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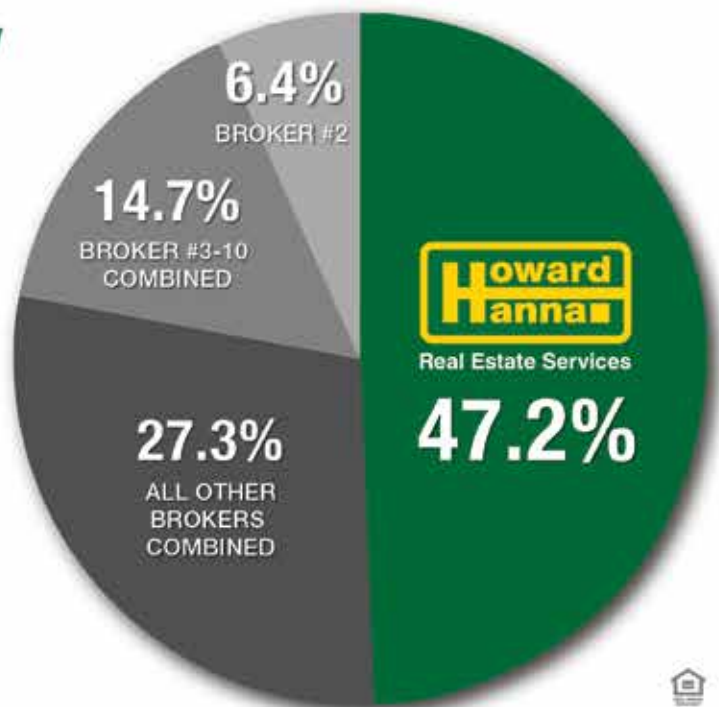
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A special welcome to all of you reading this magazine. The Chagrin Valley Chamber of Commerce is proud to partner with the Chagrin Valley Times to make this publication available as a resourceful and entertaining guide to our wonderful community.

The Chagrin Valley Chamber of Commerce is a group of 550 small businesses and nonprofits in the 13 communities that make up the Chagrin Valley that welcomes you to shop, dine and find resources in our beautiful valley. Every season has its own special events from Restaurant Week in February, Blossom Time on Memorial Day weekend, Concerts in the Park during the summer, Chagrin Documentary Film Festival in the fall, to our magical holiday season. There is much to do and discover whether you are coming for the afternoon or a weekend.

If you are interested in more information or looking for a place to stay, please check out our website at [www.cvcc.org](http://www.cvcc.org).

We look forward to seeing you here soon.

*Robin Peavy*  
President, Chagrin Valley  
Chamber of Commerce



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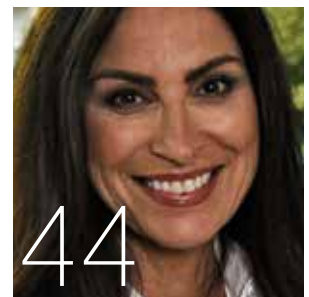
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**ON THE COVER:** Photographer Michael Steinberg captures the vibrant colors of autumn at Whitesburg Park in Chagrin Falls. This is one of many parks in the Chagrin Valley and it is a favorite among locals, regardless of the season.

# chagrin

## VALLEY MAGAZINE

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# Althans continues as family business after more than nine decades

By BRIAN DOERING

**W**hen Arthur J. Althans began selling insurance, he had one simple philosophy: “To provide each customer with professional services including a personal touch.”

As one of three children born to German immigrants, Mr. Althans was extremely active in the Cleveland community and decided not to join the family grocery business. Instead, he signed a contract with the Aetna Insurance Company as an independent contractor.

The year was 1925 when “Art” Althans started his agency in downtown Cleveland in the former Union Commerce Building. Along with his younger brother, Carl Althans, who joined him several years later, the brothers worked together selling commercial and personal insurance products.

The Althans brothers believed the measure of success to be the number of long-time customers spanning several generations. That same belief also applies to their own family’s success.

The second generation of Althans began in 1957 with Carl Althans’ oldest son, John, joining the company and four years later Art’s son, Arthur “Buzz” Althans, joined the firm.

By the 1970s, the Althans recognized that Cuyahoga and Geauga counties were growing with many businesses and families being started or moving to the suburbs. So, in 1973 the decision was made to move the company from downtown Cleveland. They purchased what was a residential home in South Russell’s business district and moved the agency to its current location.

After the move, Art Althans retired, and in 1980, John’s youngest son, James C. Althans, now 62, joined the firm along with his older son, John, a few years later. Five years after that, Buzz Althans’ son, Michael, joined the company to complete the third generation of Althans.

Fast forward to 2020, and Althans Insurance has grown into one of the largest full-service agencies in Northeast Ohio celebrating its 95th anniversary. James’ youngest son, James Capron Althans, 26, represents the fourth generation joining the company in 2015.

“There were five employees when the company moved to its South Russell location, and since that time, four additions have been put on the building,” the elder James said. “Today we have 60 employees working at Althans Insurance.”

The company’s mission is to meet and exceed the expectations of its clients by adher-



Photo by Michael Steinberg

**For 95 years, Althans Insurance has been making history while many of its competitors have become history. Standing from the left are James Capron Althans, Mike Althans, James Althans and John Althans. The South Russell business is on the fourth generation of the Althans family. The wall hangings are portraits of Carl Althans, left, and Arthur Althans, who initially started the insurance business in downtown Cleveland in 1925.**

ing to the highest level of integrity and ethical standards with a motivated and talented team of individuals.

James said the strength of the company is its people. “Our average employee has been with the company for over 12 years, and ownership has been and will be expanded to these associates.”

The company realizes a fourth-generation

family business is a rarity in the business world.

“Being a fourth-generation family business that has been a pillar of the community for over 95 years, the Althans team provides a measurable and sustainable value to its clients through the development of innovative risk management, insurance and life and

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# The Heart of Chagrin Falls



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benefit solutions,” James said. “We achieve this by way of assertive pursuit of competitive pricing, providing a stronger value proposition for clients.”

James is also very much aware of the difficulties that come with running a family business. He works alongside family members Michael A. Althans, 55, who is the chief operating officer, and John S. Althans, 65, chief financial officer.

As the saying goes: “The first generation makes it, the second generation spends it and the third generation blows it.” James believes it starts with their family values, honesty, integrity, hard work and learning to get along.

“John, Mike and I literally started from the ground up,” James said. “As kids, each of us did the landscaping, cleaned the office, painted the building and other maintenance. Our fathers always required us to have summer jobs and pay expenses.”

“None of us were given books of business to manage when we joined the company. We received great training and support, but we were required to build our own client bases,” James said. “We don’t always agree on issues for running the company. What is important is, that we respect each other’s opinions and we don’t hold grudges.”

James Althans believes what has contrib-

**“John, Mike and I literally started from the ground up. As kids each of us did the landscaping, cleaned the office, painted the building and other maintenance. Our fathers always required us to have summer jobs and pay expenses.”** — James C. Althans

uted to their company’s success are shared values in both business and their personal lives. “I believe a big part of it is our culture. ‘A’ Team, that is what we call ourselves, it’s part of our logo, it’s even on my license plate. Sharing knowledge/team approach to handling clients.”

Along with being invested in their clients, they are also invested in their team. “We have a plaque in our lobby with nameplates of the people with 20 years or more of service,” James said. “Of the 30 people on the plaque, 14 are still with the company.”

The company prides itself on being active members in the community, as well as participating in nonprofit work.

James said the easiest and most profitable route for their fathers would have been to sell the business to another agency, broker or private equity firm. “Instead, they gave us the opportunity to buy the company and trusted us to meet our obligation to buy them out over time. It was very important that we grew the business to make sure we can meet that obli-

gation. It worked out well for all of us.”

Between James, Michael and John, they have nine children and only one has chosen to join the business from that fourth generation. “We’ve never wanted to force anyone to join the company, it is an option for all, but we respect anyone’s decision to pursue a career in some other field,” James said.

“The door is always open, you never know when someone may change their mind. This is why we have other employees that will have an opportunity to own part of the business.”

Since 1925, Althans Insurance has been making history, while many of their competitors have become history.

“We are very proud that we’ve been able to transition ownership of the company to future generations,” James said. “Today with so many mergers, acquisitions and takeovers in our industry as well as others businesses, we have been fortunate to have been around for 95 years and look forward to our 100th year anniversary.” ■

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Photo by Michael Steinberg

**Ed Babcock, left, is the current owner and president of Junction Auto Sales. His son, Cliff, continues to carry on the family business. Junction Auto is now in the fifth generation of the Babcock family. In addition to making their business a staple in Geauga County, the Babcock family members have deep roots as charitable and involved community members.**

# Five generations of Babcocks keep Junction Auto on road

By BRIAN DOERING

**T**he Babcock family has deep roots in Geauga County and storied history in the Northeast Ohio auto market. Clifford Babcock started with the philosophy that if you take good care of your customers and employees, you will be successful.

Mr. Babcock and his father-in-law, Tracy Spencer, started out in business together in

1931 as a Plymouth and Dodge garage.

“The first chapter of our story begins with a restaurant called ‘Junction Tavern’ on the same intersection here at Mayfield and 44 in Chardon in 1927,” said Cliff Babcock, great-great-grandson of Mr. Spencer.

They were “locally famous” for their barbecue and fried ice cream sandwiches. “In 1931, my great-great-grandpa, Tracy Spencer, and great-grandpa and namesake, Cliff Bab-

cock, were approached about getting into the car business,” Mr. Babcock said. “Using the name recognition of the existing restaurant ‘Junction Tavern Auto Sales’ was born and was the official name until the 1950s.”

The goal that first year was to sell 12 cars, and as the story goes, there were plenty of sleepless nights thinking that would not happen, but the two owners met their goal and

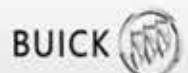
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# Thank you from The Junction Auto Family



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just kept on growing.

Clifford's son, Warren Babcock, joined the business in 1947, and the original name, Junction Tavern Auto Sales, remained until the 1950s when it was shortened to Junction Auto Sales.

"The building was built with a concrete second floor so if this car thing didn't work out, they could convert it to apartments," said Cliff Babcock.

Fast forward to today, Warren Babcock's son, Edward "Ed" Babcock, is the current owner and President of Junction Auto Sales and Cliff's father.

Ed Babcock, 69, a 1969 graduate of Chardon High School, served for two years as a Merchant Marine, and then attended the Ohio State University and earned his Bachelor of Arts in 1975 before joining the family-owned business.

Now, the family tradition continues with Ed's son, Cliff Babcock, 31, who started working at Junction in 2012, and is carrying on his family's rich history and experience.

**"Our goal is to be big enough to take care of any of our customers' needs, but small enough to value and know our customers."**

— Cliff Babcock

"I am technically the fifth generation. My great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather started the business," Cliff said. "But as the story goes, if there was fishing to be done and work to be done, great-great-grandpa did the fishing and great-grandpa did the work."

Having six new car brands, a full-service body shop, Chrysler and General Motors service and parts departments, the team at Junction tries hard to be a resource across all demographics, according to Cliff.

"Every week we have customers getting their first car and some getting their fifth or more from all over Northeast Ohio. Being in the snow capital of Northeast Ohio, we naturally do more of our business in Jeeps, GMC

trucks, Ram trucks and other four-wheel drive SUV's – it's in our DNA," Cliff said.

Junction Auto's basic philosophy is that if you take care of people, they keep coming back and bring their friends and family.

"It has served us well for 89 years and we have no intentions of changing that. Myself or Ed are always on site with an open door, which as the industry continues to change, becomes less and less common," Cliff said. "Our goal is to be big enough to take care of any of our customers' needs, but small enough to value and know our customers."

Relationships the Babcocks have built in the community and the trust placed in them by their customers is the most important asset they put above all else. "If people know that while we may not always be perfect, we will always try to do what's right, then we have done our job," Cliff said.

Along with being a successful business fixture in Geauga County, the Babcock family also has a long history of being deeply involved in the community not only with charitable giving, but also with volunteering their time.

Founder, Clifford Babcock, served on the Chardon Local School District Board of Education and as a Claridon Township Trustee. Tracy Spencer helped to write zoning rules for Munson Township, which were the first of their kind in Ohio. Warren Babcock helped bring youth baseball to Claridon Township and served on many boards including the Red Feather Agency of the United Way.

Ed and Cliff Babcock continue their family's tradition of philanthropy as well, most recently with a \$125,000 donation to the Berkshire Local School District on behalf of Ed's mother, Mary Ann Babcock, who taught English at Berkshire Jr./Sr. High School for almost 30 years.

Carrying on the family name and business legacy is extremely important to the son and father. "It's very important – we have had some amazing people in our family that came before us and have vowed to always run the business with the values they would recognize," Cliff said.

Their family motto is: "Take care of employees and customers, and everything else will fall in line," has been repeated since Cliff's great-grandfather and has worked as a guiding principle in all of the family's decisions. "Without Junction's great longtime employees, we are nowhere near where we are today, and without our loyal customers we don't exist. Our mission is to continue to focus on and protect those two relationships," Cliff said.

Cliff said it is a very exciting time to be in the automotive business with so many changes in technology on the horizon. "After 89 years and the bonds we have made with customers, employees and the community, there is nothing we would rather do. Looking forward to the 90th anniversary, 100th and beyond." ■



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# 100+ Women Who Care makes big impact on local charities

By DAVY VARGO

**F**or busy women without much time? That's appealing, Ginger thought as she read about a philanthropy in the newspaper. Then she walked with her friend Mary at Frohring Meadows in Bainbridge and asked if she'd like to do it. Yes, Mary was interested. Then Ginger asked Mari, and Mary talked to Laura, and then they asked Patty. A meeting was arranged, and three months later, the local chapter was born.

It worked. On the first night, 89 women attended raising \$8,900. "We just couldn't believe it. It was truly amazing," Ginger Azzolina said.

Around a fireplace on a patio, five Chagrin Valley women recently pulled on jackets and bundled in blankets reminiscing over some of the notable local charities helped by their group, 100+ Women Who Care: Western Reserve, an organization that collects \$100 from 100 women and donates the \$10,000 to a local charity. The five founders of the Western Reserve chapter, Ginger Azzolina, Mary Hogan, Laura Mackey, Mari Hageman and Patty Weingart recalled numerous charities their group has helped over the years.

Nearly a decade has passed since the local group's beginning in 2011, and now both original and new members attend. The possibility of participating with a team of two or four with one vote per team, to split the \$100, attracts younger women. Karen Duni-gan of Jackson, Michigan first began the organization in 2006 when she got 100 women with \$100 to donate \$10,000 for baby cribs in one hour. Now there are chapters all over the world.

The idea is for women to pool their money, make pitches for different charities, vote and then make a major impact with a large donation.

At a September gathering at Mrs. Azzolina's home, the five founders of the Western Reserve chapter deliberated over which charity would best please the majority of the group's members for the October donation, since the coronavirus restrictions on large gatherings made the usual way of meeting and voting difficult.

Mrs. Azzolina showed photos of the group, which normally meets in Chagrin Falls Township Hall four times a year and

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Photo by Michael Steinberg

**Five local women founded the Western Reserve chapter of 100+ Women Who Care, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that collects \$100 from 100 women to donate \$10,000 to a worthy charity. Co-founders Ginger Azzolina, left, Mari Hageman, Laura Mackey, Patty Weingart and Mary Hogan lead the group, which meets quarterly to vote on a charity.**

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raises around \$42,000 annually. No later than 10 minutes after 7 p.m., the members usually pick up their name tags from a table, sit down in white chairs and listen to presentations on charities, which must be local, 501(c)(3) groups.

A woman might bring her favorite charity for consideration, drop the charity's name in a fishbowl and wait to see if it is one of the three randomly chosen charities for a presentation. If it is, she will stand, introduce

the charity for 5 minutes, then answer questions for 5 minutes. The founders agree that the women have gotten quite good at the presentations. After the three presentations, all the women vote on which charity they'd like their \$100 to go to. Once the vote is in, the charity with the most votes gets all the money.

Around six weeks later, when the checks are collected from participating women, the founders deliver the donation to the chosen charity. At the next meeting, the woman who presented the charity brings a representative

from the charity to tell the group how they used the funds. Then they pose with an enormous check with the amount given and the name of the charity written on it. The charities send thank you notes to each woman who gave a donation.

About 80 women come to the meetings, but around 286 are on the email list, Mrs. Hogan noted, and checks roll in even if the women do not attend the meeting. "We collect double what we have at the meetings," Mrs. Hogan explained. Mrs. Mackey said she gets many notes of appreciation along



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with checks from the members.

Members trust the group so much, Mrs. Azzolina said, that they don't mind which charity is chosen, and send their money regardless. "How many people would send a check when they're not even there to see the presentation?" she said. "It's a trust factor."

Promptly at 7:50 p.m., the meeting is adjourned, even though Mrs. Azzolina said at first there was doubt that 100 people could do something in just one hour.

What makes the group different from other fundraisers is the absence of food or drinks (no water even), or any need to buy a fancy dress. Once, when the group raised \$100,000, they celebrated with a cake.

Mrs. Hogan sends emails out, Mrs. Mackey collects the checks, then sends them back to Mrs. Hogan to enter them, Mrs. Weingart writes the minutes, Mrs. Hageman recruits and times the meetings and Mrs. Azzolina completes administrative work. They personally pay extra costs, like the building rent, so 100 percent of the money goes straight to the charities.

Recently, Mrs. Mackey delivered checks to a woman at the Greater Cleveland Food Bank. She was "taken aback" with the woman's joy over the donation. "You have no idea what this is going to do for so many people," Mrs. Mackey remembers the recipient saying.

Mrs. Hageman finds casting votes difficult. "If the presenter is good, it tugs at your heart, and you say, 'Oh, that person — oh, they deserve the money,' then the next person comes, and they're so good, and you say 'Oh, it's such a good cause, they deserve the money,'" she said. "It's hard."

When voting, Mrs. Azzolina picks the one that seems the most in need and influences the most people. "It's very hard sometimes," she said. Babies, mothers, children and education particularly interest her. But she also loved giving quilted blankets to homeless veterans living in the woods in the winter. This charity, Sub Zero Mission, used the donation to buy the blankets. "They were so grateful," Mrs. Azzolina said. "I will never forget what they have done for homeless veterans." The group raised the most money for this particular charity, \$21,000, because the woman who presented the charity matched the amount that was collected.

Mrs. Weingart explained why she thinks the group pops: "If I donate \$100 to the group that's getting shoes to girls aging out of foster care, you know, it's a big donation from me personally, but \$10,000, now there you go, now you can do something with that." The Western Reserve chapter "mothered," as Mrs. Mackey put it, three other chapters.

One of their other notable local charities is Two Cafe & Boutique in Bainbridge, which

employs people with mild to moderate special needs. To their personal enjoyment, the women patronize the cafe regularly. When this charity was chosen, the five founders delivered the checks to the restaurant. Café owner Shari Hunter called the \$10,000 a "huge help" when her organization received the donation in 2015, near the beginning of her venture. Surprised and thrilled, she used some of the critical donation to buy a van. "We were just so blessed by their support," she said.

A "volunteer mindset," the "camaraderie" and fostering a "powerful group of women," motivate the women. Before the gatherings, a nervous Mrs. Azzolina often wonders if the meetings will "pan out one more time?" And Mrs. Weingart thinks, "Are we going to be standing there, the five of us, with 75 empty chairs?" But the loyal women faithfully arrive, and Mrs. Weingart's shoulders sink in relief.

When the meeting successfully concludes, Mrs. Azzolina said, "It's like, 'Oh my gosh, it's just wonderful, what these women have come through, they've been there, through thick and thin, whatever the weather, and the charities have been great.'"

The five heartily agreed on one last thing. "Women pretty much rock," Mrs. Weingart said. ■



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# Taking in valley sights

## From walking tours in Chagrin to driving to nearby parks and churches, history abounds in Cuyahoga and Geauga

By DAVY VARGO

**D**rive into Chagrin Falls on just about any day and take in the sights. The historical buildings. The red brick roads. Colorful leaves in the fall, a coating of snow in the winter, budding flowers in spring and green grass in summer. Always in the background is the rumbling of the upper falls.

This is what Ruth Zeager sees as she enters the village on her way to work as the executive director of the Chagrin Falls Historical Society & Museum. “I love the history feel you get here,” she said. “I think it’s really special, and you don’t get that everywhere.”

A bountiful assortment of noteworthy places can be visited in the Chagrin Valley. Ms. Zeager shared a list of interesting sites for both newcomers and longtime residents.

Starting at the Historical Society at 87 E. Washington St., in the Village of Chagrin Falls, gives a first taste of the area. Stepping over an original beam of the 1874 building, Ms. Zeager can explain tidbits of local life, such as a train on a track in the museum and

a 20-year project handmade by a local supporter. Ms. Zeager mentioned that the train even puffs smoke.

Mystery in history is what captures Ms. Zeager’s attention. She takes notice of little incongruities, like when no photo of the town’s first woman to run for mayor surfaced. With some searching, a great-great-niece was located in Newbury Township, who subsequently supplied photos.

“How cool is that?” Ms. Zeager said. “I love connecting the pieces like that.” She continued, “It’s not just sitting there reading books, which is exciting to me, but not to other people.” She tells third-graders who come to the museum, “You have a history even though you’re only 7 years old, like you have seven years of history.”

**After stopping at the museum, a curious excursionist could take a brochure and inspect the historical west side of Chagrin Falls. On West Washington, Church, Water, Walnut and South Franklin streets, many 19th Century homes laden with stories border the way.**

Walk along West Washington Street and view an 1840s home, once an academy, with bark-covered beams still in the basement. Or take a look at a home built by William “Boss” Hutchings in 1860. A stonemason, builder and brickyard owner, Mr. Hutchings couldn’t read or write. Another builder, Joseph O’Malley, built “reverse twin” homes, making one for a dry goods merchant, Zeno Eggleston, in 1875, then replicating it nearby for himself. Mr. Eggleston’s variety shop is now Fireside Book Shop at 29 N. Franklin St.

A home on Walnut Street arrived in 1920 by railroad as part of a “Fairy Design” Sears Catalogue kit. Then, at a home on Water Street, President James Garfield stayed while overseeing the construction of a church.

On Church Street, a French-imported, red glass window adorns one residence, occupied until 2016 by Henry Church, Sr. descendants. Blacksmith and artist, Henry Church, Jr. went down to the Chagrin River in 1885 to chisel what is known as Squaw Rock that can still be seen today in the South Chagrin Reservation of the Cleveland Metroparks.

South Chagrin and the other parks that make up the metroparks’ Emerald Necklace encompassing Northeast Ohio made Ms. Zeager’s list of special spots to visit.

Parks and open land are among the amenities common to all 13 communities that make up the Chagrin Valley that covers both Cuyahoga and Geauga counties.

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appeal to John Bourisseau, the board president at the Historical Society. In 1996, the late industrialist Paul Frohring donated land to the Geauga Park District to be maintained as a meadow and enjoyed by all.

Mr. Bourisseau explained that before the family owned a Chagrin water treatment business, they ran an industrial operation near the roller rink in Chagrin Falls. The park's blooming landscape, a barren wasteland in winter and a humming pasture in summer, spreads across 298 acres. Runners, walkers and dogs populate its gravel paths each day.

"For history, Quarry Park is interesting," Mr. Bourisseau said. This quarry off Solon Road in Bentleyville, is part of South Chagrin Reservation and once supplied rocks for the foundations of Chagrin homes. "There was a railroad line coming up from Chagrin to Solon, and they built a spur to go over to the quarry so they could bring the rocks directly out of the quarry on the train," Mr. Bourisseau said.

A scavenger hunt, with instructions courtesy of the historical society, might satisfy a sightseer's fun side. "Walk around town, and learn a little bit about history," Ms. Zeager said of this activity. One such item on the hunt is the old bank. Explorers exhorted to search for the original bank will discover the previous bank vault as the current business's dressing room, she hinted.

What once was a jail, a women's bathroom now graces one of the buildings that travelers find on the hunt. Completely reconstructed, the building previously used for meetings, lectures and reading held an opera house in its new space. Then it was consumed by a fire, inflicting great damage.

Susan B. Anthony spoke at the Chagrin Falls Township Hall at 83 N. Main Street. Ms. Zeager said "one of the little secrets" of the valley is that the suffrage proponent also spoke at the tiny South Newbury Union Chapel, 15829 Ravenna Road in Newbury. This little-known place, that is closed to the public but worth a drive-by, is where author Louisa May Alcott also spoke, she said.

The James A. Garfield Birthsite Memo-

rial on SOM Center Road in Moreland Hills has a replica of the cabin where President Garfield was born in 1831. Visitors can always see the cabin from the outside and walk the grounds. The cabin is periodically open; check the Moreland Hills Historical Society website for open hours at mhshohio.org. Ms. Zeager considers it a worthy stop for out-of-town visitors as is the James Garfield house in Mentor, which is a national park, and the James A. Garfield Memorial in downtown Cleveland.

A peaceful place to Ms. Zeager is where the Chagrin River capsizes into the falls in Chagrin Falls.

"I'd say that's my favorite Chagrin place," she said. ■



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Photo by Michael Steinberg

**Samantha Probst left her job with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office to open her own shop in downtown Chagrin Falls, Little Babet. She combined her love of children and her interest in business to launch a unique shop that features fair trade, organic and sustainable merchandise for babies and children.**

# Shop provides eco-friendly options for little babets

By SAMANTHA COTTRILL

**S**amantha Probst made her career shift in the spring of 2019, combining her interest in fashion and business with her love of children and the environment to open her shop, Little Babet, in downtown Chagrin Falls.

"I wanted to switch up my job because [I was] looking to start a family," Ms. Probst said, explaining that her prior job with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office was not as

sustainable with having children.

She graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering and a minor in business and was interested in pursuing law, and the office paid for its employees to go to law school. But after 13 years, she said there wasn't much more room for growth in the office, and the maternity leave, though unlimited, was unpaid. It was time for a change.

"What else would I want to do?" she recalled saying. "I had been a nanny for a lot

of my downtime when I wasn't working at my job, and I loved working with kids my whole life and I love fashion and I lived in Chagrin." The next step seemed logical. "If I were to open a store, what kind of store does Chagrin not have?"

A store selling organic items for children that she frequented when living in Washington, D.C. came to mind.

"We don't really have anything like that in Chagrin, or even in Cleveland," the Kenston



High School graduate said. “I saw it as an opportunity and dove into doing research on organic sustainable brands and how I could procure those to the Cleveland area.”

Ms. Probst, 37, a resident of Chagrin Falls and now a new mom to her own little baby, Asher, born in May of 2020, put her business minor from the Ohio State University to work and opened Little Babet at 3 N. Franklin St., making her debut during the 2019 Chagrin Falls Sidewalk Sale.

Little Babet features a wide selection of organic and fair-trade merchandise including baby clothing, furniture, toys and other supplies. From newborns to “big kids” under 10 years old, the downtown shop offers high quality, fashionable styles that even “grown-ups” could imagine themselves wearing.

When she first opened, all products she offered were organic and sustainable merchandise.

Some fabrics are made from bamboo or eucalyptus trees, she explained, which depending on how they are processed, are more eco-friendly and can be better for the skin for those with eczema or dry skin, she explained. Bamboo helps keep moisture on the skin as opposed to other materials, like cotton, that sucks the moisture from skin. She said bamboo does not require as much water to grow compared to cotton.

Due to delays in the supply chain, however, as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic, she was forced to expand her merchandise. Where she might not be able to stock the shelves with 100-percent organic products, Ms. Probst makes up for it in how other merchandise is sourced.

“I had to order some things that are maybe just good brands,” she said, giving examples like American made products, small-batch production companies or those that support good charities. Despite “hiccups” in manufacturing, Ms. Probst added to the store’s selections by taking note of where the merchandise originated and its sustainability.

Little Babet also began offering free parent classes for shoppers.

“We had just started doing a series of new parent classes,” she said. “We had prenatal yoga here in the store in February, and then in March we were going to have another class in the series for both mom and dad and new parents.”

Certified pediatric nurse Jessica Zuik of CLE Mommy, taught the classes. The series included a questionnaire for participants with plans for an entire curriculum to help bring awareness to Ms. Zuik and her business.

“I’d love to get back to this,” she said, explaining that the program has since been on hold due to the pandemic.

Her expectations of a challenging first

**Continued on page 30**



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## Continued from page 29

year of business helped her deal with the unexpected pandemic.

"You plan on your first year being a difficult year, but you don't plan for something like [a pandemic]," she said.

She felt fortunate in one way, however, because she was already used to applying for grants as a new business owner. "So when coronavirus came around, I did it all over again and started that up again and applied for things and made sure that I tried to secure any kind of help that I could," she said.

Ms. Probst said owning a business comes with "ups and downs," especially when not being able to predict when people will be out shopping after Gov. Mike DeWine reopened nonessential businesses in May.

"Not being able to predict when people are going to be shopping now has been a little bit tricky," she said. "It's not based on weather, it's not based on events. It's just random every week. It's a bit of an emotional roller coaster at times."

Another unexpected challenge that presented itself, though this one much more welcome than the others, was becoming a new mom in the first year of business.

"I didn't plan on becoming a new mom either when I opened," she said, noting the balance of childcare with operating a new

**My favorite part is just watching people's expressions when they really enjoy the shop. It warms my heart when what I'm trying to bring and convey really does resonate with people and they're grateful for it.** — Samantha Probst

business during a pandemic.

A silver lining to the closing of a nearby shop was that she was able to hire their employees to help her step away from the store as needed for the care of her then newborn over the summer. She said she and her husband, Adam, are weighing the pros and cons of utilizing a daycare during the pandemic. He is a senior manager in supply chain for Collins Aerospace.

"Does daycare make sense over having someone in our home?" she asked. "I think a daycare is just as safe when you go over everything. So, we'll see what happens there."

Ms. Probst, who makes her home in Chagrin Falls, has been working on revamping her Instagram, and her website has been up

since 2019. With the government shutdown of nonessential businesses in early 2020, she said, the website, LittleBabet.com, was already good to go.

"It slows down a little in winter here," she said, "so I took that time and I put all of my items on my website. We have been doing more local delivering for free, and people were definitely taking advantage of that last spring."

Ms. Probst said she manually adds all her merchandise to the website and everything in the store is available online.

"We also have upped our game on Instagram," she added, noting plans to start going live in the fall with new marketing strategies for her store on the social media platform, @shoplittlebabet.

Seeing her shop resonate with shoppers is a plus.

"My favorite part is just watching people's expressions when they really enjoy the shop. It warms my heart when what I'm trying to bring and convey really does resonate with people and they're grateful for it," she said. "The other part, just getting to know locals and repeat customers who are really sweet and supportive, especially right now, and seeing how much they really do care about our little shops here in Chagrin."

As for being a new mom, "It's been a wild ride so far." ■

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# Thinking green

## Valley businesses embracing sustainability on retail front

By SAMANTHA COTTRILL

**W**hat makes sustainable shopping sustainable? This is a business model and shopping trend growing in popularity every year as consumers and sellers alike take a closer look at their carbon footprint in the retail industry.

Local shops and boutiques around the valley, in downtown Chagrin Falls and even national brands found at the Pinecrest shopping center in Orange Village and Eton Chagrin Boulevard in Woodmere, are among those embracing the nationwide trend of sustainable shopping.

"When we opened, there were a couple of things that were super important to us. One was purchasing from companies that gave back in some way, some kind of a social good," said Halle Bargar, co-owner of SHED Boutique and Wellness in Chagrin Falls. "Then also just staying with small businesses has been a goal as well."

The United States Environmental Protection Agency defines a sustainable business as one that "incorporates 'green thinking' in company culture, eliminates inefficiencies, minimizes its impact on the environment, and evolves and adapts while streamlining its processes for resource efficiency."

From fair trade goods to upcycled products to organic materials, store owners in the Chagrin Valley have taken to the idea of sustainable business practices. Where supply and demand at times might not leave space for 100-percent organic or eco-friendly merchandise, they make up for how those products give back.

"In the world today, it's just become very evident that people are being more conscious about how they spend their money and where they're spending their money," said Virginia Gonzales, who owns Remnants in Chagrin Falls.

This view is shared globally. During a speech at Oxford Union, U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross said "sustainability is increasingly important to both consumers and global executives, and environmental concerns are influencing supply-chain decisions."

"Manufacturing consumes 54 percent of world energy, and emits 20 percent of the CO<sub>2</sub>," he said in the February of 2020 speech.

His statement is supported by a 2018 Nielsen survey and its corresponding 2019 article, "A 'Natural' Rise in Sustainability



Photo by Alana Clark

**As consumers demand sustainable choices in retail selections, stores are stocking up on organic and fair trade merchandise, like SHED Boutique and Wellness in Chagrin Falls and its selection of burlap and wood accessories.**

Around the World."

"When it comes to purchase behavior, it's become abundantly clear that consumers care. In fact, the majority [73 percent] of global consumers say they would definitely or probably change their consumption habits to reduce their impact on the environment," Nielsen reported.

About 41 percent of consumers worldwide say that they are willing to pay more for products that contain all-natural or organic ingredients, according to the Nielsen report.

In the Chagrin Falls shopping district, several local shops offer a selection of fair trade or organic products like up-cycled, high-end handbags, children's clothing made from bamboo or fair-trade gift items that give back.

The storefront at 35 S. Main St. is now the

home of Remnants by owner Virginia Gonzales of Chagrin Falls.

Ms. Gonzales, 46, having always loved fabrics of all kinds, started Remnants from a job she had on the side doing upholstery by using castaways from her mother's design jobs.

"I realized it was really difficult to find big enough remnant pieces for a whole chair or couch," she said, so she started using the fabrics to create her handbags. "It was kind of by accident," she added. "It organically happened."

"I realized that the fabric memos, the fabric samples, remnants, they were all discarded pieces that got thrown away because they were odd shapes and sizes," Ms. Gonzales said, "and

**Continued on page 32**

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## Continued from page 31

the fabric companies, nobody had a use for them after they served their primary purpose.”

Textiles made up 6.3 percent of total municipal solid waste in 2017, according to the U.S. EPA, totaling about 16.9 million tons. So Ms. Gonzales is doing what she can to help reduce textile waste.

Now three years in business, Ms. Gonzales holds true to her commitment to use only remnant fabrics, the only exception being leather where needed, and transforms them into new, handmade, one-of-a-kind purses and accessories.

She’s also cognizant of her own remnant fabrics by using them to make smaller acces-

sories like key rings or even separate straps for crossbodies.

“So when you create a product, that’s like an experience at the same time as being socially conscious and feeling good about it, I think it’s a win-win for everyone,” Ms. Gonzales said.

Samantha Probst, 37, owner of Little Babet at 3 N. Franklin St., ensures her shoppers have access to organic products for their little ones, including clothing made from bamboo or toys and accessories from brands with an emphasis on organic cottons and reduced use in plastics.

By using eco-friendly and organic products, Ms. Probst’s selection not only encourages shoppers to make purchasing decisions that are beneficial to the environment, but ones that are

also safer and healthier for their children with no harsh chemicals or potential skin irritants used in the manufacturing of the products.

If she can’t find enough merchandise to fill shelves with strictly organic merchandise, she looks to the causes of the suppliers to ensure she’s supporting fair trade practices or other small businesses in the county or products that have educational benefits to the children who may use the products.

A few shops over is SHED Boutique and Wellness, 27 N. Franklin St., with co-owners Michelle Kalinyak-Adams, 47, and Mrs. Bargar, 50, both of Chagrin Falls, who feature sustainable vendors throughout their “eclectic boutique.”

When Mrs. Bargar and Mrs. Kalinyak-Adams first opened their shop three years ago, the goal was to help their community and give back however they could. Their shop states their mission to be a “positive influence on the world” with the product and events they offer their customers.

SHED offers a selection of recycled and fair trade products, and similar to Little Babet, when they can’t fill a store on just organic or recycled items alone, they seek out larger brands that give to “worthwhile causes.”

At least once a month, the shop tries to hold special events; although these have been on standby since the start of COVID-19 in the state, Mrs. Bargar said. Sometimes purchases made during certain events go to support charities in the community.

“It’s more than just being a boutique,” Mrs. Bargar said. “[It’s] trying to become a space where the community could gather and learn together and have fun together and stay well together.”

At Eton Chagrin and Pinecrest, some upscale national brands hold their own sustainability missions with initiatives to support people and the environment, like Lucky Brand Jeans donating textiles to fashion students and implementing the United Nations’ Sustainability Development Goals into their mission, according to respective websites.

Pinecrest Director of Marketing Jessi Fausett pointed out that Gen Z seems to be the driver in demand for sustainability in the marketplace. Shops like Urban Outfitters, who she said leads the way in educating young consumers on sustainability, or J. Bellezza, West Elm, Pottery Barn and Williams-Sonoma, who offer organic merchandise, are making the commitment to fair-trade products.

Ms. Fausett said sustainability is more than just a trend, but a change that is here to stay.

“While it may seem like sustainability is fashion’s newest trend, a deeper look shows that consumer demand for more sustainable fashion, organic living and the issue of fair-trade practices are here to stay,” Ms. Fausett said. “And while the retail industry has weathered significant change lately these trends just keep rising.” ■

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# Visit the valley

## Overnight accommodations beckon tourists to come back

By JULIE HULLETT

**T**here are plenty of attractions in the Chagrin Valley that bring visitors from near and far. Some may visit friends and family, while others come for an event, such as Blossom Time in Chagrin Falls, the Chagrin Hunter Jumper Classic in Moreland Hills or a wedding. No matter what brings people to the valley, there are beautiful places to stay filled with interesting backstories.

The Club at Hillbrook in Russell Township, primarily a country club, also has seven guest suites. Innkeeper Nancy Telzerow said that the story behind the mansion is often what draws people to stay there.

In the early 1900s, Edmund S. Burke Jr., former chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland and founder of firms that later became Bethlehem Steel, owned more than 500 acres of lush, rolling woodlands. Inspired by a 1472-era house in England, Mr. Burke built a 40-room Tudor mansion in Russell Township. To stay true to the architecture, Mr. Burke had part of the original house shipped from England to the U.S. and had it rebuilt on his property. In 1952, a new owner turned the mansion into a country club. Guests enjoy the woodwork made of black walnut and maple trees, leaded glass and mantels of carved wood and marble.

"It's a real tucked away gem," Ms. Telzerow said.

No two rooms are alike, but each has old English decor. Guests each receive a special treat from a local shop like Malley's Chocolates or the Popcorn Shop. They have access to the entire house and they can use the club's amenities, including the dining room, pool, fitness center and tennis courts, when staying overnight.

**Continued on page 34**



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Photos by Peggy Turbett

**Punderson Manor, above, has 31 lodge rooms with modern amenities, all within walking distance of trails and other activities that Punderson State Park has to offer. The Inn of Chagrin Falls, below, is in the heart of downtown Chagrin Falls, which draws many of its guests.**



### Continued from page 33

For people looking to escape into the woods, there are also several cabins in the Chagrin Valley. The Pine Lake Trout Club in Bainbridge has five cabins available for rent. These rustic cabins are attractive for people looking to get away for a few days, Sales Manager Amanda Lassiter said. Although the cabins are in the woods, they come equipped with linens, towels, cooking tools, plates, silverware, glasses, WiFi and cable TV. The smallest cabin is at least 1,100 square feet, noting that the cabins are spacious.

The cabins have a calming view of the woods and the lake. They are secluded, peaceful and ideal for social distancing. Ms. Lassiter said that the features of the cabins draw people to stay at the trout club, including their own

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kitchen, fireplace and grill. Guests are welcome to fish and dine at the club while they are staying in the cabins.

"People really like the atmosphere that surrounds Pine Lake. The cabins are rustic. They're a little bit older but that's what people really like," Ms. Lassiter said. "The atmosphere is what draws people to them."

Some may only think of Punderson as a state park, but there is much more than trees and trails. Punderson Manor in Newbury Township is a hotel with 31 lodge rooms, with an extra treat of both indoor and outdoor swimming pools. The rooms have beautiful views of the lake and the park, according to Sales Manager Christine Blythe. There are also 26 two-bedroom cabins in the park.

The cabins are tastefully decorated, fully furnished and include modern amenities like WiFi. There is also a grill outside each cabin and three of the cabins are pet-friendly. There are many opportunities that families can take advantage of at the 741-acre state park including several golf courses, 14 miles of hiking trails, a playground, basketball court and shuffleboard court. In winter, the park offers cross-country skiing, sledding and snowmobiling.

Punderson lodge has a storied history. Original landowners Lemuel and Sybal Punderson operated a grist mill and distillery in the early 1800s. After their passing, W.B. Cleveland bought the land and then sold it to millionaire Karl Long who began building the 29-room and 14-bath manor house for his wife in 1929. He lost his fortune during the Great Depression and died, leaving the mansion unfinished, according to local historians. The land reverted back to the Cleveland family and then the state of Ohio, who finished the mansion in 1956 and built the cabins in the 1970s.

Ghostly occurrences have been reported by both employees and guests, such as unexplained laughter and mysterious apparitions, leaving some to believe that the manor house is haunted.

Today, anyone can enjoy the lodge and grounds.

"We're a park environment. You can enjoy some activities out in nature just outside the manor," Ms. Blythe said. "It's not a long walk to nature. People enjoy the peace and quiet away from the hustle and bustle."

For those with more modern tastes, Hotel Indigo in Beachwood offers overnight accommodations with a twist. Every Hotel Indigo has a unique theme, known as a neighborhood story. Director of Sales Julie Kindred said that the Beachwood location story centers around the emerald necklace of the Cleveland Metroparks and the Chagrin Hunter Jumper Classic. All of the hotel's interior design is equestrian-themed. There are works of art around the hotel of hot air balloons as a nod to Blossom Time in Chagrin Falls.

The hotel connects to Hyde Park Prime



Photo courtesy of The Club at Hillbrook

**The Club at Hillbrook, above, is primarily a country club but also has seven guest suites. The Tudor mansion is modeled after a 1472 home in England, and part of that home was transported to Russell Township. Its history, along with unparalleled quality craftsmanship, is what draws visitors.**

Steakhouse in the lobby. There is also a restaurant in the hotel known as Bistro 3581, which offers an affordable menu that is made by the chefs at Hyde Park. Pets are welcomed at Hotel Indigo where all dogs receive a goodie bag that includes a dog bowl and a map of local parks.

"Most of the people that stay here are drawn to their neighborhood stories and the uniqueness of them," Ms. Kindred said of Hotel Indigo. "And being pet-friendly is huge."

The Inn of Chagrin Falls is a quaint, charming place to spend a few days. The inn is

nestled in the heart of Chagrin Falls, within walking distance of a multitude of shops and restaurants. Although there are other places to stay near Chagrin Falls, the inn is the only option in the village. The New England-style inn has 15 rooms and a light continental breakfast.

Chagrin is a destination drawing couples and families to the inn that has had some famous visitors over the years, including TV commentator Geraldo Rivera, who now lives in Shaker Heights, and the late comedian and actor Tim Conway, a Chagrin Falls native. ■



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Photos provided by Drone Ohio

**Drone Ohio owner Jeff Holbery spends hours exploring areas with his drone, leading him to catch this stunning view of downtown Cleveland.**

# Tripod in the sky

## Drone photographer captures life on the ground from above

By DAVY VARGO

**W**ith a mighty hum, the four-propeller drone swooped from the ground to hover in the air. Then, buzzing, the white contraption shrank to a small dot in the clear blue sky as it darted away.

Below, the drone operator watched a screen with the aerial view of the Cleveland Metroparks' Polo Field in Moreland Hills, its green pastureland stretching beneath the sun. Jeff Holbery, Sr., owns Drone Ohio, a drone photography and videography business in Macedonia. The 59-year-old man, a lifelong photographer and an employee of the City of Cleveland Heights for 28 years, took up flying drones five years ago. With an eminent retirement, he spends hours upon hours on his hobby. Though he said his sister was artistic, he couldn't draw a stick figure himself. But photography, and now photography from the air, is a different story.



**Jeff Holbery, owner of Drone Ohio and Chagrin Falls native, grew his company out of a retirement hobby. He described his \$2,000 drone as a "tripod in the sky." He shoots all kinds of events, structures and nature scenes, but said he always has fun.**

"A tripod in the sky" is what Mr. Holbery, a Chagrin Falls native, calls his \$2,000 drone, one of three drones in his possession. His "hobby that accidentally turned into a business" began four years ago. "The motto of my company is, 'Drone Ohio is always having fun,'" he said. "And that's just the

truth – I'm just always having fun."

Sitting in a red camp chair, Mr. Holbery pinched a cigarette between his fingers and laughed. Friendly lines in his tan face crinkled as he told story after story of his various projects with the drone. The 2.75 pound drone rested at his feet in the grass, with its

control box nearby.

Dallas, Memphis, New Orleans, Oklahoma City, St. Louis and Indianapolis are all places Mr. Holbury and his drone visited en route to see his son serving in the Air Force. "When I'm on the road, I just look at a map and see where I want to go and see what's cool," he said. Once, he shot West Virginia's Trans-Allegheny Lunatic Asylum, which Mr. Holbury found to be a "beautiful building," built in 1858.

The World Wide Headquarters of Drone Ohio, as Mr. Holbury put it, is located at his Macedonia home. There, he's designated a "bird room" as a drone lab. His van advertises one of his Cleveland photos across its hood.

At the Cleveland National Air Show, Mr. Holbury flies his drone off the runway with around 10 other drone companies for a daily 13-minute time slot. "I got a picture of downtown Cleveland that's just unbelievable from 1,100 feet directly above Burke [Lakefront Airport]," he said. "I love flying in downtown Cleveland because the architecture and skylines – I got a thing for skylines."

Last October, Fox 8 News did a story on Drone Ohio, and Cleveland 19 News used his photos after Mr. Holbury engaged 500,000 people on Facebook with his beautiful fall scenes captured at Geauga Lake in Bainbridge Township. "I have 17,000 followers on my Facebook page," he said. "I'm the most followed and liked drone company in Northern Ohio." He streams live broadcasts of his drone excursions, with an average of 5,000-10,000 views. Viewers come from Texas, Florida and California. If somebody asks him on the livestream, he'll even fly where they want to explore, for an interactive experience.

Sunrises and sunsets he also enjoys. He chuckled over his favorite thing to shoot. "Everything," he said. "I'm a fan of nature, I'm a fan of architecture, I'm a fan of doing live events – I've done a couple marching band shows." He even shoots funerals. But no weddings decorate his expansive resume. "I don't like to do weddings because they always end up in divorce," he likes to joke. One time, a tree worker planned to propose to his girlfriend from the bucket of a truck and asked Mr. Holbury to record the proceedings. But Mr. Holbury referred him to a more conveniently-located drone operator.

Squire's Castle in North Chagrin Reservation of the Cleveland Metroparks can look unrecognizable with a new angle from Mr. Holbury's drone. "I like looking at maps and seeing satellite views of different places," he said. Sometimes he remains on the ground, like when he captured Chagrin's Pumpkin Roll, receiving 50,000 views. He loves flying in Chagrin Falls, and works with the Valley Art Center, the Chagrin Documentary



**Jeff Holbury said that his business, Drone Ohio, is swamped with clients. He has a vast array of interests for things he likes to shoot, including nature. He charges around \$200 an hour but is generous with discounts, especially for other people from his hometown of Chagrin Falls.**

**"I got a picture of Downtown Cleveland that's just unbelievable from 1,100 feet directly above Burke [Lakefront Airport]. I love flying in Downtown Cleveland because the architecture and skylines – I got a thing for skylines."**

— Jeff Holbury, Sr.

Film Festival and more. Mr. Holbury also planned to get air footage for a marathon on the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail.

When a microburst with 150 mph winds hit Cleveland Heights, strong oaks fell, flattening about eight cars, and Mr. Holbury filmed the debris from the sky.

Swamped with business, he charges around \$200 an hour, but he discounts generously and has a soft spot for folk from his hometown of Chagrin.

Processing the photos with editing adds "pizzazz," Mr. Holbury said, though he maintains the real look.

More curled propellers make for quieter drones. Mr. Holbury's drone utilizes two compasses and two computers. Drones triple the size of Mr. Holbury's can speed life jackets to a drowning person in five seconds – another drone operator demonstrates this feature at the air show. Smaller racer drones run at 90 mph.

A group of curious walkers watched Mr. Holbury drive the drone. "[Clients] want to run around here on their horse. I chase them with the drone," Mr. Holbury told the crowd. "It's four propellers – it works like a helicopter. This is the camera. Now if the drone gets wobbly because of wind, camera stays

dead steady." He displayed the features of the hovering drone to his captive audience. Instead of watching the drone, Mr. Holbury focuses on the tablet screen on the controller and will "just fly it like I'm in the drone."

Landing the drone came up in the discussion, and Mr. Holbury said he catches the drone as it floats stationary above his head. "Well that's how I lost all my hair the first couple times," he joked, running his hand over his head. They snickered.

One of the interested listeners, Lt. Thomas Stratton-Crooke, retired U.S. Navy, of Shaker Heights, considered the drone to be "state of the art." He exclaimed, "This guy's fantastic." He praised the aerial scenes: "What clarity. What definition. This man is on the leading edge of change." The swath of technology, Lt. Stratton-Crooke elaborated, aids in "safety and security in this society."

Mr. Holbury explained that the drone can legally fly to 400 feet but has the capacity to go to 5,000 feet. Seven batteries, each worth about 23 minutes, power the drone for about two and a half hours. About 29 mph is the maximum speed, unless the 40 mph sport mode is used. The right nob on the controller moves the drone forward and backward, as well as faster and slower, and the left nob turns it right and left, as well as higher and lower. "That's us down there," Mr. Holbury narrated, looking at the telemetry on the screen. "I'm going to fly up – there's a barn up there on the corner."

Four times, Mr. Holbury crashed. Most recently, the drone plunged into a swamp after what Mr. Holbury decided must have been a collision with a goose. Sometimes he flies out a mile on Lake Erie to capture images of lighthouses.

Is he concerned it will drop in the water?

Yes, he said. "But I don't worry about it, because if it drops in the water, there's nothing you can do about it, for one, and you just don't drop it in the water," he concluded. ■



# What's great about Chagrin Valley?

**T**he Chagrin Valley is a wonderful place to live and visit, at least, that is what area mayors are saying.

The valley is diverse with its 13 communities starting with the city of Pepper Pike and the eight villages including Bentleyville, Chagrin Falls, Gates Mills, Hunting Valley, Moreland Hills, Orange, South Russell and Woodmere. Rounding out the valley are four townships – Auburn, Bainbridge, Newbury and Russell.

Here is what the mayors had to say about the valley and their connection to it.

## Bentleyville



**Spremulli**

Politics seems to run in the family for Mayor Leonard Spremulli of Bentleyville. His father, Frank, served as mayor of North Randall for 42 years. When Mayor Spremulli first ran for the top office in 2007, he was a part-time magistrate at Bedford Municipal Court. He said that he had lived in the village for eight years and decided that he could use his public service in different ways.

Bentleyville is a residential community with no industry or retail. Though the lack of commercial concerns means no extra tax base, an all-residential village keeps the community close-knit, giving it an “idyllic” feel, he said.

The residents appreciate the semi-rural feeling, which is what attracts more people to live

in Bentleyville. Much of the village includes the South Chagrin Reservation, which is part of the Cleveland Metroparks. Residents also like the proximity to Chagrin Falls and the highway and their membership in the Chagrin Falls Exempted Village School District.

“It’s the beauty and the access to the Metroparks when the leaves start to change,” Mayor Spremulli said. “That’s what brings folks to Bentleyville and I find it appealing.”

The mayor said that all communities are facing the same issues right now due to COVID-19. His goal is to maintain the village’s services despite a reduction in revenue this year and next year. The village’s main residential services come from the road, police and service departments.

— Julie Hullett

## Chagrin Falls



**Tomko**

Mayor William Tomko describes himself as part “Teddy” Roosevelt with a little Huckleberry Finn thrown in for good measure.

He said he agrees with Mr. Roosevelt’s famous saying that “far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.”

“To me that also means leaving this place better than the way I found it. So far, I think we have been successful.”

He came to office in 2016 vowing to put village finances back on firm ground follow-

ing fallout from the state of Ohio tax grab which left the village and all Ohio municipalities in a budget crisis. The 2008-2010 recession and long recovery didn’t help either.

Himself a well-recognized CPA, Mayor Tomko formed a blue ribbon panel of local financial experts which formulated a plan to restore the village to near pre-recession levels. Today, careful spending and access to state and federal funds and grants is sustaining the village.

Like the country’s 26th president, Mayor Tomko is an avid outdoorsman and conservationist who has worked with and led as its president, the Chagrin River Watershed Partners.

The organization was established in 1996 while the mayor was then a councilman. He saw its value immediately and championed its work, which offers watershed towns riverbank restoration initiatives while protecting the animal and plant ecosystems and scenic beauty of the river.

As historic preservation advocate for Chagrin Falls, Mayor Tomko has partnered with the Western Reserve Land Conservancy to acquire a private fish and game club and property long associated with the historic Chase Bag paper mill. It was dedicated in 1996 and renamed Whitesburg Nature Preserve.

“We are not a suburb we are ‘an institution,’” he said, adding that any village mayor is the keeper of the flame and perpetuates the special closeness residents have to their village and its traditions.

— Barbara Christian



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## Gates Mills



**Schneider**

Mayor Karen Schneider did not have plans to get into politics. She moved to Gates Mills in 1981 with her family, so she started volunteering as a room mother at Gates Mills Elementary School.

She also did recreational activities in the village, such as working with the Gates Mills Improvement Society and the Gates Mills Community Club.

Mayor Schneider has been mayor since 2016. She originally joined council in 1996 to fill Sally Broome's seat when she became mayor. Mayor Schneider said that she sat on all committees in the village at one point or another, so she had a good understanding of how the village operates.

"I love my community. I love the people and I love the volunteers," she said "I would never do anything consciously to hurt my residents, they're friends."

She said that the residents and the beauty of the village are Gates Mills' greatest assets. The mayor noted that Gates Mills is one of the few communities with its own land conservancy to protect land in perpetuity.

Mayor Schneider has several goals for the village. They are working on a long-range financial plan and would like to have a workshop on taxation. The village officials will also partner with residents to work on a master plan for the village, such as how to use its acreage in the future. She emphasized the importance of always keeping an eye on their financials.

Overall, Mayor Schneider said that the Chagrin Valley is a great place to live because of the housing stock and excellent schools. The village offers good housing options and is part of the Mayfield City School District.

— Julie Hullett

## Hunting Valley



**Mavec**

Mayor Bruce Mavec served as a council member for 15 years and as chairman of the Planning and Zoning Commission before taking on the highest position in the village in 2020. He said that he got involved

because he wanted to help his community, such as getting the budget in line.

"All communities need to be healthy and functional," he said, noting that he does not want to make a career out of being a politician. "Some are more of a job and some are a labor of love."

The best part of Hunting Valley is its natural setting, Mayor Mavec said. About half of



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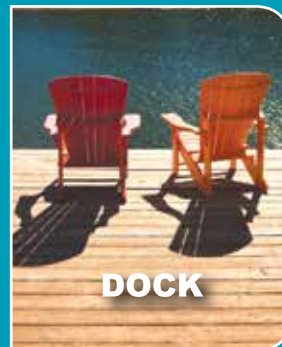
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Continued on page 40



## Continued from page 39

the village is conserved, leaving beautiful scenery and undisturbed land. There is no commercial activity in the village, and the mayor said that residents like it that way.

Mayor Mavec's goals for the village include keeping a balanced budget, being responsive to residents and maintaining the rural, wooded character of the village. The COVID-19 pandemic did not impact Hunting Valley as much as it did other communities because the village does not have an income tax.

The best part about living in the Chagrin Valley is its location, Mayor Mavec said. The Chagrin River flows through many communities before emptying into Lake Erie, leaving the landscape full of dramatic yet attractive hills and valleys. It is convenient to have a rural, residential community only 30 minutes from downtown Cleveland, he said.

"We need to work together," he said. "It's important that the region remains healthy and well run."

— Julie Hullett

## Moreland Hills



Fritz

Mayor Dan Fritz said that his inspiration to be involved in politics started at an early age when his father took him to the Orange Village firehouse. At the time it was an all-volunteer station and firefighters, including his father, came in off the clock for mechanical work for the betterment of the village.

"I remember those older firefighters coming in on weekends. It really speaks volumes for the initial intent of government and public service. That's a big backbone for me," he said. "My dad showed me at a young age that there's more to being a resident in a community than living in a home."

He served on council for 12 years before he was elected mayor in 2019. He spoke of how valuable the residents and the parks are to the Village of Moreland Hills. The residents,

Mayor Fritz said, are passionate about preserving the serene atmosphere of the village.

Residents serve on the Parks Commission and the Green Commission, both of which are dedicated to preserving green space in the village and implementing sustainable practices, such as recycling. There are also various parks in the village, including Forest Ridge Preserve and the Cleveland Metroparks Polo Field.

One of the mayor's goals is to increase environmental protections. For example, the Board of Zoning Appeals denied a variance for a residential subdivision recently that would have increased housing density in the village.

Mayor Fritz said that it is a pleasure to live in the Chagrin Valley and serve as mayor. The natural beauty is ideal for an environmentalist, including himself. He also enjoys working with the residents, the Chagrin Valley Chamber of Commerce and state Rep. Phil Robinson, D-Solon and state Sen. Matt Dolan, R-Chagrin Falls.

— Julie Hullett

## Orange Village



Mulcahy

Mayor Kathy Mulcahy started her service to Orange Village in the position of tax administrator for \$50 a month. She served in that role for 11 years. Then she won the 1995 mayoral election, a campaign during which she knocked on every door in the village and has been mayor ever since. She said that the job is fascinating and a validating career. Some days are long, the mayor said, but the years have flown by.

Mayor Mulcahy said that the best assets of Orange Village are the recreational trails. The trails run on one side of every main road in the village. She said that even people who opposed the trails love them now. She also named Pinecrest, the new mixed-use shopping and living district at Harvard Road and Interstate 271, as a reason to visit. The Orange Village Park with a state-of-the-art playground, walking trails and dog park are key amenities for families.

"I like helping people. I took this job to

help people and they are happy," she said. "[The residents] rated their quality of life as excellent or very good. We have the most committed, dedicated employees and they're long-term and they know this community."

After the dust settles from COVID-19, which has caused most communities to tighten their budget, Mayor Mulcahy said that there are many projects she would like to see started. This includes renovating the fire department, adding a police garage and extending the recreational trails.

She loves living in the Chagrin Valley because of the balance of rural and urban areas, the beautiful and affordable housing stock and the great schools. Orange Village is part of the Orange City School District.

— Julie Hullett

## Pepper Pike



Bain

Mayor Richard Bain of Pepper Pike said that he grew up learning the value of civic engagement, especially during the civil rights era of the 1960s and the Vietnam War. He attended council meetings regularly before running for council in 2005 and won by two votes. His opponent challenged the election results, which went to the Ohio Supreme Court. A tie was declared and he lost his council seat in a coin flip. Mayor Bain ran again in 2011, this time for mayor, and won.

Pepper Pike's greatest assets are its residents, he said, who provide a strong financial backbone for the city. The city's financial stability allows it to offer excellent services to the residents, including nimble scooters picking up trash and recycling near the garage rather than curbside.

Pepper Pike's greatest assets are its residents, he said, who provide a strong financial backbone for the city. The city's financial stability allows it to offer excellent services to the residents, including nimble scooters picking up trash and recycling near the garage rather than curbside.

Mayor Bain said that Pepper Pike offers a healthy balance of natural serenity and suburban liveliness. The city prioritizes planting trees and the Pepper Pike Park is home to a multi-generational playground. The park is also a gathering place for community functions like the ice cream social and summer concerts and movies.



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“Pepper Pike needs to remain a community of choice for families to want to invest in and raise families. We want Pepper Pike to be more than the place you own your house but the place you call home,” Mayor Bain said.

During the pandemic, Mayor Bain said that the city must continue to inform the public about the threat of the disease and remain safe.

He said that the Chagrin Valley communities offer a wonderful diversity of lifestyles and opportunities to own a home, in addition to natural beauty and commercial, retail and dining experiences.

— Julie Hullett

## South Russell



**Koons**

Mayor William Koons bikes on a Burton loop with his friends every Tuesday. In 2019, he put his bike to a different sort of use, riding up to homes and knocking on doors. He knocked on more than 1,000 doors

to win re-election as mayor of the Village of South Russell for four more years.

A bike lane now runs west from the village’s only stoplight to sidewalks in Chagrin Falls 2 miles down Bell Road, which particularly pleases Mayor Koons. He hopes the bike lane will soon span another 2 miles toward Newbury Township.

For five years, Mayor Koons has worked as mayor of South Russell, after completing 10 years on the council. He figured it would be a nice way to keep serving the community during his retirement from area school districts.

Mayor Koons described the village of 4 square miles and one stoplight as “pretty easy,” he said.

“As I tell people, what could go wrong?” Thirteen full-time employees work for the Village, including the police.

He loves being mayor. He said people appreciate someone who actually wants to help them.

A park on Bell Street charms Mayor Koons as a “huge success.” With grants, taxpayers paid only \$5,000 for the South Russell Village Park, instead of \$120,000. The hayfield park with a pavilion, playground and paths sometimes hosts the Kenston Cross Country team, who practices on the hills. “We could have had 103 homes or 103 acres of park,” Mayor Koons said on the topic of land conservation.

Next year, an event at the park to recognize veterans is arranged for around Memorial Day. In 2023, a 100-year birthday party to celebrate the Village’s 1923 founding is planned.

Regionalism, where towns share resources is on the rise, which Mayor Koons sees as a good thing.

— Davy Vargo

## Woodmere



**Holbert**

Mayor Ben Holbert started out as a councilman in 2012 after a neighbor told him that the Village Council could use someone like him. He served as council president for five of the six years on council before deciding to run for mayor. Mayor Holbert wanted to carry on the same vision of former Mayor Chuck Smith, both of whom were interested in economic development for the village.

The best thing about Woodmere, Mayor Holbert said, is the balance between a small town feeling and a retail destination. The side streets appear rural and country and neighbors are friendly to each other. But Chagrin Boulevard

is full of hustle and bustle due to the high-end retail stores, restaurants and other businesses.

“Woodmere Village is the crown jewel of the Chagrin Valley,” Mayor Holbert said. “It’s the best kept secret.”

Three tenets of the mayor’s administration are economic development, beautification and awareness. He said that he is working on how to improve the village’s housing stock by repurposing vacant space.

Mayor Holbert referred to Woodmere as the “gateway to the Chagrin Valley” after a car passes east over the Interstate 271 bridge in Beachwood. He said that Woodmere is the front door to all the other wonderful things in the valley. With big dreams and a lot of creativity, Mayor Holbert said that he wants to bring new ideas and a vision to Woodmere.

— Julie Hullett

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Photos by Peggy Turbett

**17 River Grille is a popular new restaurant in Chagrin Falls. Owner Rick Doody said that visitors come for the view of the waterfall and stay for the food. Featured above is Tuna Niçoise, with seared tuna, egg and pickled red onion.**

# Dining in the valley

By JULIE HULLETT

**H**ungry? The Chagrin Valley has restaurants across its 13 communities that offer a diverse array of menus that could please just about any palate from highly sophisticated to down-home cooking.

One of the area's newest restaurants is 17 River Grille, which opened in August of 2020 in the former Jekyll's Kitchen space in Chagrin Falls. Rick Doody, owner of Next Cool Restaurant (NCR) Ventures, said that the space is "pretty outstanding" with its view of the falls. NCR is not interested in opening chains, but prefers to focus on creating small, intimate restaurants.

"This has what I call an iconic trophy-like location that is unparalleled," Mr. Doody said of the location.

Mr. Doody's wife, Wendy Berry of W Design, designed the interior of the restaurant, which is oriented toward the water. Mr. Doody said that they could capitalize on the stunning location more than previous own-

ers. With a great design and great food, he said that being on the water is a home run.

The restaurant shares 70 percent of its menu with Cedar Creek Grille, another NCR Ventures restaurant in Beachwood. The most popular items are cedar plank salmon, burgers and steaks. Chagrin Falls is a special place, he said, and 17 River Grille draws local clientele as well as diners from as far as 60 miles away. Sometimes people drive from a distance just to enjoy the view of the waterfall in an intimate setting for a special event, such as an anniversary.

**"Come for the view and stay for the food," Mr. Doody said of his newest restaurant.**

The past can sometimes influence the vibe of a restaurant. Marco Stanton, general managing partner of Brown Barn Tavern in Munson Township, said that his goal is to make the restaurant feel welcoming to patrons. The history of the

tavern, he said, is a draw for many of the customers. The building has been in place since the 1930s and was originally a barn. It later turned into a furniture store then a banquet center. It reopened as Brown Barn Tavern in July of 2019.

"It's great to have guests walk in and say they bought a dresser from here or they came here for a wedding," Mr. Stanton said. "There's a lot of history and nostalgia. Everyone has a story from when they were last here, it makes it real easy to connect the dots."

The menu puts a spin on traditional American tavern meals. One of the tavern's top sellers is the Brown Barn Bacon Burger, which is a regular burger with applewood smoked bacon, caramelized onions, sharp cheddar cheese and maple chipotle aioli on a brioche bun. Since Chardon is known for its maple syrup, the tavern works with a local farmer who provides the syrup. Mr. Stanton said that Brown Barn Tavern uses five gallons of maple syrup every two weeks.

A Chagrin Falls favorite is Paris Room, a

small bistro nestled in an 1883 building on North Franklin Street. This restaurant has a romantic, French-inspired setting with exposed brick on the walls and paintings by local artist Rob Crombie. Gypsy fabric and chandeliers adorn the interior of the space. Owner Sali McSherry said that the bistro looks like a charming alley in Paris, France.

"It's not just the excellent food, it's about the experience," she said, adding that there is patio seating and live music, such as jazz and blues, in the warm weather.

Some of the most popular dishes include the rustic French lamb meatloaf, crab cakes and the wild-caught sole stuffed with crabmeat and a lemon caper cream sauce. Ms. McSherry said that there is always a seafood special.

The dishes are named after French artists and writers in addition to family members and friends. There are even a few dishes named after well-known people in the Chagrin Valley, including Chagrin Documentary Film Festival Director Mary Ann Ponce and former Pepper Pike Mayor Bruce Akers.

Burntwood Tavern and M Italian are staples in Chagrin Falls, both owned by Bret Adams. He said that they are opposite, comparing Burntwood Tavern to a polaroid photo and M Italian to the negative of the photograph. Burntwood Tavern offers wood-grilled and smoked food. The restaurant has a copper-top bar and black and brown make up the color scheme, with a few pieces of elegance like hand-blown glass to soften the appearance. Customer favorites include the tavern dip, burgers, cedar plank salmon, Cuban sliders and calamari.

M Italian is an upscale, open-air restaurant that boasts an indoor/outdoor bar, an open kitchen and a view into the Glass Asylum store. This restaurant uses a more polished color palette of white and gray. Mr. Adams said that his goal was to stimulate the senses with the food and the views. Customers enjoy Pasta M, halibut, various entree salads and the shrimp and lobster fettuccine.

"As much as we continue to expand, we're still local," Mr. Adams said. "I'm at those two restaurants every day. We want to be personal. If I don't know your name when you walk in, I want to know it by the time you leave."

For fresh food from local farms, Aurelia is the place to go. Co-owner John Moore said that his brother-in-law, James Balchak, had a vision to support his community. Most of the products are sourced locally or within Ohio. Aurelia uses produce and meats from local farmers. Mr. Balchak's vision is to have a restaurant that leverages local flavor by cooking everything from scratch. The food is always fresh, never frozen, Mr. Moore said.

"[Mr. Balchak] wants to create meals that we all recognize but they're sometimes overprepared," Mr. Moore said. "He wants to give them their natural flavor."



**The newly expanded deck at 17 River Grille in Chagrin Falls offers a prime spot for sipping wine while watching the falls. Owner Rick Doody's wife, interior designer Wendy Berry, decorated the space. Their vision was to orient the furniture toward the falls for a great view.**

The menu changes every day depending on the fresh products that are in season. Some of the most popular dishes include pot roast, perogies, walleye and grits, steak sandwich and brussels sprouts.

These are just a few of the popular valley

eateries. Some of the other favorites include Hunan by the Falls, Lemon Falls, Inc., Cru Uncorked, Yours Truly, Flour and Sapphire Creek Winery. For a complete list of top valley restaurants, visit the Chagrin Valley Chamber of Commerce website at CVCC.org. ■



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# Comfort meets style

**Wendy Berry's W Design creates spaces to match sophistication, elegance**

By SAMANTHA COTTRILL

**W**endy Berry started her lifetime passion of interior design out of her home in 2002.

Starting with herself, then one employee, then two, she now has a team of 30 with two offices for her business, W Design, at 86 West St. in Chagrin Falls and a location in Naples, Florida.

**Hunting Valley couple Wendy Berry and Rick Doody bring style to the Chagrin Valley with Ms. Berry's interior design business W Design and Mr. Doody's upscale restaurants, some of which Ms. Berry designed herself, including his 17 River Grille in Chagrin Falls.**

Photo by Peggy Turbett

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With W Design, which serves clients throughout the East Side of Cleveland, across the country and even in Mexico and the United Kingdom, Ms. Berry brings her eye for sophistication to commercial and up-scale residential projects.

Her passion for the interior design industry started young, she said, noting interest from even when she was a little girl growing up in Lyndhurst.

"My mom and dad would go out of town and I would repaint their house," she said. "I would be the person that had stacks and stacks of every design magazine."

Ms. Berry, now of Hunting Valley, said she made her way into the business by diving into anything she could to learn more about design and architecture, explaining that she combined classes with her own experience in building as a foundation.

"I just got very involved," she said. "[I] just started doing houses, and it just became, truly, a success story of a passion.

"I had an innate understanding and kind of grew up with building and understood how the mechanics of a house was structured," she continued, "and did a lot of art and art classes and a lot of architecture, structural classes that developed into a true passion that I turned into a full time job that I love.

"I'm not the interior designer that went through all of the prestigious design schools," she said, noting that she initially worked on her interior design career on the side while running a family business.

Now well-established in her field after more than 15 years, Ms. Berry, 55, said her W Design team can have anywhere between 30 and 60 projects in progress at any given time, from the framing phase to full installa-

tion or final "button up" stages like finding a missing pillow. She estimated that her team might complete about 40 projects a year.

Her favorite projects include working alongside world-renowned architect Robert Stern's firm for an upscale Hampton style seaside house on a lake in northern Michigan, a home in Bay Harbor on Lake Michigan that she said was a three-year project with 100 percent of the details designed by W Design and a recent project for a Gates Mills home where she had the chance to design in the traditional style.

On the commercial side of the spectrum, Ms. Berry said she and her team have taken on projects of which she never imagined.

"I never thought I wanted to do commercial [designs]," she said.

Starting with just designing for homes, Ms. Berry said W Design has embraced commercial projects over the years, now regularly having its hand in clubhouses, restaurants, offices and even senior and assisted living.

"We've taken senior living to another level," she said, explaining work she has done with Vitalia by Omni Senior Living.

Ms. Berry said her business has turned senior living residences from feeling like a nursing home to a custom-designed home. In working with Vitalia, she said they have helped bring more comfort to the residents.

Chagrin Valley residents Patrick and Gina Finley reached out to Ms. Berry to design one of their projects after working with another firm that couldn't quite capture their vision, she said. Mr. Finley is the founder and chairman of Omni Senior Living.

When she told Mr. Finley she had little experience with senior living projects, he

responded, "We'll teach you," she recalled. "So now I know more about memory care and senior living than I ever thought I'd know."

W Design now has a group within the team that focuses solely on senior living interior designs, she said.

She's also made her mark in stylizing husband Rick Doody's restaurants.

**"We've done several of my husband's restaurants," Ms. Berry said, listing Cedar Creek Grille in Beachwood, Lindsey's Lake House with multiple locations, and, most recently, 17 River Grille in downtown Chagrin Falls.**


"All three of the concepts that we've done for him are very, very different, but they all have a notable feel of what our company is about and what we're kind of known for. And that's all in the details," she said. "We take a space and we kind of give it a foreground, middle ground, background. On 17 River, our background was this amazing view and waterfalls. So, we kind of wanted to look through the restaurant without interruption, but not with it being boring."

There are color combinations such as charcoal green with saddle leather, she said, "to make every seat in the house a seat that felt good, that you were looking at something beautiful and capturing as much [of the] out-

**Continued on page 47**

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**Continued from page 45**

door views as we possibly could capture.”

W Design met an increase in business with many of her clientele working remotely due to the novel coronavirus and stay-at-home orders, she said, be it from their home or from a vacation home.

This uptick, however, came with its own challenges with total remote designing in some projects, Ms. Berry said.

**“Our industry is so hands on,” she said. “It’s interactive, from the designers working together, to the project managers working with the designers, to working with the clients.**

“We’re working with people’s personal spaces, which is something you have to really be careful of, mindful of and be respectful of,” she added.

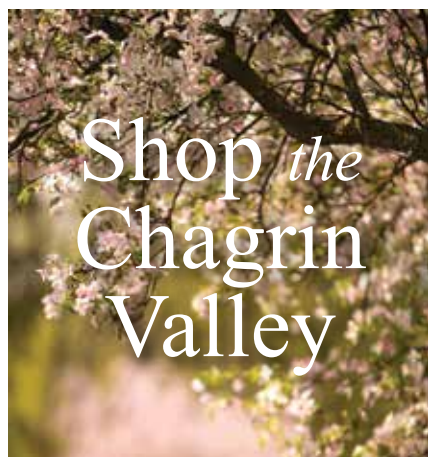
But she and her team found a way and navigated the online Zoom platform environment to continue group meetings and client calls and coordinated with the mailing materials for virtual fabric presentations.

Ms. Berry was proud to say W Design did not have any layoffs and only deferred two internships until the company could fully return to the offices.

She may have started W Design, but Ms. Berry is quick to bring her team into the light.

“I have the most talented, energetic women that work for us,” she said, not forgetting to point out a recent male recruit in the ranks. “An important thing about what I do and why I do it is because of the people that I’m so lucky to work with.

“They work so hard. I mean, we give it all to our clients,” she added. “I always say that four letter word, care, that you just want to make people happy and you want to do a great job and you want to be challenged.” ■



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CSC17

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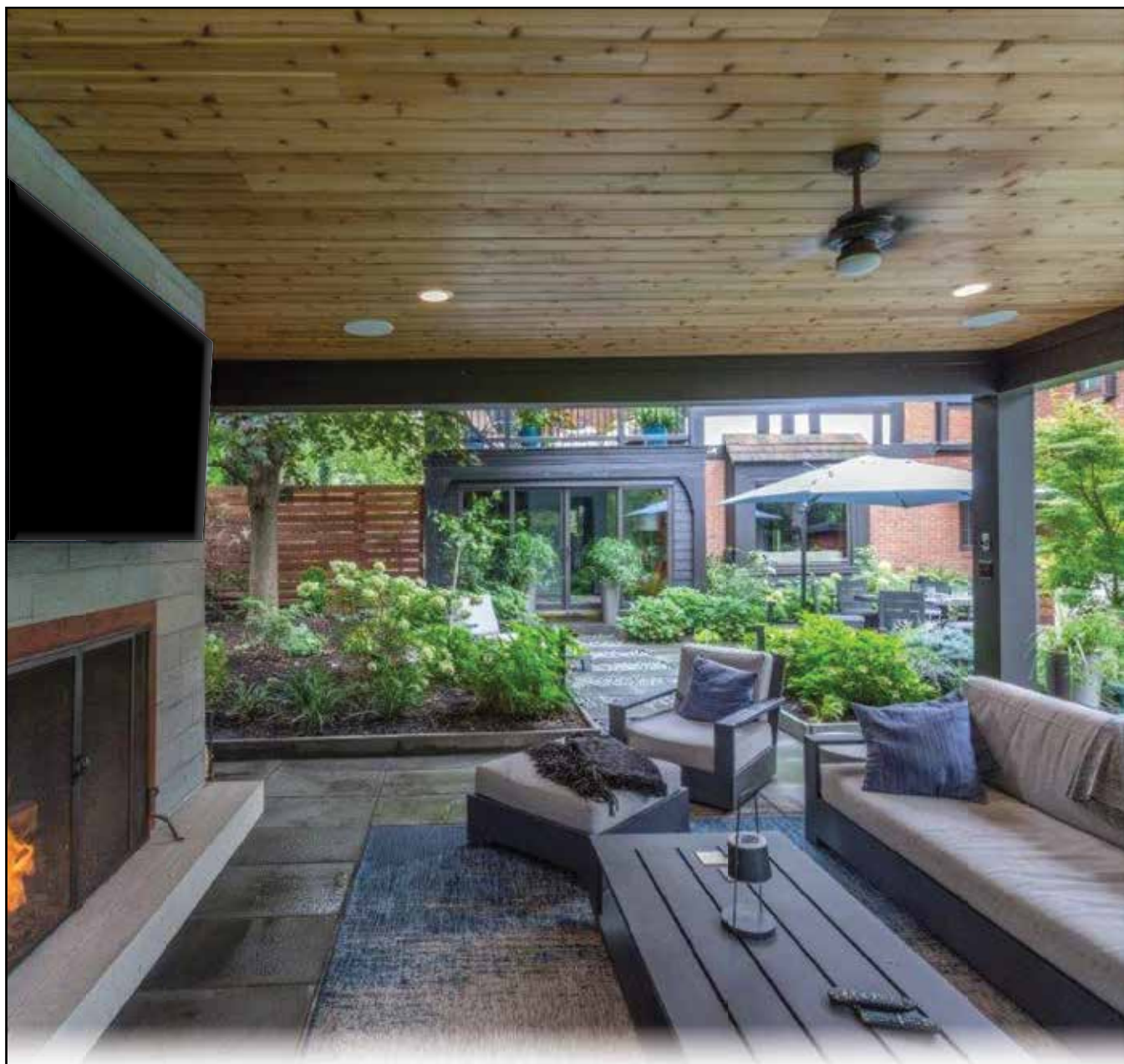
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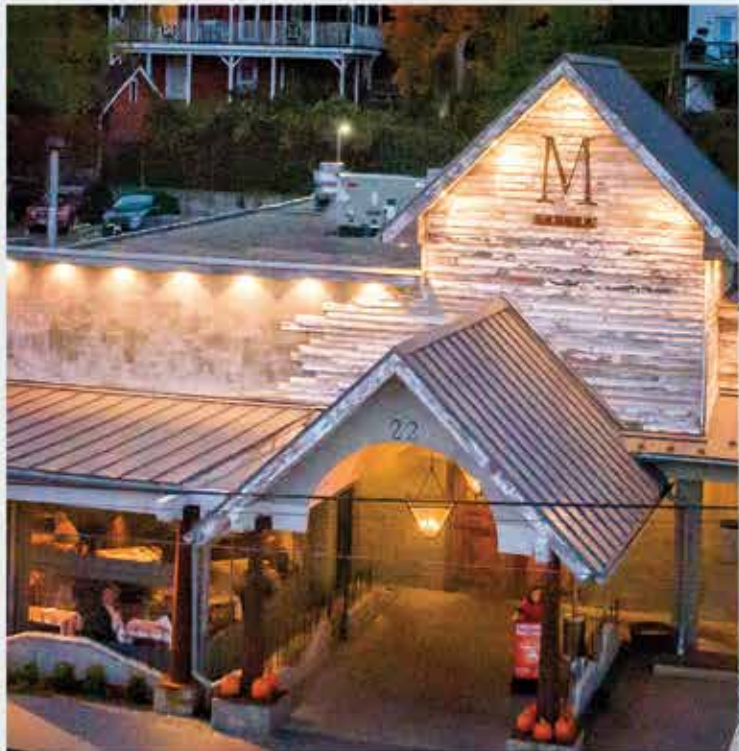
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view menu

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view menu

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burntwood tavern & m italian are part of the chef art pour restaurant group