its workforce, need to be able to rely on the availability of quality housing for their employees. If workers can't find appropriate housing locally, they will likely move to neighboring areas, where housing is better aligned with their needs. Similarly, the expansion of businesses like iSpice offers more opportunities to locals, but without the right housing stock, they may find it difficult to retain workers.

However, what Cortland County and communities like ours are also faced with is the challenge of the high cost to build and investment needed, relative to the returns on those investments. This often puts new homeowners or investors underwater, requiring them to either stomach the loss and hope that appreciation catches up over time, or turn to state grants to bridge the gap. I recently went through a painstakingly difficult yet enlightening experience while trying to make a housing project in Homer work, even with state grants. Ultimately, with the current interest rate landscape, the cost to build, and the anticipated revenue, we couldn't make it work.

New York is doing its best to fund the gap with creative means of incentivizing investors, but the clock is ticking. Every year that goes by without viable solutions for communities like ours is another year we lose the opportunity to attract new members into our community and keep existing members — those who value

quality housing, which is currently in short supply. Expanding housing options does more than just meet the immediate needs of workers, it plays a role in the long-term health of the community. A strong housing market helps attract outside investment, supports local businesses and bolsters the local tax base, which can fund additional community improvements like schools, roads and parks. A well-planned housing strategy provides stability, growth and improved opportunities for everyone.

The key to addressing these challenges lies in both new development and thoughtful renovations of existing properties. By focusing on mixed-use development and revitalizing older, vacant buildings, we can create a diverse housing portfolio that meets the needs of all income levels.

Cortland County has the opportunity to continue to build a vibrant and resilient community by embracing these housing needs. While there are challenges in getting the right projects off the ground, the payoff is immense. As we work together with city planners, developers, businesses and the community, and we work toward a more diverse and accessible housing stock, we will see the ripple effect that well-planned housing has on our local economy and quality of life.

In the end, housing isn't just about shelter, it's about opportunity. And in Cortland County, that opportunity is ripe for the taking.

Jamie Yaman is the principal broker of Yaman Real Estate.

Buying? Selling?

Try renovating to create your future home

By SEAN MACK
Contributing Writer

The pandemic and its aftermath saw limited inventory, making it difficult for many buyers, especially those who needed to sell their existing homes. Sellers had the upper hand, and often chose offers with fewer contingencies. This created frustration for a large portion of buyers who were "frozen out" of the market.

The dilemma of selling a home without knowing where you're going next is a big issue. The idea of selling subject to "finding suitable housing" has made a comeback, but it can scare off potential buyers who may be unwilling to deal with the uncertainty.

With a growing stock of homes in need of renovation, there's a financial incentive for buyers to consider renovation projects. With the increase in home values, spending on renovations may soon become more financially viable for homeowners.

Interest rates have fluctuated over the years. While current rates (around 7%) are higher than in recent years, they still pale in comparison to the high rates of

the 1980s (16%!). Despite this historical context, many buyers today still find 7% rates difficult to stomach, perhaps because of the shock from historically low rates in the past few years.

It's clear that the housing market in Cortland County (and nationwide) is in a period of adjustment. The challenge for many homeowners and buyers is how to navigate the complexities of selling and buying at the same time, all while dealing with higher interest rates and a limited inventory of homes.

The outlook seems optimistic, with a combination of factors like a growing job market, a drop in inflation and potential lower interest rates providing hope for a better housing environment.

Confidence is high that with the right circumstances, more buyers and sellers will be able to navigate the market successfully. Members of the Cortland County Board of Realtors stand ready to help buyers and sellers realize their dreams.

Sean Mack is president of the Cortland County Board of Realtors.

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Looking to 2025: JM Murray’s commitment to employment, support and community impact

By ERNIE DODGE
Contributing Writer

Providing meaningful work opportunities that offer the pride and dignity of earning a paycheck has been at the heart of JM Murray’s mission since 1966. Today, thanks to our dedicated employees and board of directors, we continue this important work while also offering compassionate, person-centered support services to individuals with disabilities and their families.

The individuals we employ and support — along with their families, guardians and our employees — are our greatest assets. Together, we’re proud to be an integral part of the Cortland County community.

Our business division focuses on creating employment and vocational training opportunities. We manufacture four American Dental Association-accredited toothpaste formulas — proudly made in the USA — along with a cinnamon-clove flavored natural toothpaste. These products drive both sales and meaningful work hours.

In 2025, we aim to build on 2024’s achievements: 43,070 vocational training hours provided to 63 individuals with disabilities; 28,799 work hours provided to 26 employees at our 823 Route 13 location, and 28,346 hours of work Cortland employers provided to 36 individuals with disabilities via our supported employment service, Employment Connections.

Our next step in expanding growth and creating new employment opportunities is to achieve ISO 9001-2015 certification across our organization by the end of the second quarter of 2025. This milestone will highlight our commitment to international quality standards, enhancing the credibility of our manufacturing operations

and reinforcing excellence across both our business and service divisions. JM Murray will proudly stand among the few — if any — providers of employment and support services in the United States to hold this certification.

Our commitment to expanding vocational training, employment, and support services for individuals with disabilities benefits not only those we serve and their families but also our entire community. As one of the largest employers in the county, with a reach across New York state, JM Murray employed over 560 people in 2024, with a payroll exceeding \$14 million. We are deeply rooted in the community, and our employees play a significant role in driving the local economy forward.

As proud corporate citizens, we remain dedicated to supporting our community and beyond. This includes providing personal hygiene kits to every patient admitted to Guthrie Cortland Medical Center, hygiene products for Grace Space, as well as contributing thousands of volunteer hours each year to local churches, fire stations, the SPCA, and other organizations in need. We have a long-standing tradition of donating oral care products to those in need — not only locally but also across the state and country, recently to victims of floods, and tornadoes.

And we are committed to spending our dollars locally. We believe in the people of Cortland County.

When other providers have reduced or eliminated services, JM Murray has continued to find a way to expand our offerings, focusing on how we can say yes instead of no. In 2024, we introduced a weekly afternoon respite service, giving families peace of mind and the flexibility to honor their work com-



Jacob Mack/file photo

Deborah Barone packages plastic cutlery in 2023 at J.M. Murray Center in Cortlandville. Barone had worked at J.M. Murray for more than 40 years.

mitment, knowing their loved ones are safe and cared for. In 2025, we will launch benefit advisement ser-

vices to help individuals navigate how their employment affects their state and federal benefits.

As pioneers of supported employment services in this county, we continue to lead through Employment Connections, providing valuable resources to both job seekers and employers.

Since 1966, JM Murray’s success has been driven by our strong collaborations and partnerships, with our longest and most valued being with the people of Cortland County. We encourage you to think of us when support services or employment needs arise. For those with the financial means, we ask you to consider the JM Murray Foundation as we continue our commitment to enhancing the lives of individuals with disabilities and their families.

Ernie Dodge is president and CEO of JM Murray in Cortlandville.

State grants help businesses grow, expand

By HAILEA POTTER
Local Editor

hpotter@cortlandstandard.com

Cortland County businesses will be able to modernize and expand with state grants announced recently by the state’s Regional Economic Development Council.

Cortland Line Holdings LLC, a fishing gear manufacturer, will use \$133,000 for manufacturing improvements and to develop new technologies at its Cortland facility. The project includes building renovations and the purchase and installation of machinery and equipment.

“It feels great. We’re going to use the money specifically to buy a large piece of equipment to help the manufacturing process here, and we’re doing a LED lighting operation as well.” Cortland Line Co. corporate Controller John Kinson said. “We’re buying a large extruder, which will allow us to do all sorts of different things with our flyline, so that’s a big piece of equipment we put on this particular grant.”

The REDC funds come from a variety of state sources. In Cortland Line’s case, the money comes from the state Homes and Community Renewal program, through a Community Development Block Grant.

Cortland Precision Eforming LLC., a metal supplier, will modernize its facility in Cortlandville.

Business Operation Manager Megan Morrison spoke about the president of the company’s reaction to the news, “It was incredible, she was in the other room, and I could hear her say ‘wow’ and went running in and she was so excited.” The \$78,827 will go toward increasing efficiency and output



Hailea Potter/Local Editor

Cortland Line Co. is receiving \$133,000 from the state for manufacturing equipment, the state announced. The equipment, an extruder, will join braiding equipment like this.

*Editor’s note:
This story was initially published Jan. 15.*

while decreasing the company’s carbon footprint.

The city of Cortland was awarded \$675,000 for the Randall Park improvements project. Following the opening of the pickleball courts in July, the Cortland Common Council voted unanimously to seek a grant to fix the bathroom. The city will reconstruct a multipurpose bathroom facility with an attached shelter, to replace the existing “small” and “nonfunctioning” bathroom.

The city will also use \$1 million in funds to replace an aging fire department ladder truck. At the start of December, the city received preliminary notice that it had won the grant to defray the cost of a \$2.2 million aerial ladder for its fire department.

Other greater Cortland area organizations also have money heading their way:

- Ducks Unlimited Inc. will use \$252,436 to restore a wetland in the Owasco Flats Wildlife Management Area in Moravia. The goal of the project is to provide a habitat for birds and other wildlife, help mitigate flood damage and improve water quality.
- Madison County Soil and Water Conservation District will use \$155,000 to implement a stream-bank stabilization project in DeRuyter. The goal is to reduce erosion and nutrient loading to nearby DeRuyter Lake, through the use of natural stream channel design with step pools, cross vanes and a riparian buffer.
- The village of Groton will use \$44,000 to conduct a housing conditions assessment.

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Dairy farms grow larger, but the number and their community shrinks

Editor's note: This story was originally published July 26, 2024

By JACK LAKOWSKY
Staff Reporter

Dairy farmer Paul Fouts had a choice for his operation: expand or disband.

The choice in 2022 was for his children, when Fouts, 51, realized his tenure running Fouts Farm, which sits between Cortlandville and Groton, was in its twilight. He plans to hand the operation off to his daughter someday. To keep the farm viable, he must build a new milking parlor, now under construction a few hundred yards from the old, 1964 parlor it will replace.

Paying the loan on the new parlor and other expenses means Fouts needs more cows, and a more-efficient parlor will accommodate them.

GO BIG OR GO TO PASTURE

The greater Cortland area has

fewer dairy farms than any time in the past 45 years. Today, just 55 farms produce milk and dairy products, down from 359 in 1978. The county has lost more than a third of its remaining dairy farms — 32 of them — in just the past five years.

But the farms are getting bigger, and the rate of expansion has accelerated in the past five years. In 1992, the average herd size was 80 cows among the 235 farms, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reports. In 2022, the latest Agriculture Census showed the remaining 55 farms have an average herd size three times larger — 251 cows.

Some have 2,000 cows, or even more.

"Five years ago we went from 400 to 600 cows," Fouts said, to meet the farm's growing expenses.



Jack Lakowsky/file photo

Dairy farmer Paul Fouts describes the new, modern, more efficient milking parlor he's building, his way of securing the operation's future.

es. The old parlor allows around 80 milkings per hour. The new

one will reach 150 an hour, getting more milk out the door. Fouts expects the new parlor to begin operation in December.

"We added cows to overcome fixed expenses, to spread it out over more cows," Fouts said. "You have to stay in business. You add cows to help pay for that."

Expanding to cover operational expenses is one of three factors driving the expansion of dairies, Fouts said.

The second is to cover capital investments — new milking parlors, for example. The old parlor won't sustain the business in perpetuity.

The third reason is posterity, Fouts said.

"If another generation wants to come in, that generally requires some expansions to cover living expenses," he said.

If the next generation does not assume control of the family farm, the farmer must seek a buyer or split the business to keep it alive, said Deanna Fox, CEO of the New York Farm Bureau.

Those who do opt to take the reins, approach the business differently than their forebears, Fox said.

"These are not kids who went to school for horticulture or animal science," Fox said. "They maybe studied business, or marketing. They see an opportunity for a bigger output and operation, and they grow the family farm from there."

VULNERABILITIES

However, fewer farms, even if they produce more milk, makes the milk supply more vulnerable to disruption, Fox said. If illness among a herd hampers or shuts down a farm entirely, it can hugely affect the amount of product flowing to consumers.

Disease spreading among large herds and contaminating production is a main concern of the farm bureau, Fox said, and right now she keeps an eye on a form of bird flu that can spread quickly among cattle, though there have been no cases in New York.

"The other thing too is if a farm is going to stay on a single commodity, they're probably going to be milking hundreds or thousands of cows, not a few dozen," she said. "There is an opportunity to

Continued on page B3



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New spaces create efficiencies for patients, and the caregivers, too

By **TODD R. McADAM**
Managing Editor

tmcadam@cortlandstandard.com
On a recent snowy morning, a worker in a Guthrie pickup truck dropped his plow in a parking lot at Route 281 and Kinney Gulf Road. Guthrie has five locations in Cortland County, and a snowy morning can be a busy morning.

A couple of years ago, that driver would have needed to plow a couple more parking lots. Guthrie has since consolidated several services — a walk-in clinic, lab and imaging services — in one location. By spring, the 32,000-square-foot facility also will offer orthopedics, general surgery, plastic surgery, obstetrics, gynecology, pain management and a telemedicine hub, too.

Across town, Cayuga Medical has done something similar. It opened a 21,200-square-foot primary care facility on Route 13 in Cortlandville in 2022. It consolidated behavioral health services, cardiology, neurology, surgery, pulmonology, ENT, occupational medicine, sleep practices and lab services.

It also consolidated five practices in 2024 into a 60,000-square-foot space at the Shops at Ithaca Mall in Lansing, including Cayuga Heart and Vascular Center; Cayuga Primary Care; and Cayuga Rheumatology.

In Homer, Family Health Network is erecting a 12,000-square-foot building behind its headquarters on Route 281, across from Homer High School, into which it plans to consolidate a number of services and install a same-day clinic.

It's essentially one-stop shopping for health-care consumers, a medical mall, if you will.

"This is a nationwide transition," said Maria Darling, Guthrie's senior director for its northern division, touring the Renzi Health Campus on West Road. "Patients want things very easy."

FLEX SPACE AND EFFICIENT OPERATIONS

So do health groups. Guthrie and Cayuga's facilities mean patients don't have to traipse from one side of town to the other to access their healthcare providers, or forget to which office they were going.

But it also means that certain functions every health office must provide — a reception space, waiting areas, custodial and administrative services — can be condensed. Cayuga adds that information technology resources and supply chain management is easier.

"Having one property vs. five — there's a cost savings," Darling said, a savings that because Guthrie and Cayuga Medical are both non-profits, can be re-invested in better care.

"The design of this campus allows for flex space," Darling said. Each facility a health organization operates needs to have enough exam rooms, for example, to accommodate peaks. But without those peaks, those rooms are empty. By combining offices, one office can, in essence, borrow neighboring space during a peak.

Spaces can also accommodate multiple activities, she said, and that's a national trend, too. CDM of Central New York, a Cice-

ro-based contractor that specializes in health facilities, reports that multi-use spaces and flexible facility designs are the top trend in healthcare construction in 2025.

On the other hand, Cayuga said, it means that the locations aren't spread across the community, so that at least one facility is near any given patient.

HEALTHY PEOPLE, HEALTHY COMMUNITY

Streamlining care was a similar motivation for Cayuga Medical when it opened both the Shops at Ithaca Mall facility and its office on Tompkins Street in Cortland, said Jeffrey Penoyer, chief operating officer of Cayuga Medical Associates, just before the Lansing facility opened last year.

"By offering lab work in the same location as our primary care, cardiology, and rheumatology services, we streamline the healthcare experience for our patients and enhance their access to timely medical attention," he said.

But both health organizations say their expansions into previously unused spaces help the community, too.

"Malls around America were a beacon of success for decades, unfortunately with increased globalization and e-commerce they have seen a decline," said Tom LiVigne, chairman of the board of Cayuga Health, when it acquired 108,000 square feet at the mall in 2022. "Adapting and reusing big box retail space like this supports our local economy, including The Shops at Ithaca Mall, by driving increased foot traffic to the businesses remaining and prospects. Cayuga Health has been making strategic consolidation and expansion decisions with the new development of Cayuga Park, new infrastructures and expanded services in Cortland, and now this. It is an exciting time for Cayuga Health and community healthcare."

"Our organization does a good job in understanding where to expand services," Darling said. "It's helping us revitalize the community, which I love. This building was vacant. It was an opportunity to repurpose it. All the stars really aligned for this location."

McNeil Development Corp. owns the property and renovated the space for Guthrie, Darling said. It also has several other buildings on the campus, should Guthrie ever want or need to expand again.

NATURAL HEALTH ENVIRONMENT

The new facilities also incorporate new technology and concepts to make the experience easier for patients who might otherwise be nervous, or have "white coat syndrome." They incorporate large windows to increase natural light — the Lansing facility even had skylights cut into the roof to brighten former retail space.

The ceilings at the West Road facility are high, to increase the sense of space. And a guide even points out that the term "waiting room" doesn't exist there. It's a "pause" space. Administrative areas are tucked out of the way, so patients don't have to watch clusters of caregivers confer or

consult in the halls or at nursing stations.

Cayuga uses a Planetree design concept, choosing colors meant to be warm and welcoming, and the same with the art. (Much of the art in Guthrie's Route 281 facility is actually regional photographs, including Letchworth Park south of Rochester.) Likewise, is also separate the on-stage/off-stage areas.

Clinical studies show outdoor views and access to nature promote physical and psychological healing, trade publication "Building Design and Construction" reported last August. Natural materials, like wood or wood-appearing floors, and attention to color and lighting all have therapeutic benefits.

Continued on page B2



Todd R. McAdam/Managing Editor

Maria Darling, senior director of Guthrie Medical Group's northern division, tours the group's new office on West Road in Cortlandville. The facility both consolidates a number of separate offices, inviting efficiencies for Guthrie and its patients, but also incorporates new design techniques, including separating administrative functions from patient areas.

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Todd R. McAdam/Managing Editor

Maria Darling, senior director of Guthrie Medical Group's northern division, discusses how Guthrie's new space on West Road in Cortlandville — still being built out — combines flexible spaces for several offices, creating money-saving efficiencies.

Center for the Arts of Homer

The success and growth of the Center for the Arts would not be possible without the collective energy and passion of our community. Your involvement—whether through attendance, performance, donations, or simply spreading the word—has made an invaluable impact on our ability to nurture creativity and bring the arts to life in Cortland County.

As we look toward the future, we are filled with excitement and optimism. With your ongoing encouragement, we are confident that we will continue to foster a vibrant cultural hub, offering opportunities for artistic exploration, collaboration, and education. Thank you!



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Coalition focuses on substance use in people with disabilities

Editors' note: This story was initially published Jan. 14.



Photo illustration by Margaret Mellott

A coalition will highlight and teach people about substance use by people with disabilities in Cortland County. Coalition members say people with disabilities have less access to information on substances to make informed decisions, and are more likely to use them.

By LILY BYRNE
Staff Reporter

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Access to Independence and Rural Health Institute noticed the gap a couple of years ago: People with disabilities didn't get the same education or treatment on substance use as typically able people. They were more likely to use alcohol and marijuana.

However, a five-year grant from the Research Foundation for Mental Hygiene and state Office of Addiction Services and Supports will help form the Cortland County Coalition on Cannabis and Alcohol: Neighbors with Disability and Lived Experience.

The coalition aims to reduce the elevated rates of substance use within Cortland County's community of people with disabilities, said Project Director Ally McCabe.

Everyday stress can lead to drug or alcohol abuse, Mayo Clinic says. When someone has a disability, stressors like not having transportation, being able to get into a building, or having a translator can increase that risk.

The 2023 Cortland County Youth Survey says that 42.3% of seventh-12th graders have at least one disability. Of those with at least one disability:

- 10.2% used alcohol within the last 30 days, compared to 7.2% of those without a disability
- 13.4% used marijuana compared to 4.8% of those without a disability

The coalition is still in the planning and data-collecting stages, but has learned that people with disabilities experience more stress — something that researchers call "minority stress."

"It's from things like systemic ableism, a lack of disability-informed providers, disability-informed services, simple things like not being able to get into the building to access their services," McCabe said. "We're starting to see that there are connections between mental health and substance abuse."

Additional stress can come from hitting a barrier in the midst of seeking substance abuse treatment, she said. An example is preventive education being available only in English if that is not a person's first language, or not being available in large type.

Other state coalitions are working on this with populations, including veterans, new Americans, people exiting the criminal justice system and senior citizens, said Alex Mikowski, director of ATI and CANDLE.

"OASAS, at the state level, focuses on substance-abuse treatment and prevention," Mikowski said. "They realized that there is a lot of prevention programming, but it doesn't seem to be showing it in the numbers with different special populations."

If a student is in a special education classroom, the prevention education that other students get isn't offered, she said.

Substance-abuse treatment programs, such as halfway houses or inpatient, are often not accessible, Mikowski said. It limits the services we have in Cortland Cortland, which are already limited.

"Many systems don't really think about people with disabilities until someone with one comes into their program," Mikowski said. "Then, they start realizing 'our counters are too high,' or 'we have a translation line for someone who speaks another language, or someone who is deaf or hard of hearing, but we don't actually use it in practice.' It's a big problem."

If people's IQ are low enough to qualify for services for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities, many substance abuse treatment services won't be open to them.

"For the people that have those lower IQs, they have mental health services that are specifically designed for them," Mikowski said. "Substance use is not one of them. So you can go to detox, because that's a medical thing, but you can't go to inpatient, because they don't think your ability to understand it is high enough."

"We have big lofty goals, but we have to start by introducing the idea that this is even an issue, because a lot of people don't know that substance use is a problem with people with disabilities," McCabe said. "That's where we have to start, and that's what we've really been doing so far, is talking to the community about what disability looks like."

ONE HEALTH FACILITY, MANY PURPOSES

• from Page B1

"They need sunlight," Darling said. "It's important for our caregivers and patients."

The building, also following national trends, incorporates environmentally friendly construction and operating principles. "It's a lean design a lot of caregivers are doing."

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

The facilities, both Guthrie and Cayuga, have expansion in mind. The West Road campus has several other buildings. Cayuga acquired 108,000 square feet at the Lansing mall, but opened only 60,000.

Some of the greater Cortland area's health needs are obvious,

Darling said — mental health, for example. Others have yet to be determined. "What are the unmet needs in the community and how do we tackle that?" she wondered.

In Guthrie's case, the space at Guthrie Cortland Medical Center on Alvena has its limits; it was too small to offer as much expansion potential, Darling said.

Better access to better health-care is an important quality-of-life feature in a community, she said. If people need to drive an hour, or two, or three, to get the care they need, some just won't. They'll suffer, or they'll leave.

"Can we provide that locally so people don't have to travel?" she asked. "What's the opportunity to close the healthcare gap?"

New name, new expanded services and new electronic health record with Centralus

Cayuga Health’s affiliation provides healthcare opportunities

By MELISSA TOURTELLOTTE
Contributing Writer

Cortland County residents who have benefited from the convenience of the multi-practice Cayuga Medical Associates Medical Office Building now have an even greater opportunity to access advanced healthcare. With Cayuga Health’s recent affiliation with Elmira-based Arnot Health to form Centralus Health, the future of local healthcare is expanding in exciting ways.

This strategic alliance has enabled the member organizations to make a major leap forward with the implementation of Epic, the gold standard for electronic health records. Launching in March, this system will revolutionize patient care by enhancing coordination, streamlining information flow and improving continuity of care across Centralus Health.

Patients will be able to access all of their health information through MyChart across organizations. Scheduling, communicating with your care team and even bill paying will become easier through the MyChart patient portal.

Centralus Health is also bringing more options for specialty care to the region. The combined scale of the two health systems is enhancing recruitment efforts, ensuring more critically important primary care providers are

available to serve patients living in Centralus Health’s nine-county region — including right here in Cortland.

The Centralus Health affiliation builds on the success of the CMA Medical Office Building at 260 Tompkins St. in Cortland. Open now for nearly two years, this 21,000-square-foot facility has consolidated several CMA offices, creating a streamlined, patient-focused experience. By co-locating primary and specialty care providers, the building fosters greater collaboration among physicians, leading to improved patient outcomes and convenience.

Patients visiting the CMA Medical Office Building can access to a wide range of specialties, including:

- Cayuga Primary Care.
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- Cayuga Heart and Vascular.
- Cayuga Center for Infectious Diseases.
- Cayuga Diabetes and Endocrinology.
- Neurosurgery Services.
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- Cayuga Surgical Specialists.
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- Cayuga Neurology.
- Cayuga Pain Management.

This one-stop-shop model ensures that patients can see their primary care physician, consult with specialists and undergo nec-



Todd R. McAdam/file photo

Cayuga Health, now Centralus Health, has consolidated several offices into this space on Tompkins Street in Cortland.

essary lab tests — all in a single visit. The seamless integration of services maximizes efficiency and enhances patient-centered care.

Recognizing the importance of mental well-being, Cayuga Health seized the opportunity to introduce Integrated Behavioral Health in conjunction with primary care at the facility. This program provides targeted short-term intervention for emotional and behavioral challenges, as well as extended mental health support for anxiety, depression and other concerns. With expanded exam rooms and a growing team, the facility has significantly improved access to these essential services.

Beyond primary and specialty care, the CMA Medical Office

Building includes an outpatient laboratory, a spacious conference and education room for health events and ample parking. Meanwhile, Cayuga Health has leveraged its success at this location to expand orthopedic, sports medicine, urgent care and cancer services at its Commons Avenue campus, further enhancing access to specialized care. Cayuga Health also has a robust physical therapy clinic on Main Street in downtown Cortland.

Cayuga Health’s commitment to seizing opportunities extends beyond Cortland County. For patients requiring advanced medical care, Cayuga Medical Center — just 30 minutes away — has developed affiliations with leading

research hospitals, including the University of Rochester Medical Center, Rochester Regional Health, Weill Cornell Medicine and the Mayo Clinic. These partnerships ensure that even the most complex medical needs can be met without unnecessary travel.

Seizing the opportunity to innovate and expand, Cayuga Health continues to honor its 25-year legacy of service in Cortland County. With the creation of Centralus Health, the future holds even greater possibilities for high-quality, accessible healthcare for the region’s residents.

Melissa Tourtellotte is the chief marketing and communications officer for Centralus Health.

State helps TC3 expand nursing program

Editor’s note: This story was initially published Jan. 23.

By LILY BYRNE
Staff Reporter

lbyrne@cortlandstandard.com

DRYDEN — Filling the nursing gap, one nurse at a time — or 10.

Tompkins Cortland Community College was awarded \$175,000 in state funding to advance its health care and mental health needs, said Peter Voorhees, TC3 public information officer.

From the funding, \$100,000 will go toward student’s mental health needs and \$75,000 will go toward the nursing program to

add a second simulation room.

That will help the college train 10 more students to graduate from the school’s nursing program each spring semester; mostly licensed practical nurses coming back to school to become a registered nurse, Voorhees said.

LPNs can now skip their first semester of the RN program, said Nursing Program Chair Kim Sharpe. In the first semester of TC3’s nursing program, they would be learning what they have already learned during their 18-month LPN program.

“The hospitals continue to tell us at TC3 that they need more nurses,” Sharpe said. “Typically, we graduate about 60 from our day program. Now, this’ll increase it by 10, which will be good for the local hospitals and employers that are desperate for nurses.”

The number of applications from LPNs has risen in the past few years, too many to accommodate in the program.

“With LPNs, it’s kind of been like a pendulum,” Sharpe said. “Hospitals, 20 years ago, used a lot of LPNs. Then, it kind of swung where most LPNs were being employed in doctor’s offices or long-term care, but now, the pendulum has swung back, so hospitals are hiring LPNs.”

Guthrie, like many healthcare organizations nationwide, has felt the effects of an ongoing nursing shortage, said Kansas Underwood, Guthrie’s chief nursing officer and vice president of operations.

The Health Resources and Services Administration projected in November 2022 that the United States would face a shortage of 78,610 full-time RNs this year and a shortage of 63,720 full-time RNs in 2030.

Partnering with local colleges, including TC3, has been crucial during the nursing shortage, Underwood said. Through clinical placements, mentorship programs and scholarship opportunities, students have been able to transition from the classroom to a clinical environment.

“These partnerships not only help to fill critical staffing needs, but also allow us to cultivate a pipeline of skilled, compassionate nurses who are familiar with

our culture and standards of excellence,” Underwood said.

Five years ago, TC3 also added an evening nursing program, which graduates 30 nurses every other December, Sharpe said.

“We really have grown our program in response to the need,” Sharpe said.

New York State’s 30 community colleges received \$8 million in recurring annual funding, \$5 million of which will be used by schools to invest in health care programs to increase enrollment, the release from Gov. Kathy Hochul’s office says.

“This investment in our community colleges is another massive step to building the best public education institution in the country, meeting the needs of our students to succeed in high demand jobs across our state,” Hochul said in the news release.

About 70% to 80% of TC3 health care graduates end up working in Cortland, Tompkins, Onondaga or Broome counties, Sharpe said.

“While we acknowledge the challenges we face, we are optimistic about the future,” Underwood said. “We will continue to invest in our nursing workforce, strengthen our educational partnerships, and explore innovative solutions to address staffing challenges.”

The rest of the \$75,000 will go toward building a second simulation room, so two simulations can be run at once, Voorhees said.

The simulation lab has students working in small groups to care for a patient that is being controlled by a faculty member, Sharpe said. Depending on what the students do, the patient gets worse or better. It can even simulate a birth.

“The state said. ‘We’d really like you to increase your nursing program’s size, tell us what you would need financially to do that,’ and we said ‘We would need this second simulation room, and an extra faculty member to teach those 10 in the faculty and in the lab,’” Sharpe said.

A part-time faculty member was hired with the state funds.

Officials are still deciding how to spend the \$100,000 for students’ mental health needs, Voorhees said.



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Hailea Potter/Local Editor

Students at Cortland High school, and across the state, will need to adapt to new and developing graduation requirements.

Schools still trying to envision the new high school graduate

Education

New standards begin in 2027, but how do schools get there?

By HAILEA POTTER
Local Editor

hpotter@cortlandstandard.com
Greater Cortland area education officials are working to figure out what a future high school graduate will look like amid changing graduation requirements, and are waiting on state guidance.

“Well, I think all of our brains have been doing a lot of thinking, but we are really, really, waiting on guidance from the state Education Department,” said Robert Edwards, superintendent of the Cortland Enlarged City School District.

In November, the state Education Department presented a timeline for to adopt the New York State Portrait of a Graduate, redefining credits to focus on proficiency, ending some diploma assessment requirements, and moving to one diploma.

QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

The issue is so new that SUNY Cortland education experts say they just don’t know enough to discuss it. Binghamton University education experts echo the statement.

Edwards said it’s not yet clear whether the state, or the individual districts, will create a way to measure the standards. “We don’t know if the state is going to say, ‘Well you tell us what demonstrates competence in that area for you?’”

“My concern is that if New York State just says go ahead and develop rubrics for all these new required assessments, to me there’s going to be a messiness and a subjectivity associated with the assessment process,” said Jeff Green, principal of Moravia High School.

Green said he’s already broached the issue with BOCES. “What I’m hoping is that if New York state doesn’t give us those assessment tools, and it is left more to us that we really collaborate as a region,” Green said. “I think it’s super inefficient if nothing else for school districts to be left doing all that work on their own.”

Matt Cook, the superintendent at Onondaga Cortland Madison Board of Cooperative Educational Services, said the main concerns he’s heard regard consistent assessments and the potential for more work for teachers and counselors.

“To be honest, while the concerns are legitimate, they have been overshadowed by the excitement about more student choice and voice in the learning experience,” Cook said.

“The biggest issue that could be an expense, and this I think is especially relevant for our school again being a small rural school district, is that we can only afford to employ so many teachers,” Green said. “To branch off in all these pathways at the high school level, it means running sections of classes with fewer students and really means the need for us to have access to more teachers.”

PORTRAIT OF A GRADUATE

To graduate, students will have to fit into the Portrait of a Graduate, showing critical thinking and problem solving skills, literacy across all content areas, cultural competence, socially-emotionally competence, effective communications and global citizenship.

“We’ve started to think about what a portrait of a graduate based on that model is going to be for us, and started to look at our current programming, and think about the things that fit, that could really easily fit within that model and also what areas we might have to grow a little bit,” Edwards said.

Cortland schools recently created an early college high school program, which Edwards said could fit into the new requirements, and a modern band program.

“We have kids playing electric guitar, and drumsets and bass guitars and learning how to sing, and that’s a unique program that’s not in every school district, and that’s just one example of opportunities for kids to show their competency and skills in certain ways,” Edwards said. “Right now those ways aren’t measured by New York in any way, but those are all students who are going to go out and have potential to have career paths related to the music industry.”

Moravia might consider “pathways programs,” similar in concept to picking a major in college, Green said.

“Of course there are still required courses you need to take ... but if you’re a student that’s interested in music specifically, then there’s a pathway where you can take more electives that align with your interest that will put you towards required credits that you need for graduation,” he said.

NEW REQUIREMENTS, REDEFINED CREDITS

The state is also considering adding career and technical education and financial literacy credit requirements. Moravia and Cortland are already looking to expand on them.

“We’re looking at potentially making that a required course to make sure all of our students are getting that information,” Green said. “Not only so they are prepared for the workforce but they’re prepared for their own financial responsibility, which we find students and parents often give us the feedback that there’s deficiencies there.”

The state has also proposed redefining academic credits to focus on proficiency rather than completing time-based units of study.

“Credits and Regents exams have been the measures, now what will that look like?” Edwards said. “Sometimes it’s hard for adult brains to think their way out of those two boxes that we’ve created for ourselves, but there are many of us that are very ex-

cited for our educators to think outside of those boxes.”

SUNSET DIPLOMA REQUIREMENTS

Students eventually will no longer need to pass the Regents exams or a +1 Pathway Assessment to graduate, but the state recommends moving to a system offering only one diploma with seals or endorsements for additional accomplishment. But not yet.

“We have community members and even teachers sometimes that will say ‘Well aren’t the regents exam going to be done soon?’ and we have not been given that information,” Green said.

“If students still want to pass the five main Regents exams, they will still be given to all students and some will choose to have those scores count as their assessment,” Cook said. The idea

is to make meeting the standards equitable for students who aren’t great test-takers, although they’ll need to take state-level assessments required by federal law.

“A kid takes those Regents exams typically in June, typically at the conclusion of a school year, and then if you miss that window for some reason you don’t have an opportunity to quickly recover from that,” Edwards said. “It just doesn’t really make sense in our modern world, so yeah I think it’s time for a change.”

WHAT’S NEXT

“If this turns into localized requirements, then it’ll be a good opportunity to have conversations with the community and really think about what our community needs,” Edwards said.

This school year has been designated for planning. Initial implementation will start fall 2027

with full implementation by fall 2029, all based on state Board of Regents approval.

“I really hope that the next set of steps by the state Education Department help our students identify some areas that they’re passionate about so that they can really identify career and college pathways that really fits with them as people, and I think if that can be the result of what this experience will be, I think that will greatly benefit our kids,” Edwards said.

“I think the main thing I’m excited about is the idea that every single person that’s on that stage at graduation feels like the courses that they took in high school were important and relevant to them and they align with what they’re sitting there excited about doing the next step of their education or entering out into the workforce,” Green said.



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New online program creates opportunity for adults at SUNY Cortland

By **ERIK J. BITTERBAUM**
Contributing Writer

Not all SUNY Cortland students come here fresh out of high school. Dozens are nontraditional — undergraduates who are 24 or older, the parents of dependent children or individuals who paused their studies after high school.

These students amaze me. They are motivated lifelong learners, extraordinary time managers and everyday examples that it is never too late to pursue a college education. And our university wants to create more opportunity for them to benefit from a SUNY Cortland education.

I am very happy to share that, starting this fall, there will be a new online pathway to earning a SUNY Cortland bachelor's degree for students who previously pursued a college education without finishing it. It will be the first com-

pletely online undergraduate program offered by SUNY Cortland.

The university's new integrated studies major is aimed at nontraditional students and working professionals. It will look to maximize transfer credit and give college credit toward a bachelor's degree for prior work experience, with students completing at least 30 credits through SUNY Cortland.

The online courses will emphasize the skills employers say are critical in many professions: communication, collaboration and critical thinking among them. Students also will learn about topics such as ethical decision-making and the importance of creating an inclusive work environment.

According to a recent LinkedIn survey, nine out of 10 employers consider these soft skills more important than technical abilities, and many hiring managers struggle to

find employees who possess them. I believe our nontraditional students and working professionals are uniquely qualified to provide these talents.

SUNY Cortland enrolls approximately 175 nontraditional students, each of whom bring diverse life experiences and perspectives to our classrooms. These students reflect a trend in higher education. This past spring, nearly 2.5 million students enrolled in an undergraduate program were 30 or older. That was a 3.5% increase from the prior year, according to National Student Clearinghouse data.

Adult learners are returning for many reasons: to stay competitive in the job market; to pave a new career path; and to acquire valuable skills like the ones provided by this new opportunity.

For some nontraditional students, completing a bachelor's



Todd R. McAdam/file photo

You can attend SUNY Cortland in person, but the college has created an online degree program geared toward non-traditional students.

degree may accomplish a lifelong goal that was put on hold. It may also serve as motivation for future generations.

I am grateful to our many faculty and staff members who support our nontraditional students and those who are working to create this new online degree program. If you or a friend or a family member took a

break in your pursuit of a bachelor's degree without completing it, I hope you will look closer at our new integrated studies program.

Regardless of where you started your college education, you can be proud to finish at SUNY Cortland.

Erik J. Bitterbaum is the president of SUNY Cortland.

Training a workforce: Adapt and think for the future

By **AMY KREMENEK**
Contributing Writer

I have served as President of Tompkins Cortland Community College since 2022, and since my arrival, it has always been very evident to me that both counties we serve place abundant value on the people who call our area home.

We take great pride in our beautiful region of the state, with its plentiful natural beauty and resources, as well as our deeply held culture that places high value on integrity, hard work and resiliency. Born in this community more than five decades ago, TC3 has absorbed these values, too, by answering challenges, rebounding after being knocked down, and doing the right thing even when it is hard. We are adapting to a rapidly changing environment, and as partners, eager to steward assets entrusted to us to help our community do this too.

One way we have adapted is looking at how best to deliver education. Our faculty have worked with regional employers and created new short-term programs like "Micro-Nano Fabrication Safety" and "Direct Service Provider" that teach the skills needed for our neighbors to get jobs, or better jobs, and help our local businesses and organizations thrive.

These fast, focused programs target the specific education needed to enter the workforce, and are designed in a way that gives students the option of continuing for more education — and more opportunities. We currently have 14 microcredentials creating new pathways for in-demand jobs, with more programs on the way.

Of course, TC3's changes include not only new programs. Nursing, one of our oldest programs, is thriving because it is adapting to demands to produce more graduates with increased efficiency. For example, Nursing has added new simulators that are

crucial for training the nurses of the future. This equipment is supported by a state grant, which has also enabled us to add 10 more seats in nursing specifically for people already working in health care to complete their RN training. Our nursing faculty are leading the way with adapting their program to meet the needs of a rapidly changing environment.

TC3's examples of adaptation are numerous. We are also partnering with Penn State and Cornell to address the existing and exploding demand for more workers in the semiconductor field, and we are working with Cornell to develop our first transfer agreement in sustainable agriculture, a key industry in our region and one of the most pressing issues facing us on a global scale. Our well-known CollegeNow program provides local high school students with the opportunity to earn college credit, and this past year we added the Cortland City School District to our list of partners in innovative Early College High Schools, extending the possibilities of higher education to more local students and families.

At TC3, we ended last year by updating our mission, vision and values to reflect our community, setting the stage for the development of the college's next Strategic Plan, now underway. This vision, "to advance personal, economic, and social vitality in our communities through the transformative power of learning," is grounded in our community and our institutional purpose. As we move forward in 2025 and beyond, the possibilities for Cortland County and the region are endless. Like so many in our community, we are proud to hold ourselves to this high standard, and we are proud to help lead the way forward, every step of the way.

Amy Kremenek is the president of Tompkins Cortland Community College.



Kevin Conlon/file photo

Tompkins Cortland Community College has increased partnerships in semiconductor technology and nursing, and now sets its sights on a new strategic plan.

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New arts and culture thrive in old spaces

By TY MARSHAL
Contributing Writer

Cortland County is living proof that creativity and opportunity thrives in unexpected places. Rather than building new spaces from scratch, our community has embraced the repurposing of old, often historic buildings, turning them into hubs of arts, culture and community connection.

Each re-imagined venue in the region tells its own unique story, offering a distinctive sense of place while seizing the opportunity to breathe new life into forgotten spaces. This unique “adaptive re-use” of our buildings is less a concerted effort as it is part of our cultural and historic heritage.

But it is something unique that should be recognized. In my own research, I have found no other county or city in our state that can make the claim that all of our arts and cultural venues are in re-adapted spaces. From former churches to industrial factories, these spaces have been transformed into vibrant cultural hubs, proving that opportunity can be seized by reimagining what once was.

I must start with the Center for the Arts of Homer, of which I have proudly served as executive director for the past 9 1/2 years. Our organization resides in the former First Baptist Church of Homer. This grand, historic building has been transformed into a multifaceted arts center, hosting live performances, visual arts exhibitions and community events by dedicated community members who envisioned a space to “feed our souls” some 21 years ago. The soaring ceilings and stained-glass windows of the old church offer a beautiful juxtaposition to the vibrant, contemporary energy that pulses through the space. It’s a place where the sacred and the creative blend, inviting the public to engage with the arts in a way that’s both meaningful and transformative all year long.

Nearby, the forthcoming former Episcopal Church on Homer’s Village Green promises to be another beacon for creativity and collaboration. While still in the works, the building’s historic architecture and potential is already attracting attention for its future of hosting a range of events from cultural celebrations to social gatherings. The “Little White Church” will serve as a testament to how Homer continues to shape its future by re-envisioning our past.

In downtown Cortland, the Cortland Repertory Theatre showcases its own approach to revitalization. The downtown location resides in a former bowling alley, where the charm of the building’s spacious interior creates an intimate yet dynamic space for live theater and other productions. Meanwhile, the theater’s second home at the pavilion in Dwyer Park offers performances surrounded by nature in a former “resort destination” (that also served as a restaurant and dance hall in days of yore). The repurposing of these buildings speaks to our community’s commitment to preserving local history while fostering our thriving and growing cultural scene.

Another notable example of transformation is the Cortland Corset Building, a space that has given new life to a former corset factory. Now home to arts and cultural studios and artisan shops, the building serves as a creative hub where local artists, makers and craftspeople come together to showcase their work and inspire the community. The repurposing of the factory is more than just a nod to the past; it’s a celebration of the craftsmanship and creativity that defines Cortland County’s spirit.

Down the road is another former “corset factory” that was empty for more than 30 years and revitalized into a mixed use, apartment and commercial center, Crescent Commons. Home of the Ake Gallery, opening in 2023, and featuring art shows, comedy shows, an annual animation festi-

val and so much more, Common Grounds coffee shop, Cortland’s LGBT Center, Studio Z Dance studio, and more.

Also in the City of Cortland, Rose Hall enriches the county’s cultural fabric by transforming a former church into a dynamic live music venue in the heart of downtown. The building’s architectural beauty — its soaring ceilings and intricate details creates a striking backdrop for live music. Rose Hall, much like the other repurposed venues in the area, serves as a bridge between history and modern creativity, offering a unique setting where tradition and innovation can thrive side by side. It’s a place where the spirit of the building is preserved, yet re-imagined for today’s cultural expression, creating an atmosphere that feels



Lily Byrne/file photo

The Center for the Arts of Homer’s production of Gilligan’s Island was just one show on one stage. The greater Cortland area has several, including Cortland



Photo provided

by Cortland Repertory Theatre

Cortland Repertory Theatre has two seasonal venues for its shows, like this 2024 production of “My Fair Lady”: Its theater on Port Watson Street in Cortland and at Dwyer Memorial Park in Preble.

both timeless and entirely of the moment.

Further embracing the region’s history, the Country Music Park/ NYS Country Music Association are located at the former Lake Mary Campgrounds, where the echoes of past campfires and gatherings now mingle with the sound of live music. This unique venue captures the essence of Cortland County’s rural charm and musical heritage, offering a place for both local talent and nationally recognized artists to perform.

Our venues and cultural spaces are unique in that they are all repurposed venues and are a living testament to the power of “seizing opportunity.” Each of our venues, from former churches to former factories and campgrounds, represents a unique story of reinvention.

Cortland County has seized the opportunity to transform our past into a vibrant future, creating spaces where art, culture and history converge. By breathing new life into our old structures, we have cultivated a thriving arts and cultural scene that’s deeply connected to our community and heritage. In Cortland, opportunity isn’t just about building new buildings—it’s about re-envisioning what has come before, and making room for the creativity that lies ahead.

As more of these repurposed spaces come to life, they will continue to serve as places where creativity, history, and community intersect, offering locals and visitors a chance to experience Cortland County’s unique fingerprint.

Ty Marshal is executive director of the Center for the Arts of Homer.

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Small shows create big opportunities

By LILY BYRNE
Staff Reporter

lbyrne@cortlandstandard.com

While the Cortland music and arts scene is growing, it is also getting smaller — in a different way.

It's not just a hundred people coming to see their favorite artist at the Center for the Arts of Homer, or a crowd of people filling a bar or Bru64 to hear live music.

The smaller, more niche music and art shows are giving Cortland creatives a new outlet: an outlet that gives them a way to start small, and that is more tailored to them.

MICRO-SHOWS

Not every artist wants to start out with a huge show. That's where pop-up venues, or do-it-yourself shows come in.

Ashe Martin, co-owner of Crown City Curiosities, and a handful of volunteers have turned one hallway of the Cortland Corset Building into a gallery that features one visual artist per month.

"I think there's a lot of formal art galleries," Martin said. "You go to these formal galleries, and they have professional lighting and professional hanging systems, and a lot of their shows are geared towards the more fine arts community."

Artists last year showed digital paintings, dioramas and pink, sparkling crowns. It was the first show for seven of the 12 artists who showed work there in 2024, Martin said.

"The majority of the artists we've had here last year do not do fine arts," Martin said. "They do



Lily Byrne/Staff Reporter

When Cortland lacks a gallery venue to fill a niche, a new one often pops up. Homer-based artist Jessica Zimmerman opened her first show in 15 years at the Corset Building gallery and cafe, a volunteer-run space at the Cortland Corset Building.

all sorts of art, and their perspective on their work is very unique compared to some traditional art, like watercolor landscapes."

INTIMACY

The artists kick off their show with an opening night, tailored to

their work and the vibe they want to create.

Jessica Zimmerman, a Homer-based artist who paints using smoke from a candle flame, held her first solo show in 15 years at the gallery in January. At her gallery opening, she immersed people in her work by having a live painter and musician.

Sawyer Wolak organizes shows in Cortland through his brand Officious Arts, often in the same hallway as Martin's gallery. At 7 p.m. Feb. 22, he is hosting "Sister Wife Sex Strike," with three bands and five vendors, on the top floor of the corset building.

He loves small-venue shows, because the environment is great for chatting and meeting new people, he said.

"You can just get a bit more personal," Wolak said. "It's less rigid than a big show. ... You get to actually interact with other people who are there. It's more community-based."

Bradford Allen, a gigging singer/songwriter in Cortland, says small venues give musicians more freedom to explore any genre.

"It's really where you get to do what you want to do artistically, and it doesn't matter what style of music you're drawn to," Allen said. "It doesn't matter if you're doing death metal, if you're doing singer/songwriter music or elec-

tronic music. Whatever it is, those kinds of venues allow you to do that, and I've seen that in that area in Cortland, but also Binghamton and Syracuse."

OPPORTUNITIES

Small shows also give artists a unique opportunity: to try their hand at something, without being ready to pursue it professionally. Artists can get put on the bill if they want to just play a song or two, rather than have a full setlist.

"I like to give anyone who wants the opportunity to have it," Wolak said. "Just giving them the space to be able to have their foot in the door to do things is what I enjoy being able to do for people."

It's a way for people to try something new, and figure out if it's something they want to keep pursuing, he said.

Whether it's older musicians or musicians who are just starting out, all generations of musicians see the value in renting out the local VFW and selling a handful of \$5 tickets to friends, Allen said.

"When you're starting, at some point, it doesn't matter where it is," Allen said. "It's the same with visual art — You'll display your art in a Taco Bell bathroom. It's just being able to get out there and share your work with like-minded people."



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WWW.CHILDDEVELOPMENTCOUNCIL.ORG





Family Health Network

Part of Your Community, Part of Your Life

OPENING SOON!

Homer Family Practice



Located behind Family Health Network's Administrative Office, this 12,000+ sq. ft. Health Center will provide services such as:

- Pediatrics
- OB/GYN
- Family Practice
- Behavioral Health
- Same Day Access

Additionally, Dr. Gina Correll, FP/OB, will be joining Family Health Network in October 2025!



www.familyhealthnetwork.org