

NNY Business

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'Hemp house' kicks off support for NYS Hemp



Builder Jeff Gagnon uses the Eready spray system - recently purchased by Cornell for community use - to insulate a basement in Ulster County with hemp lime, a composite of hemp hurd and lime binder. Photo courtesy of Build Green Now

By CAITLIN HAYES
Cornell Chronicle

According to builder Jeff Gagnon, a space that's been insulated with hemp materials stays warm in winter, cool in summer, emits no toxins and is as quiet as snow.

"It's really apparent when you walk into the space – it feels similar to when there's a fresh snowfall, that embracing

quiet," said Gagnon, a design builder at **Rondout Natural Builders** based in Ulster County. "Like other natural building materials, hemp can really transform our relationship with our environments and how we live within them."

In November, Gagnon was the first to use new equipment, purchased by Cornell, that sprays hemp lime – a composite of hemp hurd, processed

from the stalks, and lime binder – onto or between walls as insulation. The system's purchase launches a larger effort, funded by a \$5 million investment from New York state, to build a hemp processing hub at Cornell, a "service center" where New York state businesses will be able to research, develop and prototype new hemp-based materials.

See HEMPT5

Professional Connection
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JCC cuts ribbon on National Guard recruiting office



National Guard and Jefferson Community College officials cut the ribbon on a new on-campus National Guard recruiting office on Tuesday. Jonathon Wheeler/Watertown Daily Times

By JONATHON WHEELER

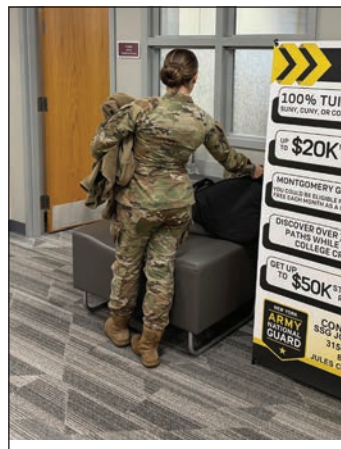
jwheeler@wdt.net

WATERTOWN — Jefferson Community College and the New York Army National Guard cut the ribbon on a new on-campus National Guard recruiting office on Tuesday.

JCC President Daniel J. Dupee II and Maj. Gen. Michel A. Natali signed a memorandum of agreement before being joined by college and National Guard officials to officially cut the ribbon on the new office.

This is the second recruiting and retention office in conjunction with a SUNY school, as they opened one in March at SUNY Potsdam.

“We were always looking to have a presence here in Watertown because of proximity to Fort Drum, the high schools, new recruiting, things of that nature,” Natali, a Watertown native and Immaculate Heart Central graduate, said. “This has always been a pretty good market for the New York Na-



The new office space for the National Guard in the Jules Center. Jonathon Wheeler/

Watertown Daily Times

tional Guard.”

The offices are open to the public.

In the offices, National Guard officials will have a recruiting retention operation at JCC, meaning they will conduct initial interviews with potential soldiers and provide information on the job opportunities

the National Guard offers. Officials will also work as a point of initial contracting, and they will provide retention services.

Natali said this differs from what they do at high schools because they will have people there full-time and it is available for everyone.

Dupee said this is another aspect of the college being a military affiliated organization.

“We wanted to be able to provide that support for them here on campus, which can support our community,” he said.

Dupee thanked the National Guard for its leadership, support, and collaboration to bring this to JCC.

“This event marks a meaningful step and a shared commitment to supporting service members, veterans, and their families while also creating new opportunities for our students and the broader communities we serve,” he said.

House passes \$900 billion defense package

INCLUDES RAISES FOR DRUM

By ALEX GAULT

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The U.S. House has passed the next National Defense Authorization Act, authorizing another \$900 billion in defense spending that will bring the total U.S. defense budget to over \$1 trillion for fiscal year 2026.

The bill passed the House Wednesday evening after some consternation it could fail. The NDAA has this year proven to be a more politically divisive issue than it has been in years past, with lawmakers scrambling to find the support necessary to bring the bill up for a vote in the first place. Eventually, it passed the House 312 to 112.

This NDAA provides a 3.8% bump to pay for all service members, and includes investments in housing, education and child care access for military families. It puts \$77 million into the Armed Forces Retirement Home trust fund, and requests that the Department of Defense establish a pilot program to improve child care quality and affordability on military bases.

For Fort Drum, this year’s NDAA includes a \$70 million increase in funding for national DOD Impact Aid schools, which include local public schools like those in Watertown, Indian River and Carthage.

It also requests that the department provide an update to Congress on the effort to promote investment in missile defense systems like the one Rep. Elise M. Stefanik, R-Schuyler-ville, has been pushing to get installed on Fort Drum.

Regionally, the NDAA awards millions in grants for research projects at the Air Force research laboratory in Rome.

Stefanik sits on the House

Armed Services committee and negotiated a significant amount of the bill, both in its early and amended iterations.

“Today, I voted to pass the national defense authorization bill to support our troops, strengthen military readiness, and revitalize our defense industrial base. It also includes my important provision combating the illegal weaponization of the deep state,” Stefanik said in a statement. “As the chief advocate for Fort Drum and the 10th Mountain Division in Congress, I proudly delivered millions in funding to support the Fort Drum community in the North Country.”

The bill also includes investments in technology, authorizing spending on things like a “Golden Dome” missile defense system and high-altitude precision glide munitions.

It closes down avenues of connection with China, including ending DOD purchases of Chinese-made computers and printers and expressly prohibits companies from contracting the U.S. and China at the same time.

In their breakdown of the bill on Wednesday, Stefanik’s office repeatedly referred to the Department of Defense as the Department of War, using the title given to the department by President Donald Trump’s administration.

That name was not made official in this year’s NDAA; Congress still calls it the Department of Defense in all legislation.

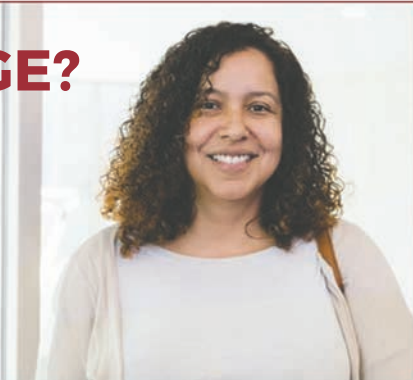
Stefanik’s team also pointed out the number of entries she pushed for, supported or wrote herself. Her provision to “combat the illegal weaponization of the deep state,” refers to an amendment she

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New CitiBus director hits the road running

By CRAIG FOX

cfox@wdt.net

WATERTOWN — In the seven weeks since starting her job, the city's new transit director has been working on making a ride with CitiBus a better experience.

Since Oct. 23, Brandi Smith, under the direction of Public Works Superintendent Brian MacCue, directs and oversees Watertown's CitiBus operations.

She was appointed to job after working for the past five years as the mobility manager for the Volunteer Transportation Center, arranging to deliver the organization's services for clients in Jefferson County and the city of Watertown. Her CitiBus salary is \$84,042.

She became interested in the position after the resignation of Kyle Meehan this year.

"I know how important public transportation is to the public," she said, "to get to their jobs and school."

Smith already has a lot of projects in the works. Most importantly, she has ordered three new buses, which were delayed for a while for CitiBus before she arrived.

The city has arranged to purchase the buses with a program through Washington state to get a better deal on them, she said. They will purchase 29-foot buses



Brandi Smith stands next to a Watertown CitiBus at the transfer station on Arcade Street. Jonathon Wheeler/Watertown Daily Times

from major public bus manufacturer, Gillig LLC, headquartered in California, for \$736,000 each.

The city receives 75% in federal funding through the Federal Transit Administration and money from the state Department of Transportation to help pay for them.

They're replacing smaller 26-foot buses that were bought in 2019 and each

have about 150,000 miles on them. Two paratransit buses are also being purchased.

The new buses won't be delivered to the city until 2027, Smith said.

A long-range project will be replacing the bus transfer station on Arcade Street, near Arsenal Street and Public Square. The city is looking at a handful of sites for its new site, she said.

A longtime rider of the

system, Jonathan Phillips of Mill Street, has attended numerous City Council meetings over the years, complaining that the transfer station should be moved.

CitiBuses frequently get blocked into the transfer station by busy Arsenal Street traffic, forcing riders to wait for delayed buses, he said. Phillips also wants the hours of operation to be extended.

Former City Councilman Patrick J. Hickey, who now serves as the chairman of the city's public transportation advisory board, said Smith is a good pickup for the city with all of her experience.

"The best thing that the city could have done," he said.

Smith is aware that some riders complain about the public transportation system, so she's working on improving the system.

To make the system more efficient, she'll be evaluating routes that haven't changed for 50 years. CitiBus offers five routes and has expanded service to Target and Walmart in recent years.

Smith is also excited about adding a service that allows riders to pay for their fares through their phones. That option will soon be available.

CitiBus has an annual budget of \$2.2 million. According to the city budget, ridership was expected to increase about 14% this year. In 2024, ridership was at 149,000.

Besides Smith, the system employs five full- and four part-time drivers, a transit supervisor and a head driver.



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

Honoring the women behind a 50-plus year NNY skating legacy



POTSDAM — For more than five decades, one of Northern New York's most enduring figure skating businesses has been shaped, guided, and sustained entirely by women. Northern Ice is a specialty retailer providing figure skates, fittings, skate sharpening, apparel, and equipment for athletes of all ages. Today, the business stands as a testament to generations of women whose leadership and hard work built a beloved local institution.

The story begins in the mid-1970s with Betty Hollenbaugh, the business's founder and matriarch. Her commitment to skat-

ers and families across the region laid the foundation for what would become a multi-generational North Country staple.

In the 1980s, ownership was carried forward by Margaret R. Stacy and Peggy Cambridge, whose stewardship supported the sport's growth in the area and strengthened the shop's reputation for service and expertise.

During the 1990s, Catherine Minnetyan guided the business through nearly a decade of change, progress, and modernization. In 2005, she passed the business to Cassie Lawrence, who continues to operate Northern Ice to-

day, proudly maintaining the tradition of women-led entrepreneurship that has defined the shop since its beginnings.

Together, these women represent more than just business ownership; they reflect the quiet strength, dedication, and longevity of women entrepreneurs across the North Country. Their story is one of many in Potsdam, where women-owned and women-operated businesses continue to shape the character, resilience, and economic vibrancy of the community.

Learn more at northerniceanddance.com, or visit Northern Ice at 47 Market Street, Potsdam, NY.

Hemp

From T1

The facilities and equipment will help farmers and businesses overcome barriers to the hemp industry's growth in the state.

"The biggest need is investment in processing facilities," said **Larry Smart**, professor of plant breeding and genetics in the School of Integrative Plant Science in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and leader of Cornell's hemp research and extension and hemp breeding program.

"The aim of this new project is to provide a facility with processing equipment that would be too specialized and expensive for a startup company to invest in," he said. "We take that risk, acquire the equipment and have it ready to go for companies that want to develop new products or try a new process."

The capital project will fund the construction of a code-compliant biomaterials processing building at the Cornell AgriTech campus in Geneva, to house currently owned equipment and new processing equipment recommended by stakeholders in the industry, such as fiber cleaning equipment. The Eready hemp lime spray system, developed in France and licensed to Americhanvre in Pennsylvania, was the first piece purchased. It's now housed at the Cornell Hudson Valley Research Lab and is available for loan to trained installers for their construction or renovation projects.

Cornell will also contract with Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute for the purchase of equipment that can take the raw materials processed at Cornell and turn them into usable building products.

The investment is creating momentum. Cornell Cooperative Extension (Ulster County, with funding from the county, held an at-capacity conference Dec. 9 that drew more than 90 stakeholders – from growers and community organizers to processors and investors – to discuss current research, best practices and opportunities, including the new equipment and capital projects, which are projected to be completed by early 2029.

For Gagnon, who used the new spray system to insulate a client's basement in Ulster County, the investment and energy bring hope.

"This is a whole new approach to the built environment and to the materials we're sourcing, and it's going to take a lot of support," he said. "Having Cornell as an ally, a hub for this regional supply network throughout the state, and the support from Ulster County – there are a lot of exciting prospects on the horizon as far as getting this bioeconomy moving."

'THE STORY IS SHIFTING'

Industrial hemp, with its myriad uses, has huge potential: It can be used as a component in insulation, siding, flooring and other building materials; it can be woven into fabric or rope and pulped for paper products; and it makes for an excellent, high-protein additive for animal feed, among other uses. Distinguished from cannabis by its low concentrations of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), hemp lacks the toxicity of many manufactured materials, stores carbon and grows well in New York state. Proponents imagine a bioeconomy that benefits New York farmers, creates manufacturing jobs and improves the safety and sustainability of

See HEMP T10



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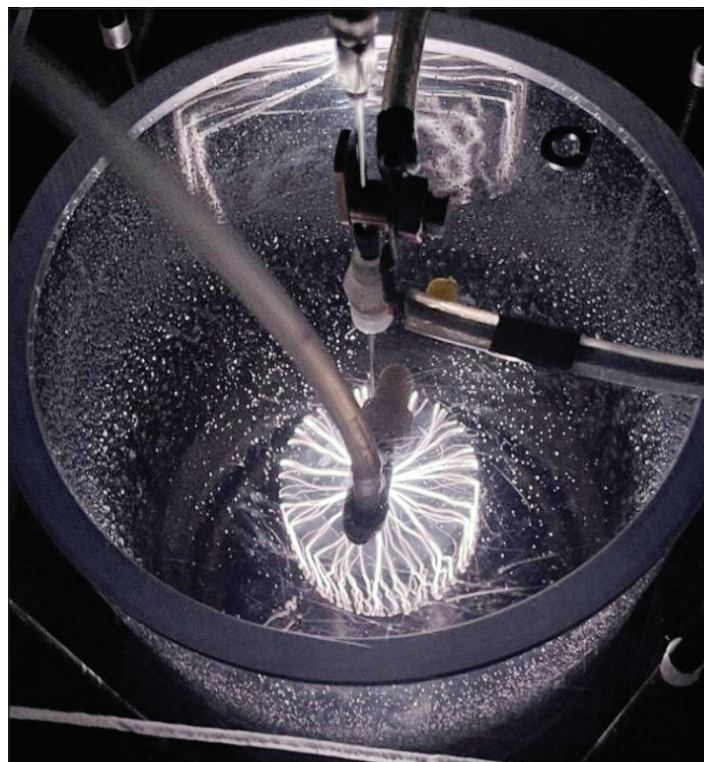
Clarkson researchers develop clean plasma technology for sustainable fertilizer

POTSDAM — Clarkson University scientists are developing a clean-energy fertilizer production method that could help New York farmers lower emissions, strengthen local supply chains and reduce costs. The research uses plasma technology to convert air, water and electricity into a nitrogen-rich solution that can be applied directly to crops, offering a sustainable alternative to today's fossil fuel-intensive fertilizer manufacturing.

Clarkson's project focuses on scaling up a non-thermal plasma spinning-disc reactor that produces plasma-activated water (PAW). PAW contains nitrogen available for immediate uptake through roots and leaves, enabling farms to generate fertilizer on-site. New York farms currently rely on nitrogen fertilizer produced with fossil fuels and transported up to 2,000 miles, contributing to 47 percent of the state's greenhouse-gas emissions.

"This technology has the potential to transform fertilizer production from a global supply chain into a local, low-emission process," Selma Mededovic Thagard, the Richard and Helen March Professor in Clarkson's Department of Chemical & Biomolecular Engineering. "It's about creating practical solutions that support farmers while protecting the environment."

The Clarkson team will develop a farm-scale reactor prototype, conduct a life-cycle analysis and test PAW effectiveness on New York crops such as tomatoes and lettuce. The work aims to demonstrate that on-farm fertilizer generation can significantly reduce carbon



Clarkson University scientists are developing a clean-energy fertilizer production method that could help New York farmers lower emissions, strengthen local supply chains and reduce costs. Clarkson University photo

footprints, lower nitrogen runoff and decrease economic vulnerability for rural and smaller farms.

The project, led by Mededovic Thagard and Thomas Holsen, Jean S. Newell Distinguished Professor of Engineering and Co-Director of CAARES, is one of seven statewide initiatives selected for funding through the New York State Pollution Prevention Institute's (NYSP2I) 2025–26 Research and Development Program. NYSP2I awarded \$650,000 this year to support practical, near-term sustainability solutions that help New York businesses reduce their environmental impact while improving economic competitiveness.

NYSP2I's annual R&D program supports applied research that validates and expands proven sustainability concepts. Faculty and staff from NYSP2I's partner institutions—Binghamton University, Clarkson University, Cornell University, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and Rochester Institute of Technology—are eligible for competitive awards of up to \$100,000.

Funded by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, NYSP2I works to make the state more sustainable for workers, the public and businesses through pollution-prevention initiatives, technical assistance and technology development.

Potsdam Chamber hosting Hockey night on Feb. 21

POTSDAM — The Potsdam Chamber of Commerce will host its annual Chamber Hockey Night on Friday, Feb. 21, when the Clarkson Golden Knights face Brown University at Cheel Arena. Puck drop is set for 4 p.m.

Reserved seating tickets are \$15, with a portion of each ticket sold through the Chamber donated by Clarkson University to support community events including Summerfest, Fright Night and the Light the Night Parade.

Ticket holders who purchase through the Chamber will be seated together in a designated section and will be eligible for prize giveaways throughout the game. Chamber ticket holders will have a one-in-10 chance to win a prize. North Country Savings Bank will sponsor the on-ice Money Grab, where one participant will attempt to collect as many dollar bills as possible while wearing hockey gloves.

Individuals, high school clubs and businesses may purchase tickets or reserve blocks of seats by emailing director@potsdam-chamber.com or visiting the Chamber office at 6 Market Street between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., Monday through Friday.

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Maple, etc. celebrates one-year anniversary in Norwood

NORWOOD — The Potsdam Chamber of Commerce joined Maple, etc. on Nov. 29 to celebrate the business's one-year anniversary and the official opening of the Donald E. Finen Maple Learning Center, a new educational space created in memory of the late Donald E. Finen (1945–2022).

The chamber hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony, where community members gathered to honor this milestone and to recognize the legacy behind the Learning Center. The Donald E. Finen Maple Learning Center was established to honor the lifelong passion of Donald E.

Finen, longtime owner and sugar-maker of Fine-N-Dandy.

Known for his enthusiasm for teaching others how maple syrup is made, Finen welcomed people of all ages into the sugar house and took pride in sharing both the process and the products he created. As a teacher and mentor, he found joy in educating and inspiring those around him — a spirit captured in the center's dedication and its featured quote: "The more that you learn, the more places you'll go." — Dr. Seuss.

"The chamber is proud to celebrate Maple, etc. as they

reach their first anniversary and honor the legacy of Donald Finen," the Potsdam Chamber of Commerce stated in a press release. "The new Maple Learning Center is a meaningful addition to the community, offering families an opportunity to learn about maple production while preserving a story rooted deeply in local tradition."

Maple, etc. is owned by Margret and Jim Finen and is located at 28 S Main St., Norwood. For more information, visit www.finenmaple.com or call (315) 353-2015.



Pictured are Jim Finen, Joyce Finen, Norwood Mayor Mark Tebo and Margaret Finen. Provided photo

Riverside Farm Market Kicks Off Holiday Season with Grand Opening and Local Focus



From the Left, Beth Bergman, Joe Eisele, Koah Mousaw, Madison Laubscher, Jeff Morrill, Angie Huber, Jerry Montelione, Dean Laubscher, Pam Maurer. Provided photo

POTSDAM— The newly opened Riverside Farm Market on State Route 11 opened the Christmas celebration in the Canton-Potsdam area with a joyful Ribbon Cutting Ceremony and the kickoff of Christmas tree sales on Saturday.

The grand opening, hosted by the St. Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce, took place at precisely 11:11 a.m. at the market's new location at 6759 Route 11. The event celebrated the successful launch of the farm-direct store, which emphasizes high-quality, locally produced items.

Owners Joe Eisele and Dean Laubscher expressed their enthusiasm for bringing the concept to the community.

"We're grateful," Eisele said. "A lot of people helped us, and we are grateful to all who did."

Laubscher expressed special gratitude for builder Jerry Montelione.

The market focuses on locally sourced proteins, including beef and pas-

ture-raised chicken from Northern Limits Farm, as well as locally sourced pork and lamb. Produce and a wide array of goods from local farmers, artists, and makers are also available.

The owners also previewed a significant expansion: a commercial kitchen is set to open soon. This kitchen will prepare clean, fresh, and fast breakfast and lunch sandwiches, as well as hearty dinner meals ready for families. The prepared food line will adhere to a commitment of minimal ingredients, no nitrates or preservatives, and non-GMO or organic choices.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony was a true community event, featuring live music from local performers Nick Rycoft and Larry Holly, along with a live presence from B99.3. Attendees had the opportunity to sample items from several local vendors, including Nibbles Snackery, One Steep at a Time, Raquette River Roasters, and Canton Apples.

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Life Undiscovered
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Watertown Key Bank building undergoing renovations

By Craig Fox

cfox@wdt.net

WATERTOWN -- A prominent downtown building will be getting a \$900,000 sprucing up and a new major tenant in the coming new year.

The Key Bank building, at 200 Washington St., will undergo major facade improvements and "a complete build out" of the fourth floor, said Kylee McGrath, CEO of the Watertown Local Development Corporation.

The entire fourth floor will be taken up by the state. The state Office of General Services has a 10-year, \$1 million lease with owners Jake Johnson and Bobby Ferris, who own the four-story structure under the company name Downtown

Professional Buildings LLC.

It was unclear on Wednesday which state agency will be moving into the fourth floor, however.

On Wednesday, the local development corporation's revolving loan committee approved a \$300,000, 10-year loan with the building's owners. The full board is expected to okay the loan next Wednesday,

The local development corporation, also known as the Watertown Trust, had no qualms with approving such a large loan, since it involves a long lease with a well known tenant, board members said.

"It's a solid project," said board member Marshall Weir, who also serves as the CEO of

Jefferson County Economic Development.

Patrick Agan, a friend of the owners who runs Pavia Real Estate, gave them the lead for the tenant.

The project includes redoing the fourth floor and a facade upgrade, McGrath said. The top floors of the building's front now consists of nearly all brick. She has not seen pictures of what the building's elevation will look like.

The work is set to begin shortly after the first of the year, she said.

Ferris, owner of Big Apple Music on Arsenal Street, and Johnson own a number of other properties together. Johnson's portfolio also includes dozens of properties in and



The Key Bank building at 200 Washington St. will be undergoing renovations to accommodate a new lease with the state Office of General Services. Jonathon Wheeler/Watertown Daily Times

around the city and about 730 units across upstate.

In 2022, they purchased the

bank complex for \$3.374 million. It was built in 1970. It's assessed at \$1.4 million.

Project in T.I.ag park needs new traffic study

By CRAIG FOX

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WATERTOWN — The Jefferson County Planning Board on Tuesday determined that developer Michael E. Lundy must complete an updated traffic study for a strip plaza he wants to build in the Thousand Islands International Agriculture and Business Park that he owns.

The county planning board was considering site plan approval for the project Tuesday when it unanimously agreed that the traffic study is required before the 12,000-square-foot project can proceed on Alexander Drive in the agricultural park. The strip plaza was first proposed in 2022.

A traffic study was completed in 2019 for the agricultural business park, but county planning department officials said a new traffic study is required for the project.

"I think it's time to do another traffic study," county planner Andy Nevin said.

The board is concerned that some plans that Lundy submitted to the planning department also show another strip plaza, a restaurant and a con-

venience store in proximity of the 12,000-square-foot plaza. A second study is needed because those other planned development projects would increase traffic, the county planners said.

Three years ago, Lundy first proposed the plaza but it was delayed because the town is unable to issue a sewer permit for project that's caused by some ongoing pollution issues in the Western Outfall Trunk System drainage system.

County Planning Board Chairman David Prosser, who also serves on the Watertown Town Council, said the town is working on correcting the issue of untreated wastewater discharges into Beaver Meadows, a large wetland west of the city limits, so it can once again issue sewer permits for development projects in the town.

Lundy has also made some minor modifications to the project since he first went before the town of Watertown Planning Board to get approval for the project. The town Planning Board is expected to discuss the project on Monday night. The proposed plaza is located in a commercial district.

Lundy had hoped to get the site plan approval completed before the end of the year to beat a state deadline to ban natural gas hookups for new buildings.

But planning director Hartley Bonisteel Schweitzer told the planning board that should not be an issue since the state has put a pause on the ban.

Town of Watertown officials are taking steps to resolve a longtime environmental issue in the Western Outfall Trunk Sewer drainage system.

The town is going out to bid with two projects designed to correct the issue of untreated wastewater discharges into Beaver Meadows.

One project involves securing leaks from manholes and manhole covers that cause untreated rainwater to end up in the Western Outfall Trunk System. The other project involves moving a town pipe that enters the city's wastewater treatment facility so that it re-enters the plant in another location. That \$300,000 project will prevent discharges into outfall trunk system, Town Supervisor Joel R. Bartlett said.

The town's engineering con-



Developer Mike Lundy speaks ahead of the groundbreaking ceremony for an egg hatchery in June 2022. Watertown Daily Times

sultant, BCA Associates, is designing both projects. The bids will open on Dec. 13. The Town Council will review the bids and then vote on them that night, Bartlett said.

The projects would be completed "as soon as possible," Bartlett said.

Two years ago, the town received a consent order from the state Department of Environmental Conservation to stop issuing sewer permits until it corrected environmental violations, causing a handful of development projects to be delayed in the town.

But town development will be back on track once the two projects are completed, Bartlett said.

"They'll certainly be ready to go in the spring," he said.

The city has been dealing with its own DEC consent order and coming up with an "inflow and infiltration" plan to correct the environmental issues

According to the two consent orders, the town and the city were required to put plans in place to account for removal of infiltration/inflow equal to three times the anticipated flow from any new sanitary connections.

Until recently, construction of a Circle K convenience store on state Route 12F was in jeopardy because the sewer permit could not be issued. However, under that 3-1 formula, the city was able to approve the sewer permit for that project.

The city has taken a series of steps, including replacing 72 manhole covers and sewer section fixes, to help prevent the discharges. The city also hopes to obtain a \$10 million state grant to reduce inflow and infiltration and "structural vulnerabilities" in the WOTS drainage system.

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Solar farm hearing draws standing room only crowd

By **BOB BECKSTEAD**

bbeckstead@wdt.net

MASSENA — It was standing room only in the Massena Town Hall meeting room for a public hearing to take comments on a proposed 200-megawatt solar facility in the towns of Massena and Brasher.

The public hearing to take comments on the application and draft permit was the next step in the approval process for the Two Rivers Solar Farm LLC. Boralex is the project developer.

“Your feedback helps shape ORES’s (Office of Renewable Energy Siting and Electric Transmission’s) final decision on the application,” said Henry James Joseph, the administrative law judge who presided over the public hearing.

The hearing drew a mix of positive comments and concerns.

Eric J. Gustafson, attorney for the town of Massena and Massena Electric Department, said one of his concerns was the lack of a road use agreement in the draft permit conditions.

“From the town’s perspective, it’s concerning. The applicant has made it clear that they intend on entering a road use agreement. I don’t suspect that they will go back on their word in any way. I have no reason to believe that, but it’s disconcerting to the town,” Gustafson said.

St. Lawrence County Planning Director Jason C. Pfotenhauer

said the county’s concern is the use of agricultural land.

“While we applaud the efforts of the applicant to develop away from prime agricultural land as much as possible, it appears that approximately 305 acres, or 9.6% of the facility footprint will still consume prime agricultural land, and we would just like to encourage the developer to reduce this consumption of prime agricultural land,” he said.

Scott Hilyard, business manager for Laborers Local 1822, said they support entering into projects like the Two Rivers Solar Farm. The project would create approximately 150 jobs during construction.

“I want to thank the team at Boralex for their commitment to utilizing our local labor workforce” who would be paid a “good living wage and benefits for themselves,” he said.

Several members of the Amish community also attended the hearing, with one reading a statement from the community indicating they did not support the project.

“The undersigned are writing to express our concerns regarding the solar project being placed in the township of the Massena, Brasher and Bombay surrounding area. There are family’s homes, working farms and wetlands and have been cleared and brought back to life by hard-working community mem-



It was standing room only for a public hearing to take comments on the proposed Two Rivers Solar Facility in the towns of Massena and Brasher. Bob Beckstead/Watertown Daily Times

bers who depend on the land,” he said.

He said they support renewable energy, but believed the project would not benefit the local community, and they had not seen an impact statement to show the protections and benefits for agriculture districts.

“These all should be considered before any decision is made,” he said.

Timothy Joannes said he owns a farm in Helena and supported the proposal. He said they tried milking cows, but it was difficult making a living, and using some of his land for the project could be beneficial to the family.

“This was the opportunity for us to keep the farm in the family and still grow crops,” he said.

Massena Fire Chief Thomas C. Miller said he was concerned that they had not heard from Boralex regarding training and specialized equipment they would need.

“It’s very concerning to us, but I’m understanding it’s in the works. Hopefully that meeting will be set up quickly,” he said.

Miller said he was also concerned that the solar project would spell the end for the Cedar View Golf Course, which had raised between \$25,000 and \$30,000 a year for the fire department.

“The Cedar View Golf Course is a huge fundraiser for the department,” he said.

Curran Renewable Energy owner Patrick Curran said he

welcomed the project at a time when others were leaving the area.

“If we don’t start bringing in some business that will actually help offset the taxes that we’re all going to be paying, we’re going to see a lot more people leaving here,” he said.

Brasher Town Supervisor Mark A. Peets also supported the project, in part because landowners could lease some of their property to Boralex.

“Although some today think it takes up some of the space, if you were to go to some of these farms today, you would see that some of that land is not being used right now,” he said. “I believe the folks that are using some of this land will still be using the land around it.”

Denise Tyo, however, opposed the project.

“I actually believe this is going to decimate our environment. I don’t think the jobs that come in are going to last more than a year. They may have a few left, but the wipe out of wetlands, trees, where flora and fauna and creatures live, that’s a huge amount of land you’re talking about,” she said. “I agree with the Amish. I just see this as a company coming in to make their money, and we’re going to be left with creatures wiped out, birds wiped out, wetlands wiped out, beauty wiped out, and those are the things that are important to me.”

Hemp

From T5

the materials around us.

But it’s been a rough road for farmers and businesses working to establish a New York state industry. Many hemp growers entered the cannabidiol (CBD) market when it exploded in 2018 but then suffered two years later when that market crashed. The market changed again after New York state legalized recreational cannabis in 2021, with many switching to THC-producing varieties, but farmers and pro-

cessors have struggled with regulatory uncertainty and permitting.

Cornell largely rode the wave with the industry, Smart said, initially working to develop cultivars for grain and fiber markets and helping improve the viability of the crop for New York. In 2018, researchers pivoted to help with CBD hemp – setting out to learn about the variety’s biology and production and passing on the knowledge through outreach and extension all over the state. Now, with fewer in the CBD market, and because cannabis remains illegal at the federal level,

Cornell researchers have shifted focus again, developing cultivars and processes that would help stakeholders break into the building materials, textile fiber and animal feed markets.

Throughout it all, the potential for and grassroots interest in an industrial hemp market has remained.

“Up to this point, [taking on hemp] has been presented as a risk, so many have stayed away from it,” said Henry Gage, community organizer, senior project manager for the nonprofit **Build Green Now** and former president of the U.S. Hemp Builders Association. “But

the story is shifting, this year in particular, and I think going into next year, that’s when you’re really going to see things start to happen.”

Gage sees Cornell’s new facility and equipment as a catalyst. With CCE specialists, he and his organization helped host a training in September to use the new Eready spray system; he plans more trainings in 2026 and expects interest from contractors across the state. Gage is also working to help communities manage hemp building projects and navigate barriers through a platform called **Voices for Progress**, which he launched at

the CCE conference on Dec. 9.

With the new funding, Smart said he’s most excited for companies he’s seen struggle to get a foothold in New York state. He gave as an example **Hempitecture**, which was a Grow-NY winner in 2022 and has received support from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, but still faces hurdles. The company manufactures a hemp-based insulation, a direct replacement for pink fiberglass, but they currently make the product in Idaho, closer to their hemp supply, which is grown in Montana.

Watertown Chamber of Commerce appoints new executive director

By **CRAIG FOX**
cfox@wdt.net

WATERTOWN — The Greater Watertown-North Country Chamber of Commerce has a new leader.

The chamber announced Friday that Kaylee Millward was appointed as its executive director.

For the past three years, Millward has served as the economic and tourism development specialist at Naturally Lewis.

“We are confident in Kaylee’s skills, talents and experience to help drive the organization forward,” said Max DelSignore, chair of the Chamber’s board of directors. “With this opportunity to lead, we believe Kaylee will help guide the evolution of the Chamber as a steady-



Kaylee Millward will serve as the new Greater Watertown-North Country Chamber of Commerce executive director. Provided photo

ing presence and valuable resource to the community.”

During her tenure, she led outreach and engagement strategies for Naturally Lewis, Inc. and its administered entities, Lewis County Chamber of Commerce, Lewis County Industrial Development Agency, and the Lewis County Development Corporation. She has direct experience in cultivation and stewardship of business relationships, membership strategies and collaboration with community partners and stakeholders.

Millward will be responsible for management of the Chamber’s key programs, membership recruitment and retention, creative marketing strategies and establishing deeper relationships

with community businesses and organizations.

“I care deeply about the north country and the people and the businesses that make this community what it is. There’s a lot of potential here, and I’m looking forward to listening, collaborating, and working alongside our members and partners to continue building on the strong foundation the Chamber has established,” Millward said.

Before joining Naturally Lewis in her current role, Millward was a marketing intern with the organization.

She earned a master’s degree in business administration from The College of Saint Rose in 2023.



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Airline seeks students for mentoring partnership

By **BOB BECKSTEAD**

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MASSENA — Boutique Air is looking for local students for a new mentoring program.

Boutique Air Director of Operations Nadim El Khoury pitched the airline's proposal to the Massena Town Board and asked for their assistance in moving it forward. Boutique Air is the town's Essential Air Service provider at Massena International Airport.

He said they would start in Massena and expand to other schools in the future.

"We have a small idea. We're trying to bring to the town a mentorship idea here," El Khoury said. "Everybody knows what we do. We do fly to Boston from here, back and forth two times per day. We serve the community. We're part of the community. Since we like to be here and we like to be part of the community, we would like to start a mentorship to the youth."

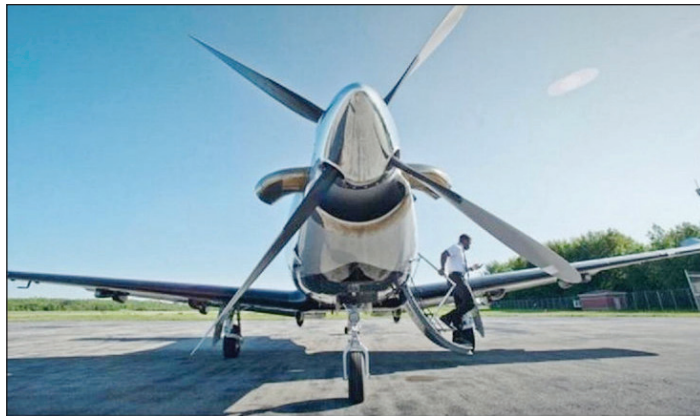
He said the idea originated when they hired a new pilot who lives in Massena. He said the pilot suggested they approach the high school to gauge interest.

"One day he's like, why don't we approach the high school? Why don't we approach the people that have studied here?" El Khoury said.

"We're proud that we have someone from Massena and he lived here and he flies for us to start his career. He's like, why don't we help people here and guide them through a new idea that you have a career you can build into through the aviation world?" El Khoury said.

El Khoury said the program could help students decide their career path after they graduate from high school.

"I know when I went to school and a lot of us went to school not knowing what we do in our life. We have no clue what's going on, no mentorship, no guidance. We don't know where we're going to be, what



Boutique Air is looking for local students for a new mentoring program. Boutique Air is the town of Massena's Essential Air Service provider at Massena International Airport. Watertown Daily Times

we're going to be doing, our next step," he said.

He said the mentoring program can cover a range of positions that are available with Boutique Air.

"We can explain to them what aviation is, and aviation is not one department. Aviation is like a huge department. You can go from maintenance to being a pilot, corporate technology, customer service. There's a lot of aspects there, not just one side," El Khoury said. "I'm a pilot, too, but the goal is to present all the options that you can do in the aviation industry."

He said that could include class trips to the airport "to show them what we do, how the things are operating, customer service, the airplane. They can see stuff like that," he said.

But, he said, the question was where do they start, and he said they were looking for guidance from the town board.

"The whole idea is we need your help to give us access and to guide us through your community and we do will do the work. We'll do the mentorship," he said. "It's good for us to do something good and it literally doesn't cost any money. We're not asking for money. This is literally just goodwill work. It's great for everyone."

Town Supervisor Susan J. Bellor suggested that he con-

tact Massena Central School Superintendent Ronald P. Burke to start the ball rolling. She said he could also present the plan to the district's school board.

"I can't speak for them, but that could be a likely process," she said.

JCC Chemistry Students Conduct Advanced Research at Clarkson University

Chemistry students at Jefferson Community College (JCC) recently gained advanced, hands-on research experience through a collaborative project with Clarkson University. As part of their Honors Program chemistry research, students extracted pectin from fruit in Jefferson's laboratories under the guidance of Instructor Rabab Aoun, Ph.D., to explore how this natural material can enhance aerogels used in applications such as wound dressings, food gels, and agriculture.

Building on their on-campus work, Jefferson students visited Clarkson University's Science Center to continue their research in a university-level laboratory environment. In Professor Silvana Andreescu's lab and under the mentorship of Clarkson graduate student Jehad Abdelnabi, students conducted experiments using the pectin they produced at Jefferson and were able to work with advanced scientific instrumentation.

The collaboration provided students with exposure to real-world applications of sus-

tainable materials research while strengthening foundational lab skills, including the use of infrared (IR) spectroscopy for product analysis. The experience also allowed students to explore pathways for future study and careers in STEM fields.

"Providing meaningful, hands-on learning is central to our mission," said Daniel J. Dupee, II, President. "This collaboration with Clarkson University gives our students direct access to advanced research environments and reinforces the power of partnerships in strengthening educational opportunities across the North Country."

"This project showcases how our undergraduate students can engage in authentic scientific inquiry," said Donna Stevenson, Associate Vice President of STEM, Health Professions, and Business. "By beginning their research at Jefferson and then expanding it in Clarkson's laboratories, students gain both the foundational skills and the broader perspective needed to succeed in STEM pathways."

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Ellis Auto recognized by Donate Life NYS

By ALEXANDER VIOLO

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MALONE — This week an auto dealership in the village was recognized for their efforts to promote registration for organ, eye, and tissue donations.

Last week, Malone's Ellis Automotive was recognized for their community leadership receiving the "Dealer of the Year" award from Donate Life New York State.

Donate Life NYS and New York State Automobile Dealers Association partnered to host the inaugural 'Dealer of the Year' award to inspire a friendly statewide competition between auto dealerships to promote organ donation registration in their communities, according to a press release from Donate Life NYS, and since 80 percent of New Yorkers register as organ donors through the Department of Motor Vehicles, auto dealers are important places to increase registration efforts.

Among dozens of participating dealerships, Ellis Automotive went above and beyond and



Ellis Automotive, in the village of Malone, was recognized for their efforts in promoting organ donation registration, Thursday, receiving the "Dealer of the Year" award from Donate Life New York State. Provided photo

were celebrated.

According to Jason Ellis, president of Ellis Automotive Inc., he got involved with the effort through the state dealers association.

"Donate Life made a presentation to the auto dealer board, which I am on, to get dealers involved in helping out," he said, adding a Malone resident, Jodi

Andrews passed away in 2023 donating her organs to help save lives, "The way they portrayed the message to me kind of really hit home, it was really top of mind for me and it spoke to me, their message, how New York State has a lot of people waiting for organs and very few donors signed up."

"Thanks to the work of Do-

nate Life NYS and partners like Ellis Automotive, Franklin County's organ donor registration rate increased by 6 percent this year," the release said.

"It seems like an easy thing to do, if you don't have that heart on your license your not an organ donor so I wanted to get involved with this," Ellis said, "We try to pick something every month to promote, a charity or an organization that somebody in the store is connected to. April was donate life month and we chose to get on board with the program during April."

Ellis Auto, engaged with the community through several channels, including radio advertisements, fundraising efforts, and social media, according to Ellis, who said the dealership's staff supported the initiative by sharing organ donation resources in their emails and by wearing Donate Life shirts and pins to work each day throughout Donate Life Month in April.

"My team did an awesome job they jumped right on it and we promoted the heck out of it, signed up donors, we raised money, did raffles and just go the word out," he said, "It wasn't just straight up money raised or the number of people you signed up it was also how successfully you promoted the program. Everything we did, every advertisement we did we had it on, every post we put on Facebook had a reference to Donate Life on it with a QR code. That's what the organization saw and that's what they were acknowledging us for."

Ellis said efforts like promoting people to register as organ donors are ways to support the community.

"It's just a way to give back, whether it's toy donations around Christmas, or an event for back to school supplies for kids, whatever somebody on the staff thinks is worth doing we all get behind it and do it," he said.

Assemblyman Michael S. Cashman, D-Plattsburgh, was on hand for Thursday's event in the village.

"Every person who enrolls in the registry has the potential to save eight lives through organ donation and impact 75 others

through eye and tissue donation. I can think of few other ways that someone can have such a profound impact on others' lives," Cashman said in the release, "Ellis Automotive President Jason Ellis and his remarkable staff deserve high praise for their efforts to save and heal lives."

Nearly 8,000 New Yorkers are currently on the waitlist for a life-changing organ donation, according to the release, and a decade ago the percentage of eligible registered donors was 23%.

Last year, New York passed a health milestone when, for the first time, the majority of age-eligible New Yorkers were registered organ donors, the release stated.

"As recipients of the inaugural Donate Life Dealer of the Year Award, Dealer Principal Jason Ellis and his dedicated staff make us all proud at NYSADA for their extraordinary commitment to bringing hope to the approximately 8,000 New Yorkers waiting for a life-changing transplant," Robert Vancavage, president of New York State Automobile Dealers Association, said in the release.

This year, New York passed the HEART ACT, Helping Equal Access to Registrations for Transplants, a policy that expands access to transplants for low-income New Yorkers, according to the release, and the bill is projected to cut wait times in half and decrease mortality rates among New Yorkers on the transplant list by approximately 20%.

"At Donate Life NYS, our mission is to ensure that every New Yorker who needs a lifesaving transplant can receive one," Aisha Tator, executive director of Donate Life NYS, said in the release, "Alongside advocates, elected officials, volunteers, and partners across the state, we are furthering a culture of donation here in New York – Ellis Automotive has been a fantastic partner, and we're proud to honor them with the Dealer of the Year award for their life-saving work."

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American graphite mining is back

Times staff report

GOUVERNEUR — Titan Mining Corp. has started ore feeding at its Kilbourne graphite demonstration facility, advancing the project toward first graphite concentrate production.

This marks a historic step toward restoring end-to-end U.S. natural flake graphite production for the first time in more than 70 years.

"Today is a pivotal moment not only for Titan, but for U.S. critical minerals independence," Rita Adiani, president and CEO of Titan, said in a statement. "We are delivering on our commitment to re-establish a secure U.S. supply of battery-grade natural flake graphite, a key input for energy storage, defense and strategic industries."

Located within Titan's Empire State Mine infrastructure, the fully permitted 1,200-tonnes-per-year of concentrate demonstration plant is now in start-up operations. Output from the facility will enable qualification runs and offtake discussions, accelerating the project's progression toward commercial scale-up.



Employees from the Titan Mining Corp. pose for a photo with state Sen. Mark Walczyk, Assemblyman Ken Blankenbush, and U.S. Rep. Elise Stefanik during a tour of the Gouverneur facilities in September. Jonathon Wheeler/Watertown Daily Times

The Kilbourne project is designed to eventually reach 40,000 tonnes per year of graphite concentrate, potentially supplying nearly half of current U.S. natural graphite demand, as market needs grow. This domestic output addresses critical supply-chain vulnerabilities that

have materialized given global graphite export restrictions.

This announcement follows Titan's recently released Kilbourne Project Study, which confirmed strong project economics and highlighted expanded backing from the Export-Import Bank of the United

States (EXIM) under its "Make More in America" initiative. EXIM approved an additional \$5.5 million in non-dilutive funding to accelerate feasibility work and issued a non-binding Letter of Interest for up to \$120 million in project financing—support that underscores the strategic im-

portance of restoring a fully integrated U.S. graphite supply chain. Today's commencement of processing at the Kilbourne demonstration facility represents the next major step in advancing that vision.

Burrito Bob's serves, delivers over 90 free Thanksgiving meals



Pictured are Bob and Jen Pike and the Burrito Bob's team after serving and delivering 90-plus free Thanksgiving meals to the Potsdam community. Pictured left to right: Ethan LaRose, Brienne Basford, Jen Pike, Bob Pike, Jaiden Pike, Autumn Zelleweger, Deb Berger, Bob Berger, and Nicole Morgan. Provided photo

POTSDAM — Burrito Bob's at 6 Elm St. in The Foundry Square provided more than 90 free Thanksgiving meals to individuals and families in the Potsdam community on November 27.

Owners Bob and Jen Pike, along with their team, served meals at the restaurant and also delivered dinners to community members who were unable to attend in person.

Their efforts helped ensure that anyone who needed a warm Thanksgiving meal had access to one.

For more information, visit Burrito Bob's at 6 Elm St., Potsdam.

JCC and Alfred State College Sign Transfer Agreement

WATERTOWN, N.Y. — Jefferson Community College (JCC) and Alfred State College (ASC) held an official signing ceremony on December 15, 2025, to commemorate a new agreement that strengthens transfer opportunities for Jefferson students pursuing careers in technology. The agreement, effective spring 2025, guarantees qualified Jefferson graduates transfer admission to Alfred State as full juniors and offers significant scholarships.

The seamless transfer pathway applies to Jefferson students completing an Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) in Computer Information Technology or an Associate of Science (A.S.) in Computer Information Systems or Computer Science. Under the agreement, students can complete any of Alfred State's corresponding bachelor's degree programs within five additional semesters of standard course-

work.

Participating bachelor's programs at Alfred State include Information Technology: Network Administration, Information Technology: Web Development, and Information Technology.

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Labor Councils donate to Community Development Program



The Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence Regional Labor Council donated \$2,000 to the St. Lawrence County Community Development Program to assist with their food centers. From left are program CFO Andrew LaPoint, program director Barbara Adams and council Vice President Vernon J. "Sam" Burns. "Delegates of the 50+ labor unions represented throughout the three counties realize the difficult time many of our fellow residents of the North Country are having at this time of the year and refuse to sit by and do nothing when there are funds available to provide food or heat to them. It's difficult to do nothing when in the richest country in the world so many are going without," Burns said. Submitted photo.

JACKIE BRAY PROMOTED TO DIRECTOR OF STATE OPERATIONS

By ALEX GAULT

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ALBANY — Gov. Kathleen C. Hochul made some changes at the top ranks of her administration's staff this week, promoting one woman to oversee the majority of the state's agencies and offices and another to run New York City's Port Authority.

On Tuesday, Hochul announced that her current director of state operations, Kathryn Garcia, was going to be the next Executive Director for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. To replace Garcia, Hochul announced she was elevating Jackie Bray, the current Commissioner of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, to the more senior state operations position.

Hochul thanked Garcia for her work in the executive chamber, crediting her for pushing a number of large public projects through over the last four years.

"From the Gateway Tunnel to Micron, the Interborough Express to our Nuclear Moonshot, Kathryn helped us launch and advance generational infrastructure projects and rebuild our economy following the pandemic with an eye toward the future," Hochul said. "I am thankful she will continue serving the people of New York as Executive Director of the Port Authority, where she will help us continue to advance a regional economy that keeps us the global leader in job creation and growth."

Garcia is a lifelong resident of New York City and has worked her way through the civil service for both the city and the state. She served as commissioner of the New York City Sanitation Department in 2014, a role she held till 2020. Over that time, she added titles like interim chair of the city's public housing authority and 'food czar' overseeing the city's efforts to keep families fed during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. She resigned to run for mayor in 2020, and lost the Democratic primary to Mayor Eric Adams by less than 1%.

And the Governor put a strong vote of confidence in Bray, who

has similarly worked for New York City and the state. As DHSES Commissioner, she's overseen the state's response to a number of crises from harsh weather to the prison staff strike earlier this year. She also served as acting policy director for the Governor this year, helping to take point on the legislative and regulatory actions Hochul pursued. Before she joined Hochul's administration, Bray helped manage hospital capacity and COVID testing in New York City, and had previously worked in the city's Office to Protect Tenants and as a deputy commissioner at the city's Department of Homeless Services.

"As Commissioner of the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, Jackie has helped lead the State's emergency management response through extreme weather, infectious disease outbreaks and threats to our public safety," Hochul said. "Her experience coordinating interagency operations makes her the right leader to continue delivering the government that New Yorkers deserve. And in her time serving as acting policy director, she helped us to design and implement some of our most important initiatives, including delivering financial relief to millions of New Yorkers and getting cell phones out of our classrooms."

The Hochul administration did not announce who would take over for Bray as DHSES commissioner in their announcement Tuesday.

Also this week, the state Office of Cannabis Management lost its executive director, as first reported by WCNY radio's The Capitol Pressroom. Since pushing out former director Chris Alexander last year, Hochul had Felicia AB Reid in the job as an "acting" director, meaning she wasn't approved by the state Senate for the job. The replacement last year was meant to stabilize the flailing agency that had been struggling to approve dispensary licenses and was slow-walking other parts of the fledgling legal cannabis economy in New York.

Defense

From T3

wrote and inserted in the NDAA this year requiring that the FBI notify relevant congressional committees when it is investigating a lawmaker or presidential candidate. It's an effort that allies of Trump have been pushing for nearly a decade since the Russia investigation with FBI Director James Comey, and this year it appears it finally made it to the finish line.

Stefanik picked a public fight with House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., over the provision last week. She accused him of working with Democrats to scrub it from the final bill language, and said he was lying when he claimed to have no knowledge of the negotiations. The language was restored to the bill shortly afterward.

Stefanik's team highlighted the bill's inclusions of millions in grants for the defense of Israel, including extending the U.S.-Israeli anti-tunneling operation, extends a partnership to counter unmanned military vehicles, and puts a total of \$350 million toward all U.S.-Israel cooperative programs.

Rep. Claudia L. Tenney, R-Cleveland, also pushed for inclusions in this year's NDAA; she doesn't have a spot on the Armed Services Committee but she did have a hand on the Intelligence Authorization Act, which was packaged with the NDAA, as a member of the House Intelligence Committee.

Tenney said she'd worked to include a number of investments for local military posts, including \$20.3 million for Fort Drum for three projects, \$200 million for a project to modernize the unique fleet of aircraft flown by the New York Air National Guard's 109th Air-

lift Wing based out of Niagara Falls, and another \$54 million for the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station itself.

"This year's NDAA strengthens our military at a critical moment as threats from China, Iran, Russia, and terrorist groups rise," Tenney said in a statement. "It restores accountability and merit, dismantles wasteful DEI bureaucracies, and ensures promotions are based on performance. The bill protects taxpayers by cutting nearly \$20 billion in ineffective programs while supporting President Trump's 3.8 percent pay raise for our service members. It rebuilds readiness, revitalizes our industrial base, secures the southern border, and gives our troops the tools to deter any adversary."

The bill now goes to the U.S. Senate, where lawmakers are expected to broadly approve the measure, before heading to Trump's desk for final approval.

Craving breakfast? New cave opens in Canton



Front row from left: Ella O'Neil, Etta Coburn, Alondra Maldonado, co-owner Willie Shuster, Co-owner Will Peña, village trustee Barb Beekman, Tara Peña, Jehovanie Munoz, Alex Munoz, Christian Munoz. Back row from left: Merrit Kotula, Cafe Patron, Cafe Patron, Brad Howe, Mayor Mike Dalton, Irene Munoz, Journey Lapage, Rosa Perez-Solis, Sophia Munoz
Provided photo

CANTON — Crave Cafe, a new fast-casual breakfast and lunch spot on Main Street in Canton, celebrated its official opening on Saturday with a ribbon-cutting ceremony hosted by the St. Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce.

Co-owners Will Pena and Will Shuster, an uncle-nephew team who also co-own McDuff's in Potsdam, welcomed community members, along with Canton Village Mayor Mike Dalton, Village Trustee Barb Beekman, friends, family, and cafe staff.

"I want to thank everyone for coming. We're very excited to have opened up our cafe, and we want to welcome everyone," Pena told the crowd during the ceremony.

The cafe, at 67 Main St. in the heart of Canton, offers a fresh concept, focusing on quick, high-quality breakfast options, lunch items, and specialty coffees.

"Our goal is to provide quick, high-quality food that appeals to locals, college students, and visitors alike," Pena said in an earlier interview, noting the desire for patrons to "come in, grab a fresh meal or coffee, and be on their way in under five minutes."

Signature offerings, inspired by New York City and New Jersey delis, include "Hobo" breakfast sandwiches and the

"Hangover Burrito." The menu also highlights locally roasted coffee with house-made syrups, with self-serve soup and salad options planned for the future. Crave Cafe operates seven days a week from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Pena acknowledged that the cafe's early success is rooted in strong community backing and the dedication of its team.

"We want to give thanks to the village for their support," he said. "We also want to thank our team members, who really make the cafe successful the way it is. You bring a lot to the business, and we wouldn't be able to be successful without you."

The cafe has actively partnered with area businesses, including the Blue House for sushi and Racquet River Roasters for coffee, and plans to feature products from local farmers' markets. They also offer popular items from their sister location, McDuff's, including their renowned blue cheese.

The ribbon cutting marked the latest addition to Canton's downtown business community, with local officials praising the cafe's role as a new gathering place for residents, students, and visitors alike.

Pena closed his remarks by reiterating his gratitude, stating, "Thank you very much for your support."

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