



BNNY Business

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Big moves at Watertown International Airport headline. Page 5



Work takes place on the installation of new fuel tanks at Watertown International Airport. The airport has increased its fuel storage and is nearing the end of a \$28 million terminal expansion/ Provided photo

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Made in Canada interest soars

WEBSITE CREATOR SAYS SITE REFLECTS PRIDE, LIVING COUNTRY'S VALUES

By **CHRIS BROCK**

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TORONTO — By day, Dylan Lobo is a digital consultant, helping mid-sized companies streamline their marketing operations. By night, he works on his labor of love as a patriotic Canadian.

"I think Canadian pride has evolved into something deeper than flag waving," he said. "It's about living our values."

Increasingly, those values do not match those of Canada's largest trading partner, especially when the U.S. president states he wants to annex the country, calling it "the 51st state," while imposing high tariffs.

Lobo believes that purchasing Canadian-made products is one of the most tangible ways to support his country. "It's a quiet pride rooted in quality, fairness and community," he said.

In 2018, during Donald Trump's first term as U.S. president and when he threatened steel and aluminum tariffs on Canada, Lobo had an idea: a place where Canadians could easily find Canadian-owned businesses across a wide range of industries.

"People would talk about 'buying Canadian' in principle, but there was no easy way to actually find Canadian-owned brands across everyday categories," he said.

So, Lobo created the website, Made in CA, based in Toronto.

"It started as a simple list, just a way for Canadians to make deliberate choices and keep more of our dollars here," he said.

The idea was never meant to be political.

"But tariffs made us realize how connected trade, jobs and identity are," Lobo said. "That moment was the spark that turned an idea into a full platform."

What was once a website attracting a niche audience of a few hundred visitors a day has grown to a platform attracting thousands each day.



Dylan Lobo's website has grown from a niche platform to a site that attracts thousands of visitors each day. "I've always believed in supporting Canadian businesses, and Made in CA is my way of putting that belief into action."

"That tells me Canadians aren't just thinking about supporting local businesses, they're actively doing it," Lobo said.

Made in CA experiences traffic spikes when trade tensions or tariff headlines surface on the news, Lobo explained.

"But the bigger story is the shift to a year-round habit. People are choosing Canadian-made because they see its value, not just because it's in the news. That mindset shift has been the real driver of our growth."

Made in CA is basically a list of products and services made in Canada. "Whether it's a family-run business in the Maritimes or a manufacturer in the Prairies, the idea is to shine a light on Canadian-made products from every corner of the country," Lobo said.

It's a one-person operation and Lobo has no team or funding behind it. Categories on the website where visitors can click on for products and services range from automotive to finance. There's even a shopping list for groceries.

"The variety on Made in CA is almost entirely thanks to our community," Lobo said. "People will try a product, fall

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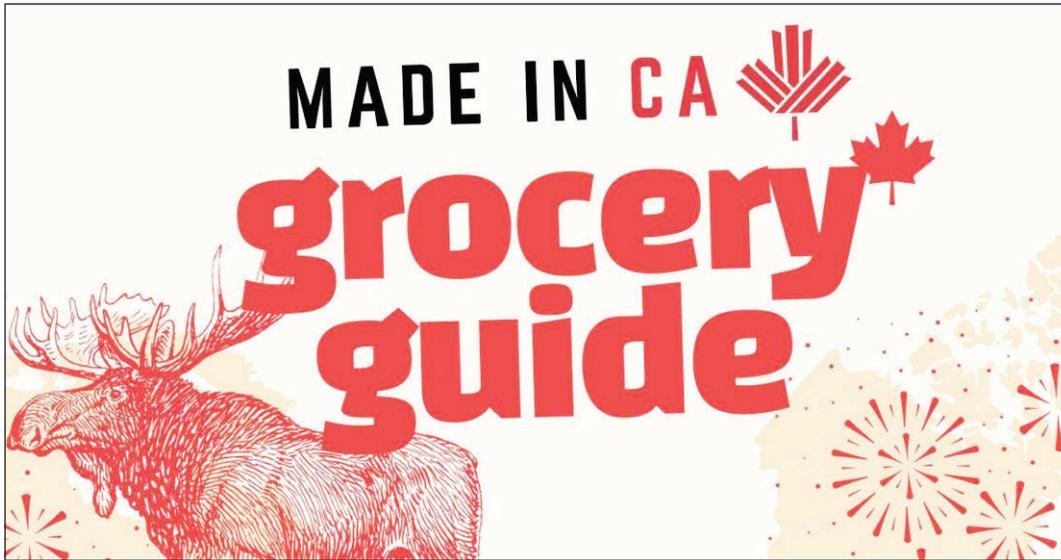
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See CANADA T4



The website includes a list of grocery products — from Bassili’s Best products made in Edmonton, Alberta, to products made by Upper Canada Creamery in Iroquois, Ontario.

Canada

From T3

in love with it, and then send it in because they want other Canadians to know about it. That’s why you’ll find everything from furniture makers to clothing brands to pantry staples.”

Submissions are a regular source of surprise for Lobo.

“Every time I think we’ve

covered it all, a new category appears that I never imagined,” he said. “It’s proof that Canadian-made products are more diverse and innovative than most people realize.”

Lobo said he enjoys putting his long-held belief on the importance of supporting Canadian businesses into action.

“The most rewarding moments are when I hear from a business owner who gained new customers because they were discovered on the site,”

he said. “It’s not just listings on a web page, it’s real-world impact. Whether it’s a family-run shop in Halifax or a startup in Vancouver, knowing the site helped them grow makes all the late nights worthwhile.”

On the Made in CA Facebook site, Lobo advised a few months ago: “You are not failing if you can’t buy Canadian every time. You are trying, and that’s the most important part. Every Canadian purchase is a brick in a stronger



Footwear is one of products found on Made in CA.

foundation.”

“When someone chooses local over imported, even if it’s less convenient, they’re investing in their neighbors,

their town, and the country as a whole,” Lobo said. “Seeing that mindset grow makes me optimistic about where we’re headed.”

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\$28 million project nearly done at airport

WORK ON NEW TERMINAL AT WATERTOWN FACILITY IN FINAL STAGES

By **CHARLES MCCORMICK**
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WATERTOWN — The new 25,000-square-foot terminal construction project at Watertown International Airport is nearing its completion after its announcement last year.

The project, which cost \$28 million as part of a \$230 million grant to north country airports, will replace the current terminal with an updated facility with more space.

According to Airport Manager Grant Sussey, there has been excellent progress made on the project, noting that many internal elements, such as sheetrock and floors, have begun their final steps towards completion.

While an exact date of opening has not been announced, Sussey is hopeful for opening “by the end of summer, early fall of 2025”.

This new upgraded building will offer amenities such

as new seating with USB charging ports, a larger holding area and improved baggage claim space. Other traveler-focused improvements will include extra ticketing counter space and a dedicated counter for rental car services.

Upon completion and integration into the new terminal, the old terminal will be repurposed as a restaurant and meeting space, offering a gathering area for travelers and non-travelers alike. The restaurant is said to offer access to non-airport patrons as well as travelers, facilitated by a connecting hallway recently added to the project.

Local restaurant and bar chain Bad Apple Saloon has been chosen to operate the restaurant space, beating out Albany’s Legacy Hospitality and Entertainment Group LLC. The development of the space will begin dependent on the completed transition

to the new building.

The current project scope is solely building the new terminal. Other future projects, Sussey mentions, involve better lighting installation, paving of the parking area and a new fuel farm to aid in supply efficiency. These projects are not connected with the terminal construction, or the recent maintenance done to the runways, which fell under general maintenance, funded primarily by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

Originating from the Upstate Airport Economic Development and Revitalization Competition, a \$230 million award was distributed to nine upstate airports, including \$28 million to Watertown. Gov. Kathy Hochul originally announced the competition in September of 2022, recognizing upstate airports

See **AIRPORT T9**

WATERTOWN AIRPORT FUEL FARM NEARING COMPLETION

By **CHARLES MCCORMICK**
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DEXTER - Progress is being made on Watertown International Airport’s new fuel farm, taking delivery of the new fuel tanks Wednesday.

This project, separate from the construction of the new terminal, evidences upward trends in utilization of the airport, requiring extra fuel reserves to be brought on.

According to Airport Director Grant Sussey, the new fuel farm is going to “double the capacity” of the current model, an outdated, partially underground system that has operated unchanged since 1998.

Along with the two American Airlines flights that offer service to Philadelphia, Watertown International Airport serves as a hub for private charters, flight schools, air medical, and military cooperation with Wheeler Sack Airfield on Fort Drum.

This new fuel farm serves a two-fold benefit for the airport. As Sussey noted in a press release, not only does the capacity “help maintain adequate inventory during the strong demands of the summer months,” it will also aid during times in the winter where fuel deliveries may be delayed by inclement weather.

The new structure will hold 30,000 gallons of fuel in total, doubled from the current capacity of 15,000 gallons. Along with increasing the capacity, the old fuel farm was over 25 years old,

See **FUEL T9**

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NYPA board sends 20-year Alcoa contract to governor

Increased staff numbers, investments proposed

By **BOB BECKSTEAD**

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MASSENA — New York Power Authority trustees have approved a proposed contract with Alcoa that calls for an increase in employment numbers and capital investment.

The current contract expires March 31, 2026, and the new contract would begin April 1, 2026 at a base of 10 years, with the potential for up to 20 years. Negotiations on the new contract began in late 2023.

However, there are more steps involved before the contract can be finalized. Whenever NYPA reaches an agreement on a power sale contract, they are required to transmit the proposed agreement to the governor and other elected officials and hold a public hearing. Following the public hearing, the contract may be modified, as necessary, and will be submitted for final approval by NYPA trustees and the governor.

Eric Bowers, NYPA vice president of economic development and key account management, made the recommendation to trustees during their meeting Tuesday morning.

"This item is to recommend that the board approve a preservation power allocation renewal for a 240-megawatt award to Alcoa USA Corp. through March 31, 2036 with an option for Alcoa to extend the

term for two additional five-year periods if specific capital investment and employment commitments are met, for a total term of up to 20 years," he said.

He said there were "several key contract provisions" between NYPA and Alcoa in the new agreement.

"The existing contract has a seven-year term that commenced on April 1, 2019 and goes through March 31 2026. For the proposed contract, there is a base term of 10 years that would start April 1, 2026 and goes through March 31 2036. The proposed contract also allows for two separate five year-extensions contingent upon Alcoa meeting certain employment and capital investment criteria. Thus, the contract could have a 20-year term," Bowers said.

He said Alcoa has agreed to retain 500 jobs, which he said was an increase from 450 that Alcoa had committed to in the existing contract. There are also capital investment provisions.

"There is an annual capital investment of \$2 million per year. This will be increased to \$3 million annually in the proposed contract. There are two separate five-year term extensions if Alcoa maintains certain employment levels along with additional capital investment commitments. If Alcoa invests at least \$70 million through 2035, it would unlock or qualify for the first



New York Power Authority trustees have approved a proposed contract with Alcoa that calls for an increase in employment numbers and capital investment. The current contract expires on March 31, 2026. Christopher Lenney/Watertown Daily Times

five-year extension. If Alcoa invests \$130 million through 2040, it would qualify for the second extended five-year term. If the proposed contract lasts the full 20 years, then the total capital investment commitment would be \$145 million," Bowers said.

He said NYPA had a long-standing relationship with Alcoa.

"Alcoa and the authority share a long-standing relationship dating back to the 1950s with Alcoa signing its first agreement with NYPA in 1955. Alcoa was one of the first customers to utilize power from the St. Lawrence-FDR Power Project when it started generating

electricity several years later. One can argue that the St. Lawrence plant was built with Alcoa in mind. In their heyday, they took 60% of the output of the plant. Over the years, Alcoa and the authority have collaborated on a number of long-term agreements, especially during challenging economic conditions," Bowers said.

He said those challenging economic conditions have led to a downturn in the number of employees. In 2009, NYPA had agreed to provide Alcoa with 478 megawatts of preservation power, with Alcoa agreeing to invest at least \$600 million and retain at least 900

employees over the course of the agreement.

However, Alcoa officials announced on Nov. 2, 2015, that they would close the Massena East smelter rather than modernize it and idle the Massena West Smelter. In the process, 487 jobs would have been eliminated. Alcoa officials said at the time they expected approximately 220 jobs to remain following the reductions.

That's when NYPA and Alcoa reached a new agreement in which Alcoa received 240 megawatts of preservation power. In return, they agreed to a capi-

See **ALCOA T11**



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Enid Moore - Owner 226 James St., Clayton, NY

Flights between Ogdensburg and Raleigh-Durham start Sept. 2

By **ANDY GARDNER**

agardner@wdt.net

OGDENSBURG —Breeze Airways will add flights between Ogdensburg International Airport and Raleigh-Durham International Airport (RDU) starting next month. The airline is also planning to resume seasonal flights to and from Orlando in February.

"More opportunities for our north country residents and Canadian neighbors. We're happy to see all these continue out of Ogdensburg," Airport Manager Charlie Garrelts said.

RDU flights will be on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays starting Sept. 2. Garrelts said Ogdensburg picked Raleigh, North Carolina, as the new flight destination because it's a "growing hub."

"For Breeze, that's actually one of Breeze's strongest hubs in the East Coast," he said, adding that passengers can use Breeze's "Breeze Through" option to take connecting flights out of Raleigh, including to Orlando in advance of the direct flights during the winter.

"Orlando is Breeze Through. Same day connection, they can go to Tampa, they can go to Prov-



Breeze Airways will add flights between Ogdensburg International Airport and Raleigh-Durham International Airport starting Sept. 2.

Watertown Daily Times

idence, Rhode Island, if they wanted to, or they can connect, next day, to San Diego and New Orleans," Garrelts said.

The Orlando nonstop flights will begin Feb. 6 and go until April 27. On Mondays and Fridays, the jet will leave Orlando at 2:06

p.m. and arrive in Ogdensburg at 5:14 p.m. In the other direction, the plane will leave Ogdensburg at 5:54 p.m. and arrive in Orlando at 9:31 p.m.

Tickets for all flights in and out of Ogdensburg, including regular flights to and from Dulles Interna-

tional Airport in Washington, D.C., can be bought at a discount by going to the OGS ticket counter on Tuesdays from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

"We've been seeing a lot of growing demands on Dulles," Garrelts said, noting there were 1,400 enplaned passengers in July. "We tripled that number from last year."

To add the new flight, the Department of Transportation (DOT) needed to sign off because Breeze operates with the help of a federal subsidy called Essential Air Service (EAS).

The current contract, which began in September 2024, is a two-year deal. The subsidy for the first

year is \$8.9 million, and the second year's subsidy is about \$9.1 million.

Last year, Breeze began offering daily flights to Dulles and earlier this year introduced the seasonal flights to Orlando, which are separate from the EAS agreement.

Breeze has been rapidly expanding, launching new destinations and routes consistently. One of the main criticisms of Breeze has been the absence of interline agreements, which limits connecting flights. Adding Raleigh-Durham to their network helps address some of these issues, as Breeze now offers its own services from there.

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Converging Line Joins Potsdam Chamber, Opening Norwood studio



Converging Lines. Contributed.

POTSDAM, NY – The Potsdam Chamber of Commerce is pleased to welcome Converging Line as one of its newest members. Founded by Lacy Shatraw, Converging Line is a process-based art studio that

offers individuals of all ages the opportunity to explore creativity, self-expression, and artistic experimentation in a supportive and engaging environment.

After operating as a mo-

bile business throughout the North Country, Converging Line has officially announced the opening of its first permanent location at 24 S Main Street in Norwood, NY. Preparations are underway to transform the space into a welcoming art studio for the community where they will offer drop-in studio sessions, community events, birthday party booking, and more.

Unlike traditional art classes, Converging Line focuses on the process of creating, rather than the final product. Participants are encouraged to explore materials, take creative risks, and follow their own path through artmaking.

While renovating the new space, the business is seeking community support through a GoFundMe campaign and is accepting donations of new or gently used art supplies. Those interested in supporting the studio can find more information at www.convergingline.com or donate directly via <https://gofund.me/0002ae8a>.

For updates on the official opening date and upcoming events, follow Converging Line on Facebook and Instagram.

MacK Maple Supply joins Potsdam Chamber



Pictured left to right: Ian MacKellar with Gavin MacKellar, owner of MacK Maple Supply. Contributed.

POTSDAM — The Potsdam Chamber of Commerce has welcomed MacK Maple Supply as a new member.

Founded in 2014 and owned by Gavin MacKellar, MacK Maple Supply is located at 1139 County Route 35 in Potsdam. The business offers a complete line of equipment and supplies for maple syrup production and produces its own locally made maple syrup.

“We’re excited to welcome MacK Maple Supply to our Chamber family,” said Melanie Flack, Executive Director. “They represent the spirit of our local economy—rooted in tradition, committed to quality, and actively engaged in the community.”

For more information, visit www.mackmaplesupply.com.

com, call (315) 244-5256, or follow MacK Maple Supply on Facebook.

The Potsdam Chamber of Commerce promotes local businesses and aims to facilitate opportunities for member businesses to receive and give quality referrals. For more information about Chamber membership, email the Potsdam Chamber of Commerce at director@potsdamchamber.com or call (315) 274-9000. The Potsdam Chamber is located at 6 Market St., Potsdam, NY 13676, and is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Town of Canton approves Midtown Plaza project tax deal

By TOM GRASER

tgraser@wdt.net

CANTON — The Vecino Group’s long-anticipated Midtown Plaza project took a step forward Wednesday as the Town Board approved a revised Payment In Lieu Of Taxes (PILOT) consent resolution.

The updated agreement, which also requires approval from the Village Board and the school district, includes increased payments for the first

three years and an escalation clause that could boost payments if the project’s revenues exceed projections.

The initial proposal had no payments during the first three years, which is when the building will be under construction.

The resolution approved by the town now includes a \$20,000 payment to be divided among the taxing entities for the first three years.

The resolution also features

a provision for additional payments if the project’s “shelter rent” surpasses \$492,000 after the fourth year, with 20% of the excess going to the taxing jurisdictions.

“This has been 25 years in the making,” Canton Town Supervisor Mary Ann Ashley said before the board voted unanimously to approve the resolution. “It’s long overdue, and it’s time to move forward.”



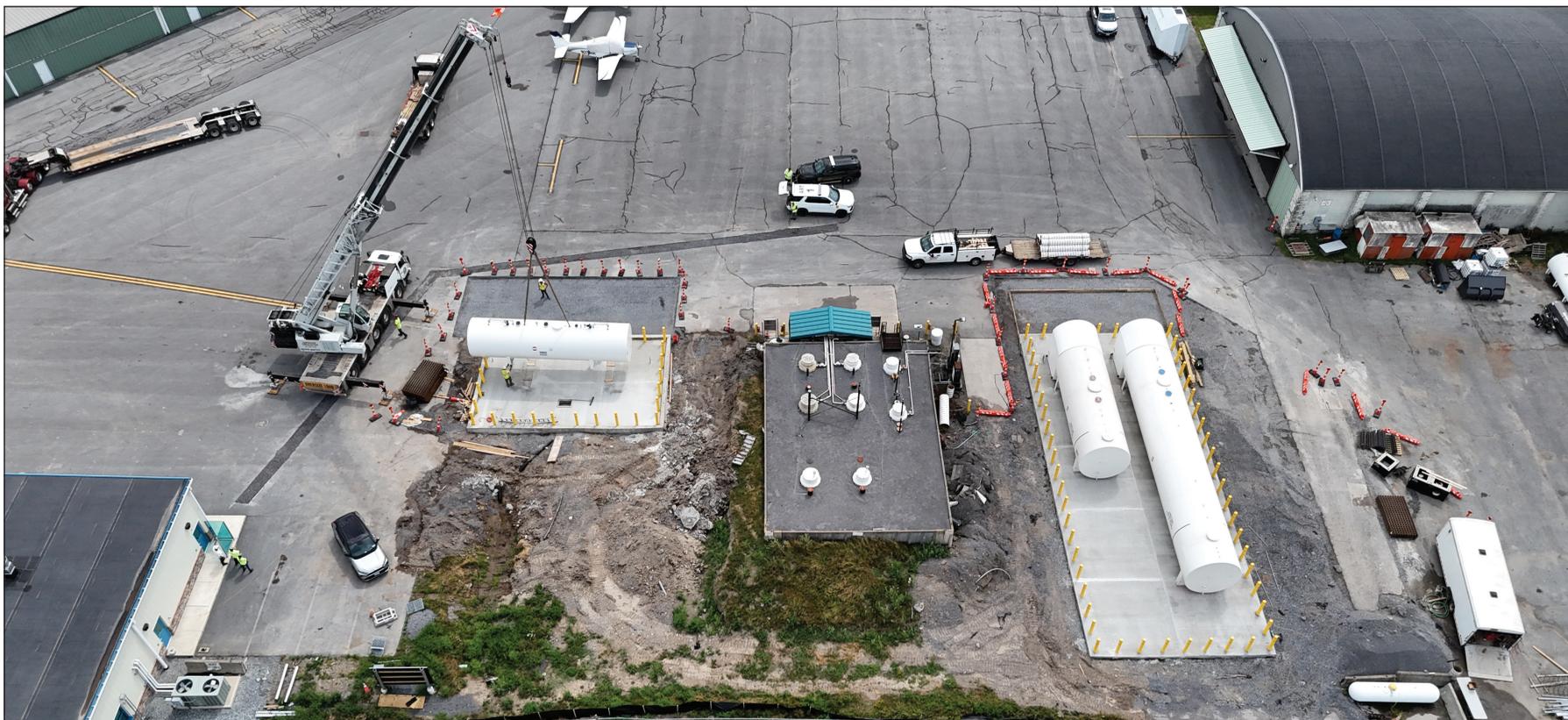
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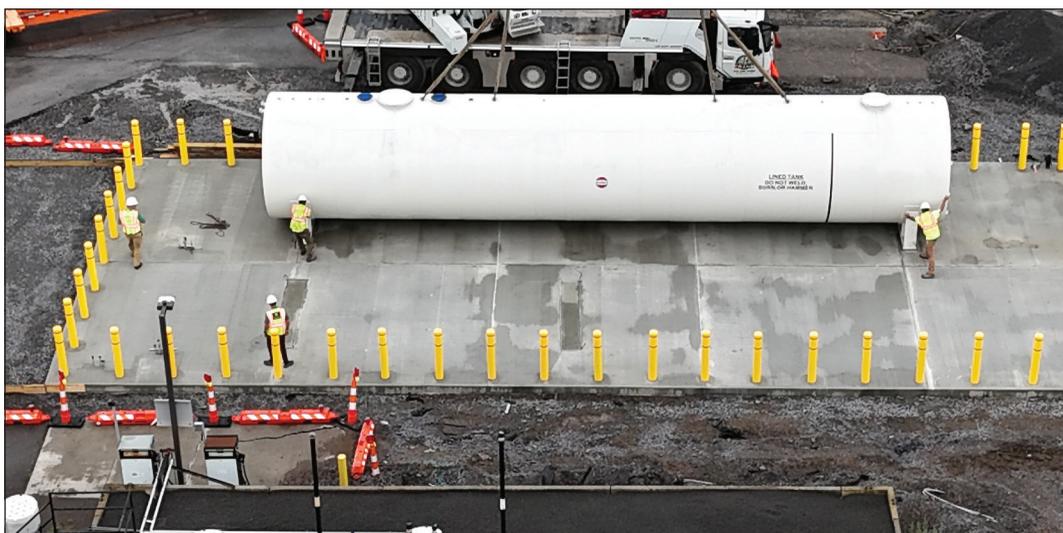
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An aerial view of the installation of new fuel tanks Wednesday at Watertown International Airport near Dexter. Provided photo



A new fuel tank is placed in position Wednesday at Watertown International Airport near Dexter. Provided photo



A crane is used Wednesday to assist in the placement of new fuel tanks at Watertown International Airport near Dexter. Provided photo

Airport

From T5

as “gateways to local economies” and that it should be a necessity to provide a “21st century transportation experience that travelers expect and deserve.”

Gov. Hochul confirmed

the \$28 million award to the Watertown airport in August of 2024, again noting the economic opportunities that present themselves through one’s airport experience. “Businesses looking all over the country are going to judge us by the welcome they get when they land,” said Hochul.

Fuel

From T5

and the degradation of tanks primed the airport for an upgrade.

LaValley Brothers Construction Inc. is the contractor tasked with both Phase 1 and

Phase 2 of the project, valued at just under \$3 million. Funding was acquired through grants from the state Department of Transportation and the Jefferson County Board of Legislators.

Chairman William Johnson emphasized the importance of the project as “crucial for supporting our expanding cus-

tomers base at the airport and would not be possible without our state and federal partners.”

The project construction will continue into the fall, completion anticipated before the winter months. Electronics and piping are the next steps after the tanks are installed, scheduled for the coming weeks.

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Gray's Flower Shop closing after more than a century

FOUR GENERATIONS OF GRAYS BROUGHT FLOWERS TO NNY

By CRAIG FOX

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WATERTOWN — After more than a century in business, Assemblyman Scott A. Gray announced in late July that his family's flower shop will be closing.

The sign in front of the family business on State Street first made it known and then it was later announced in a press release and in a Facebook post.

"It's with a heavy heart that we announce this closure, but it is time," wrote Gray, the current owner and great-grandson of the original founder, F. Burton Gray. "For four generations, my family has had the privilege of serving our neighbors through life's happiest moments and its most difficult days."

Steeped in family heritage and regional growth, the flower shop first began in Clayton in 1918, moving to Carthage and then expanding to Watertown.

Gray expressed his deep appreciation for the community's support as he prepares to close the family business.

"We are profoundly grateful to our loyal customers and the entire community for supporting Gray's Flower Shop for over a century," Gray wrote. "This journey began in Clayton and grew through Carthage, Watertown, and Fort Drum because of you. Thank you for being part of our family's story."



Assemblyman Scott A. Gray announced that his family's florist business will close Sept. 1 after more than 100 years of operation, including Gray's Flower Shop, 1605 State St., Watertown. Jonathon Wheeler/Watertown Daily Times

It started as a small greenhouse and farm in the village of Clayton and blossomed into a thriving multi-store operation and one of FTD's top 100 florists in the U.S. market, serving all of Jefferson and parts of Lewis and St. Lawrence counties.

In the mid-century, the business relocated to Car-

thage, where it became a mainstay on South James Street. Later, the family expanded to Watertown, opening a shop at 1605 State St. that has operated for over five decades.

The business returned to its roots by establishing a Clayton location once again in recent years, all while of-

fering daily delivery service to customers across the region, including Fort Drum's military community.

Through each generation, the Gray family maintained a tradition of quality service, affordability and community involvement, making Gray's Flower Shop a household name in Northern New

York, Gray wrote.

Gray's Flower Shop will continue to serve customers until its closing date on Sept. 1. In the coming weeks, the shop will honor all existing orders and welcome customers to stop in for one last visit.



517 Riverside Drive, Clayton NY 13624 | 315-686-3771

1000islands-clayton.com



Alcoa

From T6

tal investment commitment of \$2 million per year over a three-year rolling average period and to retain at least 450 jobs.

“When I first started 18 years ago, this was one of the accounts I took over. So, this is kind of near and dear to my heart. But, in the contracts, back in the day, we used to have 1,200 jobs. This is the first contract that we’ve been able to increase job commitments for them. They’ve gone from 1,200 down to 1,100 down to 750. Then it was 650 and in this current agreement, it was 450. They lost they lost a plant in that process. It was contentious and difficult 10 years ago. So, it’s great to see the rebound and the recovery all the way around,” Bowers said.

He said the new proposed contract was important for Alcoa and the north country, adding that Alcoa had been meeting all of their compliance measures in the current contract, including jobs, power utilization and capital investments.

“Alcoa’s Massena plant holds the distinction of being the oldest continuous smelter in the world, having commenced operations in 1902. The facility provides employment to over 500 workers, including contract employees, establishing Alcoa as one of the largest employers in St. Lawrence County. Alcoa contributes over \$150 million in payroll earnings statewide. Alcoa actively supports the community through economic development initiatives, such as a \$10 million contribution to NYPA for the creation of an economic development revolving loan fund called the North Country Economic Development Fund,” he said.

Bowers said Alcoa was also engaged in volunteer efforts and grant services “which have provided positive impacts locally.”

“Hydropower from the

authority supports Alcoa’s ability to continue making significant contributions to the aluminum industry and support north country families and communities. This underlines the importance of securing a new contract that promises price stability and predictability, employee retention, and capital investments in their facilities,” he said.

As their current contract winds down, Bowers said Alcoa officials were looking for an agreement with a longer term.

“The number one concern for them was term. Just to put it into context, the last couple of contracts that we’ve had with them, back in 2015 there was a five-year agreement. Then, we went into a seven-year agreement. A longer term allows their corporate headquarters to really see that the state is committing to them and that they can start investing more into the plan,” he said.

NYPA Trustee and north country resident Cecily Morris said it was a “win-win as I see it” for Alcoa and the north country.

“They’re a good neighbor and good corporate citizen,” she said.

Mayor Gregory M. Paquin said it was positive news.

“Alcoa has always been a constant. Having a new contract that gives us 20 more years of employment is a positive for our community. The hope is we can build off of this and create future development, whether that be with Alcoa, Arconic, or any other future employment,” he said.

Town Supervisor Susan J. Bellor said it was “great news for the town of Massena.”

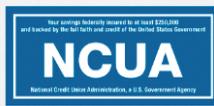
“It shows the commitment of jobs and investment in Massena by the New York Power Authority and its collaboration with Alcoa,” she said. “Wonderful news for all the employees.”

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18-year-old opening former Shuler's Restaurant

By **CRAIG FOX**

cfox@wdt.net

WATERTOWN — Just two months after getting her high school diploma, 18-year-old Julianna Downey is opening her own restaurant.

Downey, who has worked at the Longhorn Steakhouse as a hostess for the past three years, was wondering what she should do with her life just a few days after graduating from Watertown High School.

She decided that running a restaurant was her calling. She's leasing the former Shuler's Restaurant on Mill Street. She's naming it The Porch Light, wanting to give a "cozy vibe" that serves comfort food.

"I just always wanted to work for myself," she said. "I wanted to do something on my own."

When she heard Shuler's restaurant was available, Downey "found the perfect spot," she said. "I just love this location."

Shuler's closed earlier this year after 50 years in operation.

The Porch Light will turn on Sept. 8. A staff of about 20 friends, family members and others with restaurant experience will work there.

Her mother, Cheryl, is helping her get ready for the opening, putting together "a huge menu" for breakfast, lunches and dinners. It will feature a coffee bar and no alcoholic drinks.

"I'm really proud of her," her mother said.

She's only 18, so it avoids having to get a liquor license, her mother quipped.

Julianna isn't offended by skeptics who don't think an 18-year-old can run a restaurant.

"When I want something, I stick to it and get it done," she said.

The mother and daughter have been getting the place ready, doing some painting and removing 40-year-old carpeting. The cleaning of

the kitchen comes next, Julianna said.

Her mother recalled her grandparents brought her to Shuler's on Friday nights when she was a girl. Julianna also was customer when she was still in a stroller, her mother said.

The young businesswoman did some research about the place, finding out that the building originally housed a Standard Oil Service Station when it opened 101 years ago. After that, Baker's was the first restaurant when it started in 1936. It was also Howard's restaurant.

She opened up a drawer behind the bar to show off a plate with a logo of Howard's on it.

The Porch Light will be open seven days a week, with plans to offer late-night food on Fridays and operate for 24 hours on Saturdays.



Just two months after getting her high school diploma, Julianna Downey, 18, is opening her own restaurant — The Porch Light — in the former Shuler's Restaurant on Mill Street in Watertown.

Craig Fox/Watertown Daily Times

Stewart's to acquire four Slider Food Marts in the north country

By **CRAIG FOX**

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WATERTOWN - Stewart's Shops plans to acquire four convenience stores in the north country.

Stewart's Shops officials said the Ballston Spa company is under contract to purchase Sliders Food Mart stores in Clayton, Harrisville, Croghan and Lowville.

Robin Cooper, Stewart's Shops public relations manager, said the company hopes to finalize the deal in the next few months. Stewart's Shops does not operate stores in Croghan and Clayton.

"They've been our radar for a while," he said.

Stewart's officials have been talking to the owners of the four Sliders Food Marts



Stewart's Shops has announced plans to acquire four Sliders Food Mart locations in the north country, including this one in Clayton.

Watertown Daily Times

for about a year. The W.B. Payne Co. Inc., a Boonville insurance company, owns Sliders.

The company plans to sell the existing Harrisville store to the insurance company, which plans to operate another type of business there.

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NYPA asked to approve \$1.5M for Canton innovation center at Midtown Plaza

By **BOB BECKSTEAD**

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CANTON — New York Power Authority trustees will be asked to approve a recommendation to award \$1.5 million to the Vecino Group for the creation of an innovation center in the Midtown Plaza to assist business entrepreneurs.

The recommendation came during a recent meeting of the Northern New York Power Proceeds Allocation Board.

“In this 14th round of allocations for the board members to consider, staff is recommending an award of \$1.5 million from the Northern New York Economic Development Fund to the Vecino Group New York LLC as part of their more than \$30 million Midtown Plaza redevelopment in Canton,” said Patricia K. Wilson, NYPA’s senior program manager for economic development.

She said the Vecino Group plans to spend \$7.5 million to develop the first floor as an

innovation center “to equip emerging entrepreneurs with end-to-end support to launch and grow new ventures successfully in St. Lawrence County.”

“This project fulfills one of four signature initiatives identified in McKinsey and Company’s 2015 economic development blueprint for St. Lawrence County suggesting such an entrepreneurial accelerator generates economic and job growth through the formation and expansion of small businesses. Establishing an entrepreneurial accelerator to help St. Lawrence County entrepreneurs launch and scale up businesses is also listed in the action items of St. Lawrence County’s comprehensive economic development strategy,” Wilson said.

She said the Vecino Group, a privately held LLC formed in July 2013, had extensive experience in multi-use community development projects



New York Power Authority trustees will be asked to approve a recommendation to award \$1.5 million to the Vecino Group for the creation of an innovation center in the Midtown Plaza to assist business entrepreneurs. Tom Graser/Watertown Daily Times

across the United States and has “deep ties” to New York

state with projects in Potsdam, Elmira, Ithaca, Saratoga Springs, Troy and Utica.

“Given that this project is integrated within a larger mixed use development where not all land and buildings are utilized for eligible proceeds purposes, the allocation of fund benefits would reimburse the applicant for a portion of those costs specifically associated with the innovation center related to machinery and equipment, furniture and fixtures, soft costs and working capital,” Wilson said.

She said that what makes a strong case for the recommendation is the plan to help diversify the regional economy by equipping emerging entrepreneurs to launch businesses, and enabling existing firms to expand. She said those factors enhance both resident and visitor experiences by replacing a dilapidated plaza in Canton with a modern, mixed use, multi-level structure that will support entrepreneurs and small business growth by offering support and skills development.

“The innovation center will serve as a year-round draw for entrepreneurs, investors, students and corporate partners, supporting area restaurants, retail and lodging,” Wilson said. “Vecino Group New York has a proven track record with an extensive portfolio of successful, purpose-driven economic development projects.”

The Northern New York Power Proceeds Allocation Act, which became law on Dec. 29, 2014, applies the net earnings of the market sale of unutilized hydropower from the New York Power Authority’s St. Lawrence-Franklin D. Roosevelt Power Project to support economic development in St. Lawrence County.

An eligible applicant is a business or a nonprofit corporation. An “eligible project” is an economic development project that is physically located in St. Lawrence County and supports the growth of business in the state, leading to the creation or maintenance of jobs and tax revenues for the state and local governments.

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Naturally Lewis welcomes new director

By **ELAINE M. AVALLONE**

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LOWVILLE — Naturally Lewis Inc. has announced Joanne Witt has taken the position of executive director for the nonprofit economic development organization.

In April, the organization began searching for a replacement for Brittany Davis, who is embarking on a new venture.

According to a statement from the organization, the Naturally Lewis Inc. Board of Directors led an extensive and competitive hiring process to identify the next executive director of the organization.

The responsibilities of the executive director include organizational leadership and strategic planning, staff leadership and development, economic and business development, community engagement and partnerships, and financial and operations management.

“Naturally Lewis, Inc. is proud to announce Joanne Witt as the Executive Director of our organization,” Mike Jackson, chairman of the board, said in a statement. “With a strong background in education and youth development, Joanne brings a fresh perspective to the work of community and economic development. Her passion for empowering people and building connections will be an incredible asset as we continue to grow and serve Lewis County.”

Joanne Witt officially assumed her role on Aug. 4.

“I am thrilled to be joining the Naturally Lewis Team as the executive director and serving our community in this new role,” she said in the prepared statement.

Witt grew up in Richville and raised my family in Watertown, where she taught English at Watertown High School. She later became a career and technical education principal at St. Lawrence Lewis BOCES’ Southwest Technical Center in Gouverneur and then Jefferson Lewis BOCES’ Bohlen Technical Center in Watertown. During COVID



Joanne Witt. Submitted photo

pandemic, she was promoted to Jefferson Lewis BOCES CTE and adult education director.

About two years later, she became the Director of a Department of Defense sponsored STEAM program, called STARBASE Academy, through which area schools’ fifth graders went to Fort Drum for 25 hours of hands-on STEAM learning that was supplemental to the district curriculum.

“We opened our doors after only two months; a record,” Ms. Witt pointed out. “In its first three years, STARBASE Fort Drum served over 4,000 students in 17 districts and one home-schooling group. This September, they will expand to serve middle school students, as well.”

It was through the STARBASE program that Witt became familiar with Naturally Lewis when the Lewis County Leadership Academy toured Fort Drum and she attended a Coffee and Connections event.

She said in attending events in Lewis County, she always felt valued and “always walked away with something tangible that I could take back and immediately implement.”

“I knew then that I wanted to be more involved with this phenomenal group of professionals,” the new Naturally Lewis director said. “I continued to attend different Naturally Lewis events, and when I learned about the executive director position, I jumped at the chance to be a part of it.”

She said in attending events in Lewis County, she always felt valued and “always walked away with something tangible that I could take back and im-

mediately implement.”

Witt has three adult children — Megan, who with her family lives in Columbus, Ga.; Raeleen, and her family who live in Memphis, Tenn.; and Joseph and her granddog, Biggie, who live in Gouverneur.

Davis’ departure from Naturally Lewis follows the timeline she set for herself when she took the executive director position in 2020.

“I feel that I was put in that role to build,” she said. “Build a team, build a one-stop-shop resource center for business development, build services and programs, build boards who can oversee the direction of big picture economic development, build resources for internal and external operations, build capacity, build a foundational organization that can do great economic development and build the strategy to achieve that.”

“I am proud of our brands and community identity we have built through Naturally Lewis, the economic development brand, and Discover

Tug Hill, the local and regional tourism brand,” she said.

Under my leadership, we went from two staff in 2020, to seven staff in 2025, as we built the programs and services, to which needed talented people to administer and run. Lastly, I am proud that Naturally Lewis has become a model organization for rural economic development across New York state. We focused on what actually works here, not what works elsewhere, and because of this, we are seeing tremendous growth.”

Davis said working with Christie Andrus Nakano, owner of the Human Factor Leadership, inspired her to pursue a career in consulting, with a focus on organizational development and leadership.

Davis said she feels she has left Naturally Lewis in good hands.

“Joanne Witt brings a wealth of experience in the education and leadership field,” she said. “I am very excited for her fresh perspective and to be the person that can lead the organiza-

tion into its next phase — her, coupled with an amazingly talented team, will continue to do great things for our community.”

The former executive director hopes Naturally Lewis remains a “powerhouse rural economic development organization.”

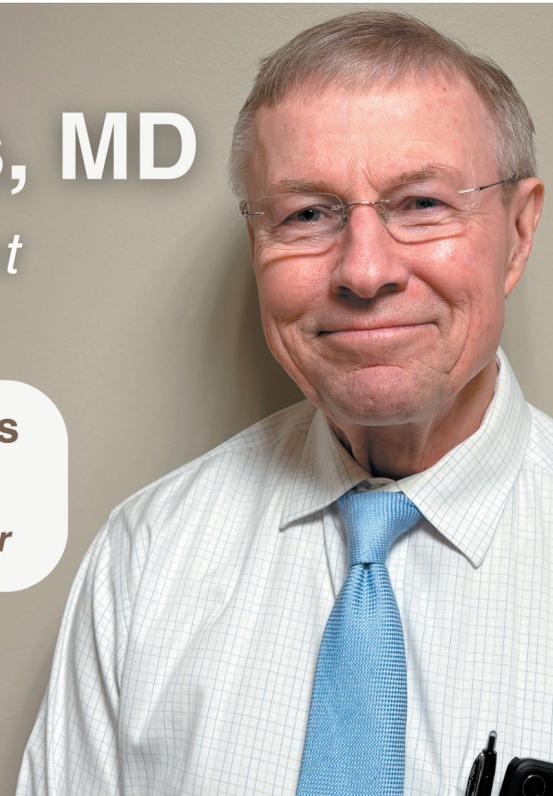
“We’ve made a name for ourselves, creating unique programs and initiatives that fit for Lewis County,” she said. “I hope that we don’t lose sight that what works in a big city, just doesn’t work here — we need to continue to focus on what is already growing in Lewis County and cultivate that growth. I hope that the organization continues to build and nurture partnerships and a great team culture — developing the people and the place — so that people want to invest here in Lewis County. After all, I still call this place my home and want to live in the very place that I worked so hard over nine years to help grow and develop — keep that momentum going.”

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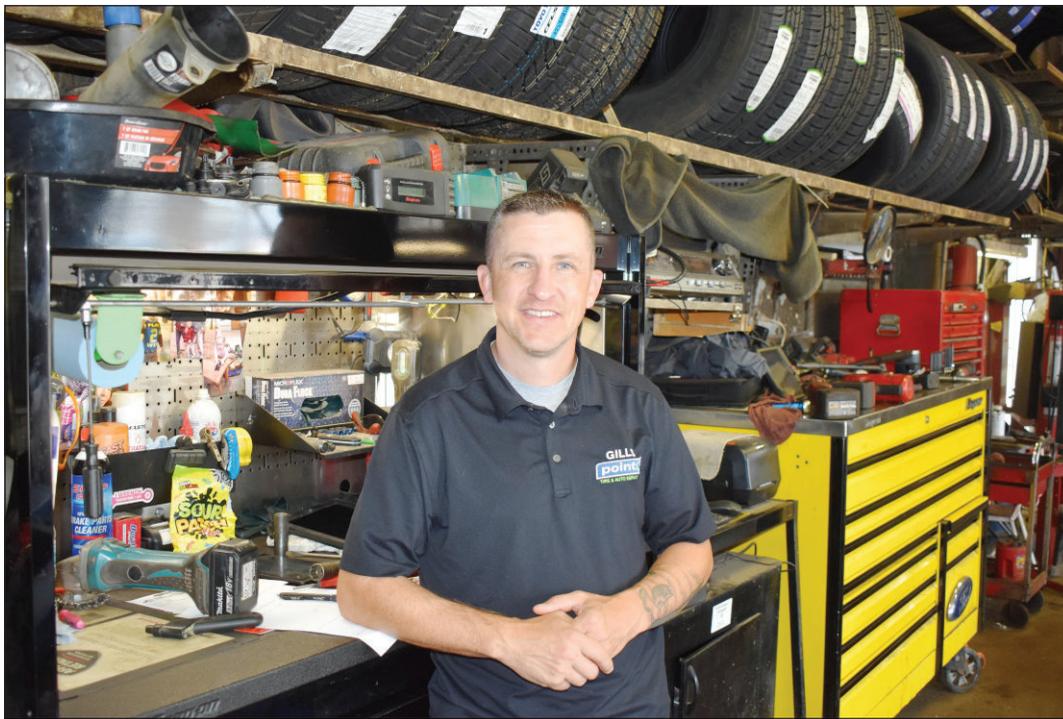


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New manager at Gills Point S Tire and Auto Service



Gills Point S Tire and Auto Service in Malone has a new manager that has taken over the post for Tim Marlow, who worked at the local shop for about 40 years. Pictured, the new manager Ryan Prairie stands in the shop's garage, located at the corner of W. Main St. and Finney Boulevard. Richard Rosentreter/Malone Telegram



The new Ashley Furniture store at the Salmon Run Mall is now officially open for business. Charles McCormick/Watertown Daily Times

Ashley Furniture opens in Salmon Run Mall

By CHARLES MCCORMICK
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WATERTOWN — The Ashley furniture store at Salmon Run Mall is now officially open for business after its grand opening on Aug. 16.

This opening culminates a yearlong journey, resulting in a brand-new furniture option for residents of the area. The 27,000-foot space sits on the far side of Salmon Run Mall, near Planet Fitness and Best Buy.

Customers were lined up outside the store as early as 8 a.m. to enter, owner Shawn Massey said, and the first 50 patrons were rewarded with \$100 gift cards. An orange-and-white arc of balloons greeted customers as they entered. More than 100 people attended Saturday.

Considering the location, Massey mentioned that some residents in Watertown were traveling all the way to Syracuse, or even farther sometimes, to get Ashley Furniture. Having a location in the Watertown area cuts down on delivery costs, which can now be facilitated from here, and travel time.

Salmon Run Mall stands to be positively affected by this recent addition, also boasting mainstay chains like Best Buy, Planet Fitness, JCPenney, and Hobby Lobby to anchor the

smaller stores in between. The Ashley store does not have direct access to the mall from the inside, but Massey indicates this as a good thing, focusing a customer's interest.

Something unique to the space is the availability of a specific patio/outdoor section, rather than having outdoor pieces interspersed throughout the store, a common occurrence in furniture stores. Part of the allure of a 27,000-foot space is the ability to separately show off the outdoor section in its element, as there is the open-air feeling while still remaining fully covered from the elements.

The store itself is state-of-the-art, Massey said, describing it as a "Version 7.0 model." What that means, in terms of iterations that Ashley has unveiled in other locations, is the most recent of models that they have released. The staging and decorating were all done by a design team from Florida.

Ashley Furniture is one of the top 5 furniture sellers in the world, ranked among Swedish-born IKEA and American-founded Williams-Sonoma. The Arcadia, Wisconsin-based manufacturer has been in business for more than 80 years.

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