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BUSINESS

Review & Forecast

Friday, Feb. 14, 2025

Section B — Franklin / Sugarcreek Borough



Space was at a premium at the January 2024 Sugarcreek Borough Council meeting at the Sugarcreek Borough Building, where dozens of residents came out in support of Sugarcreek police. To see the story, turn to Page B2.

By Valerie Zitterbart

Section

B

Section B of the Business Review & Forecast focuses on the businesses and local governments of the city of Franklin and Sugarcreek Borough.

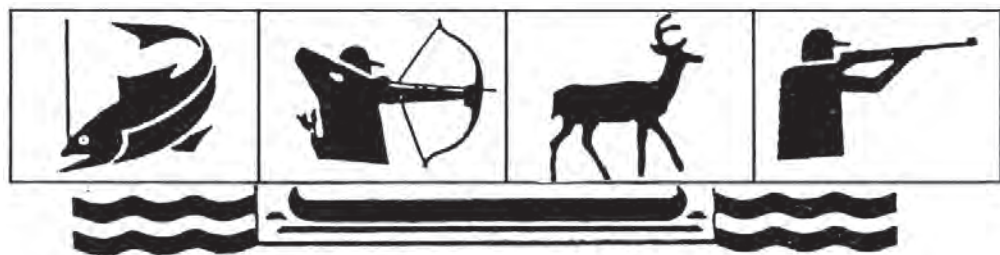
The section kicks off with a story on the support Sugarcreek police received from the borough's residents when information circulated in early 2024 regarding the possible dissolution of the department.

Residents demanded transparency when it was learned Sugarcreek and Franklin had discussions about Franklin's police force possibly working as a contractor to provide law enforcement protection for the borough.

In Franklin, Jim Wetzel, the city's former fire chief, took the oath in January 2024 as city manager, and the city also finalized an update to its sign ordinance and received various grants for projects.

Both the Franklin Industrial & Commercial Development Authority (FICDA) — formed in 1985 to operate the Venango Area Industrial Complex — and Liberty Electronics will celebrate 40-year anniversaries in 2025.

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Sugarcreek residents backed their police

BY MAKAYLA KEATING
Staff writer

Sugarcreek officials last year found the borough was suddenly a subject of much public discussion, as the future of the borough’s police department came into question.

Social media posts that had spread the word of a potential dissolution of the department resulted in a packed conference room at the borough building for Sugarcreek Borough Council’s January 2024 public meeting.

It was there where dozens of residents voiced opposition to the information being circulate, and many residents who spoke at the meeting demanded transparency.

Specifically, the anger centered on information that Sugarcreek and Franklin had discussions about Franklin’s police force possibly working as a contractor to provide law enforcement protection for the borough.

Council President Jim Speth emphasized the borough is “not eliminating any police coverage within Sugarcreek Borough. At this time, there are no agreements, there are no contracts, there are no plans and there is no timetable in place with the city of Franklin. We are in the early stages of any discussion.”

Speth explained it’s council’s “duty” to explore the best options for services impacting taxpayers, which includes police, maintenance departments, administration and other borough business.

“At my request, after some discussion, council has unanimously agreed that we would explore some different options that could improve and expand our police coverage for the borough,” Speth said.

During February’s public meeting, Sugarcreek Police Chief Bob Wenner proposed a three-year plan to increase police coverage, part of which included hiring a fourth full-

time officer. That position was filled in May by Nash Montgomery, who was introduced during June’s public meeting.

Wenner’s plan also included a request to council to increase the 160-hour-per-week limit to 200 hours per week of service for the remainder of the year after the hire of the new officer.

In July, Wenner requested council to approve a 30-hour increase for his force, which would have brought the total amount of weekly hours to 190. For the proposed increase in hours, Wenner requested council to consider utilization of the borough’s part-time officers, who would have been paid “straight time” at \$20.62 an hour.

Wenner said at that same meeting that he could report to council monthly on how the increase was working out, as both he and Borough Administrator Joe Sporer would monitor it, with the possibility of those hours being curtailed “so we stay within the budget, yet we provide additional hours.”

Wenner said he wanted to try it out at that time so officials would know what they’re looking at ahead of tackling the 2025 budget.

Although council did not approve increasing the hours to 190 or 200, they unanimously approved an increase in police hours to 176 per week for the purpose of training its new full-time officer. Those additional hours were in effect from Aug. 4 through Sept. 28.

In October, the panel approved, by a 4-1 vote, continuing the additional 16 hours for the police department through December at Wenner’s request. Speth voted against the additional hours.

Also in February 2024, Wenner said he was applying for a COPS grant that would enable him to add an additional full-time officer.

“This grant pays for the salary of a full-time officer

with a three-year draw-down decreasing in the amount that is covered over that period,” Wenner said. “The first year is free...the grant pays for the officer.

“The second year, there’s a percentage dump. We have to show a progressive decline. Then by the fourth year, we pick up the tab. What we’re getting is a four-year experienced officer that we’re now paying full salary for.”

Wenner also planned to discuss with council the possibility of adding an additional full-time officer in the budget for 2025.

Then, he said, the plan for 2026 is to repeat the cycle to increase staffing until it is at eight full-time officers and a minimum of two part-time officers, which would enable the department to perform 24-hour services for borough residents.

Later that month, council members announced the borough had ended discussions with Franklin regarding police coverage.

Council said in a news release that the borough received concrete figures from Franklin for contracting police services for the borough after council’s February meeting.

“For now, all that needs to be said is that the anticipated price for the services in question is outside of our expectations, and we do not believe that a contract with Franklin for enhanced police coverage is in the interest of our citizens at this time,” the release said.

Tax appeals

During the January 2025 public meeting, council approved a settlement for the Rural King tax appeal, one of multiple appeals that will likely take a chunk out of the borough’s budget moving forward.

Prior to the vote, Borough Solicitor Brian Spaid said he wanted to ensure the public



Photo by Valerie Zitterbart

Sugarcreek Police Chief Bob Wenner listens as a council member speaks during February’s Borough Council meeting. Wenner also spoke at the meeting and laid out his plan that he said would eventually provide 24-hour police coverage in the borough.

was aware of the “various impacts of these tax appeals.”

“If all three — at this point, the county, the school district and the borough — were all going to vote in favor of this, that’s going to cost the borough approximately \$18,000 (of revenue for 2024-25),” Spaid explained before the vote.

After the meeting, Spaid said the borough must “reimburse the landowner for Rural King for the taxes that they overpaid in 2024, which is approximately \$18,000, and that comes out of the 2025 budget. We will not collect that additional \$18,000 in 2025 and each tax year hereafter because the appeal’s going to be resolved.

“The net impact for 2025 is \$36,000, because we have to pay back 2024 and we will not collect the approximately \$18,000 for 2025.”

2025 budget

Council in November approved the tentative 2025 budget, which did not call for a tax hike for the eighth consecutive year. The budget

received final approval in December.

Expenditures in the budget total \$3,401,874 with a tax rate of 6 mills and a rate of 55 cents on each front foot assessment for street lights in Rocky Grove and Reno.

In November, Sporer told the newspaper that the borough has been able to go so long without a tax increase by “effectively managing our costs.”

As far as how the borough plans to pay for things, Sporer said the plan is to be cautious of what is purchased, where it is purchased and cost.

He said the biggest problem was tax appeals, citing the borough had over \$5 million worth of tax appeals in 2024.

In November, he said it would likely cut into revenue, somewhere between \$30,000 to \$40,000. “And next year, we already have \$10 million in tax appeals to be appealed.”

Sporer said if some of the tax appeals go through, the loss in revenue would likely cause a future tax increase, but

that there was nothing immediate that would tell him a tax increase was needed for 2025.

Sporer also said officials would need to keep in mind the possible changes to the Reno water rates and the Rocky Grove 417 water and sewer rates “as the General Authority continues to increase their rates based on their loans.”

Although the vote to hold the line on taxes was unanimous, a few council members voiced concerns about the budget.

Councilman Larry Baughman said his concern centered on reassessments and “how those things are going to all shake out. It’s very, very scary to put together a package of how you’re going to run a borough when you’re unsure about what somebody else is going to decide.”

He used Franklin’s tax hike as an example: “One of the reasons, the big reason, was the reassessments, the unknowns. We’re going to have to face that at some point.”

See **COUNCIL**, Page B4

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Franklin gets new leadership and key upgrades

BY HELEN FIELDING
Staff writer

The city of Franklin headed into 2024 with new leadership at the helm, as former Franklin Fire Chief Jim Wetzel took over as city manager from Tracy Jamieson, who retired at the end of 2023.

Wetzel had been deputy city manager before Jamieson retired.

The city finalized a comprehensive update to its sign ordinance in 2024, along with pursuing and receiving a number of grants for projects throughout the city.

The sign ordinance, which was passed in June, was a combination of the city's then-current ordinance — last updated in 2009 — and an ordinance from another part of Pennsylvania, and was intended to provide better guidance on signage, City Solicitor Brian Spaid said at the time.

Written over the course of a year by Spaid and Zoning and Code Enforcement Officer Chuck Gibbons, the new ordinance completely prohibited the use of electronic message center and digital display signs in the city's historic district, after a number of council discussions.

It did not prohibit internally illuminated signs, which Spaid said was due to the large number that already existed in the historic district.

However, council members Christian Marshall and Ashley Smith said they had spoken to many business owners and residents in the historic district who were in favor of excluding internally illuminated signs, leading

Marshall and Smith to vote against the new ordinance since they wanted it to include the prohibition.

The city also voted to expand the Sip and Shop program downtown, an exception to the city's open-container law permitting shoppers to carry certain alcoholic beverages in designated cups while shopping downtown.

And the city adjusted its sidewalk cafe ordinance to allow for the playing of outdoor music at sidewalk cafes, if permitted in writing by the city manager.

City projects

From August onward, Franklin City Council and other government board meetings normally held at City Hall were held elsewhere as work began on the major HVAC and lighting upgrades at City Hall.

During part of the project, City Hall was closed to the public. Although meetings have returned to the building, City Hall remains closed as the project wraps up. Wetzel said he hopes the building will be open by the end of February.

Work also began on rebuilding the World War II and Korean War Honor Roll in Bandstand Park, to replace the deteriorating one along Liberty Street in Fountain Park. That project is slated to be finished this year.

Over the course of the year, the city received several grants funding projects that included the purchase of a new fire truck, new and upgraded equipment for the police de-

partment, the remediation of the city's defunct Third Street reservoir, the development of a tree canopy plan in the city for removal and replacement of bad trees, and a road safety study on Elk Street.

In December, the city approved a contract with Lancaster County-based Glick Fire Equipment for the fire department to receive a new \$1,271,123 Pierce pumper within the next four years, when the department will be able to retire a 40-year-old engine.

In what has been a common theme in previous years, several residents addressed council with traffic speeding concerns during the year, and the panel continued to pursue funding from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Implementation Grant Program to improve road safety, approving an SS4A Action Plan in May as one of the prerequisites for funding.

The city completed a substantial amount of paving and installed new waterlines in Oak Hill, in Franklin Heights and on Old Mercer Road, as well as completed a storm water project on Sassafras Street.

And the third phase of the city's sidewalk improvement project, which helped property owners get their sidewalks replaced at a reduced cost, also took place in 2024.

Budget and tax hike

Along with other local municipalities, Franklin raised its taxes in the 2025 budget passed in December.

Some of the factors contributing to the 2-mill tax increase, from 11.5 to 13.5, included major property tax appeals in the city; continued high operating and maintenance costs, despite the slowing of inflation; and the depletion of budgetary reserves, according to the city's budget message.

Residents were hit with a threefold increase in costs this year, as the water and sewer rates were also raised in 2025 in part because Franklin General Authority took on close to \$9 million in Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority (PENNVEST) loans for a major waterline replacement and a major sewer project, both slated to start this year.

The authority also carried an outstanding balance on already-existing loans for earlier projects, and the engineering firm used by the authority said in February 2024 that the authority's water and sewer rates were at the time too low to be eligible for additional grant funding instead of loans.

The city learned in summer that Community Development Block Grant funds received by the city would no longer be eligible for city-wide projects, as not enough of the population was considered low-to-moderate-income (LMI) according to new survey data.

Therefore, CDBG funds may now only be used for projects benefiting specific groups or LMI areas.

Personnel changes

Jamieson returned to the

city this year to join the General Authority panel after authority Chairman Tim Dunkle, in turn, retired at the end of December. John Eckel is the new chairman of the General Authority.

Ashley Smith was sworn in as a new council member at the start of the year after being elected in November 2023, and current council members Donna Fletcher — who was re-elected deputy mayor — and Todd Zahner also entered into new terms of office.

The city's longtime wastewater treatment plant supervisor, Glenn "Bub" Brown, also retired last year, and Nathan Bell took over as supervisor.

In May, the city voted to combine the positions of community development director and economic development director after former Economic Development Director Deb Eckelberger retired that month.

The combined position of community and economic development director was given to Amanda Power, who had been community development director.

And the city created the position of business outreach coordinator to take on part of the job of the former economic development director, giving the new position to Jess Carroll.

Looking ahead

In 2025, Franklin residents and those traveling the city's roads should expect some disruption as two major infrastructure projects — the A-108 sewer replacement and CSO elimination project,

and the Allegheny Boulevard and Front Street waterline replacement — are slated to start in spring.

Sibley and Plumer avenues and Old Mercer Road are slated to receive final tar-and-chipping this year through liquid fuels funding, and plans call for the City Hall parking lot to be resurfaced, according to Wetzel's budget message in November.

The city will have to purchase new computers to replace those no longer being supported by Microsoft, and the city will also be upgrading to cloud storage and replacing the firewall at City Hall.

The police department is slated to purchase 16 tasers and 16 pistols to replace old equipment, as well as 16 body cams and a new patrol vehicle. Main goals for city administration next year include consideration of upgrading street lighting to LED and of using solar energy at city facilities.

Wetzel said future longer-term goals include improvements at the intersection of 12th and Liberty streets, to be completed in conjunction with the upcoming PennDOT Liberty Street Betterment Project, of which construction is now expected to begin in 2026.

Other projects are on the wish list, but "it all hinges on money," Wetzel said.

HELEN FIELDING, reporter for The Derrick and The News-Herald, can be reached at helenfielding.thederrick@gmail.com or 814-677-8374.

Franklin building permits

BY HELEN FIELDING
Staff writer

The city of Franklin saw an increase in improvement value of building projects last year compared with 2023, partly due to a large rehabilitation project at City Hall.

Project costs totaled a little more than \$3.2 million in 2024 compared to just over \$2 million in 2023, according to Chuck Gibbons, the city's zoning and code enforcement officer.

The City Hall HVAC and lighting renovation, listed as a \$1 million project at the time of application, was the largest building permit issued during 2024.

It was one of 31 commercial permits and 51 residential permits issued in 2024, 82 in total — a number down from 97 in 2023, though total project value increased.

Most commercial permits were renovations to kitchens or facades, Gibbons said.

Among the larger permits were a \$60,000 merit for 1262 Liberty St. — the former Callaghan's Pharmacy — to prepare it for Daffin's Candies to move there this year from its current location across and down the street.

Also, a \$50,000 permit was issued for the renovation of a new second-floor apartment at 1246 Liberty above Crosswalk Retail Shops.

And new restaurant Taco Inc., whose opening announcement received great community enthusiasm early last year, obtained an \$18,000 permit for a kitchen renovation, Gibbons said.

As for residential permits, no new homes were constructed in 2024, but "there were a lot of decks, roofs, windows, doors and small additions," Gibbons said.

"There are people who want to build new homes, and I've seen plans for new homes, but they're not being built," he said. "I think the economy and cost really kept it down last year."

He added that due to space, there isn't much opportunity to build new structures in the city "unless you tear something down."

There were four demolitions of houses by private owners during the year, three dilapidated and one that was damaged by fire, Gibbons said.

The city has also acquired or is in the process of acquiring seven dilapidated and decayed houses for demolition.

And several businesses opened in the city over the past year.

Domino's Pizza, Taco Inc, Simply Skin Medical Spa at 1263 Elk St., and Techiez Tech Consulting all opened in 2024, and Primo Barone's at the Venango Regional Airport is now under new ownership and has been renamed The Runway Ristorante and Lounge.

In addition, Qualex has moved to the former Joy Plant 1, now owned by Phoenix Franklin Industrial Investors, and the Crosswalk Retail Shoppes opened in the former Prime Fitness showroom on Liberty Street.

Cloudpermit

Gibbons noted that starting this year, the city will be using the cloud-based permitting, inspections and code enforcement program called Cloudpermit for all licenses and permits, including retail, food facility, mercantile and others.

"Sending postcards costs money. Sending permits costs money, and it costs

the taxpayer," Gibbons said. "With this, it will be all online, and we'll go paperless. We'll email the permit to the applicant and they can print out the permit and hang it in their window."

He added that residents who don't have an email address to sign up for the Cloudpermit system, or those who are unable to use the system at home, can still come into City Hall and have their data hand-entered by staff.

However, staff would still be using the Cloudpermit system when entering residents' data.

Late in 2023, the city began using Cloudpermit for building permits and code enforcement, and Gibbons believes it is because the system has worked so well for those items that it is now being expanded to all licenses and permits in the city.

It also speeds up the permitting process since "it comes straight to my desktop when someone files a (code violation) complaint or building permit," Gibbons said. And sending completed permits back by email is faster than using regular mail.

On tap for 2025

Clark's Donuts has plans to open a facility on Liberty Street this year, in addition to Daffin's Candies' planned move across the street, Gibbons said.

A new AirBNB, Trails to Ales Bed and Breakfast, will be opening on the second floor of the former Callaghan's Pharmacy, and the apartment above Crosswalk Retail Shops is also slated to be up and running this year.

And the city plans to demolish more blighted and dilapidated structures as finances become available, Gibbons said.

SFPC celebrated 20 years

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

In 2024, Specialty Fabrication and Powder Coating (SFPC), celebrated its 20th year in existence. Owner and CEO Rod Griffin attributes the success of the company, first to God for His direction, and for allowing them the privilege to serve Him, then to all their customers for entrusting SFPC with their business. Last, but certainly not least, the valued employees that the company has been blessed with over the years remain crucial in maintaining the level of success they continue to enjoy.

SFPC's equipment has also led to the success of their company. Their latest purchase of the 10K Fiber Laser with a fully automated parts picker and material storage capable of holding 225,000 pounds of material is fully operational and allows them to better serve their customers.

Jarrad Griffin, Vice President of Operations, said that since the company's inception in Nov. 2004, the overall success of SFPC can be attributed to having a committed work force, investing in quality equipment and having a diversified customer base. Jarrad emphasized that continuing to diversify their customer base and adding technology remains one of the most important plans for SFPC's sustained growth. "To do otherwise would result in the company becoming stagnant and not able to provide what customers have come to expect from us."

Because SFPC's state-of-the-art equipment allows the



company to provide products at a consistently high-quality level and at very competitive pricing, Shawn Wingard, Chief Financial Officer, said, "the management team will continue to look at equipment needs as the year 2025 evolves. Specifically, we will be looking at purchasing additional manufacturing equipment that would add to the company's fabrication capabilities to support our current and future customers."

Griffin agreed with Jarrad and Shawn. He expounded by saying, "We want to first make sure that we are always able to supply the needs of our current customers who have entrusted us with their business. Secondly, we must continue to have the capacity to further diversify to ensure job security for our current and future employees. We owe a lot to our customers, and along with our appreciation for their business, they have also brought us additional business by recommending SFPC to other companies."

"Next to our customers, our biggest asset is our employees, and I can't say

enough about how blessed we are to have great employees. Our employees support the company, the community, and are instrumental in SFPC's growth. They are not just numbers! These people are part of our work family. We care for our 140 employees, and we pray for them every day. God has certainly blessed us in so many ways, and we are so thankful to our customers and our employees who have made us successful."

Griffin went on to say that 2024 was a moderate year, and with the changes put in place, he expects 2025 to be even better, unless the economy declines due to things out of the company's control.

The company is currently recruiting welders, robotic welding operators, powder painters, press brake operators and material handlers/kitters. They have an excellent benefit package that includes a great health care package and a matching 401K program.

For more information about Specialty Fabrication and Powder Coating visit www.specfab.com.

Council

Continued from Page B2

Prior to the approval, Wenner voiced his concerns with the proposed budget, specifically, a couple of line items he submitted reports to council for, such as bulletproof vests, which cost \$3,200. "There's only \$1,000 in that line item, so we're automatically \$2,200 behind."

In December, he said police service hours have been cut lower than they had been five to seven years ago, and the overtime was cut in half. "So I realize that means that 160 (hours) will be what it is. I just wanted to put on the record that some of these numbers are not realistic in the budget; so there will be

overtures, to make you aware ahead of time."

Looking ahead

As far as 2025 projects go, Sporer recently said the borough is currently looking at its "regular road work" and what it can do with liquid fuel money that will continue. "It's going to be business as usual this year. The tax appeals are going to be the single-biggest effect on the bottom line. How far do they go and where do they stop?"

However, in January, Franklin General Authority approved two construction contracts for a waterline project along Allegheny Boulevard and Front Street.

Building permits

According to Zoning Officer Larry Moyer, there

were 48 certificates and 31 building permits issued in 2024 at a total estimated value of \$3,692,898. By contrast, in 2023, there were 57 certificates issued at an estimated value of \$4,880,772.

The largest commercial project was the new credit union on Route 8 at a cost of \$1,450,000.

Of last year's total \$3.6 million estimated value, \$218,533 was for demolitions, garages, additions, new buildings, pools, fences, decks/porches, sheds, renovations, signs and roof-solar panels.

MAKAYLA KEATING, reporter for The Derrick and The News-Herald, can be reached at makaylakeating.thederrick@gmail.com or 814-676-7057.

Anderson Furniture

Franklin’s community jewel set to close after 153 years

BY HELEN FIELDING
Staff writer

The oldest continuously open retail business in Venango County will close its doors after more than 150 years of business in the community.

In November, Feldman Jewelers, at 1260 Liberty St. in Franklin, announced it would be going out of business early this year, and the news sent shockwaves throughout the area.

“We’re hearing from everybody, and people I don’t even know are stopping me in the street and saying, ‘Wow, we’re so sorry, it’s such a landmark,’” Doug Volmrich, who co-owns the store with his wife, Niki, said not long after the news was announced.

Soon after the November announcement, a constant stream of people began patronizing the store’s going-out-of-business sale, which is still ongoing.

“It’s absolutely a going-out-of-business sale; we’re not moving,” Volmrich said.

In agreement with her husband, Niki Volmrich said, “It’s time.”

The decision

The Volmrichs emphasized the decision to close was not due to any kind of financial distress.

However, the couple felt it had “become time” for them to retire from running the business, and no other party has expressed interest in buying and running it.

“I’d sell tomorrow,” Doug Volmrich said. “We would have loved to have done that, but...someone that can give us the money we need to get out of it doesn’t need Feldman’s. They can start their own store.”

Niki Volmrich said, “I would have loved for someone to have bought the store. It’s been there forever. It breaks my heart to see it end.”

The couple said they would have happily sold the business to their store managers, but “they’re at the point where they want to retire” as well,” Niki Volmrich said.

Doug Volmrich said in November that the couple’s staff has been working six days a week, and they have been “very supportive.”

Oldest retail business

The jewelry store, which has moved at least three times since its founding in 1871 by B.J. Feldman, is the oldest retail business in continuous operation in the city — and in the county — according to research that had been done by the late Carolee Michener, the longtime Venango Historical Society board member, Doug Volmrich said.

“It’s never closed for all those years,” he said.

Feldman Jewelers celebrated its 153rd anniversary in 2024, and has been around just as long as the city of Oil City, The Derrick and Good Hope Lutheran Church. An August 1971 Feldman advertisement in The Derrick was addressed to those businesses and titled “A Toast to our Birthday Friends in Oil City”.

Niki Volmrich, before she was married, originally came into possession of the store in August 1986, when her father, Nick Cummings, purchased it from previous owner Robert Hoover. She took on the day-to-day management of the business before eventually purchasing it in full from her father.

Even in 1986, a newspaper article discussing the sale identified Feldman Jewelers as the “oldest retail business



Photos by Helen Fielding

A sign on Feldman Jewelers’ storefront lets people know the store will be going out of business. Doug and Niki Volmrich announced in November 2024 they are closing the 153-year Franklin mainstay.



Photo courtesy of Becky Solle Witherup and Feldman Jewelers

In this circa-1950s photo by Franklin resident Peter Solle, the iconic Feldman Jewelers clock is seen at its former location, near 1276 Liberty St., where it remained until the 1970s, when it was moved to its current spot in front of 1260 Liberty St.



This September 1986 photo ran in The News-Herald shortly after Niki Volmrich’s father, Nick Cummings, purchased the business.

in continuous operation in the city.”

“I had had a job in the jewelry business, and my dad came up with the idea, ‘What do you want to do about Feldman’s being for sale?’” Niki Volmrich recalled. “‘Do you want to buy a jewelry store?’ He fronted me

the money, but he made me pay back every cent.”

She said her father “taught me a lot about business. There were lots of challenges...you kind of learn by experience. That’s what I did, and I loved every minute of it. Well — not every minute, but most



Photo courtesy of Doug Volmrich

A photo shows the original Feldman Jewelers, which current store co-owner Doug Volmrich said was next to Feldman Way in the 1100 block of Liberty Street. A 1945 obituary for founder B.J. Feldman’s son George, though, lists the original location as the old Park Hotel, which was located where the PNC Bank drive-through is now.

minutes, I loved,” she added with a smile.

Feldman’s offerings

Doug Volmrich said when his future wife bought the business, it had a watchmaker

and a clockmaker, and Hoover was there and did some of the repairs. The business continued to offer in-store jewelry, watch repairs and custom design. Niki Volmrich added estate (pre-owned) and

antique (over 100 years old) jewelry and giftware to the store’s merchandise, a rare offering in independent jewelry stores 35 years ago.

See **FELDMAN**, Page B10



By Helen Fielding

Sixteen-year Feldman Jewelers employee Chrysanne Corsetti, left, and 46-year employee Jennifer Huff, center, show estate jewelry to customer Sandy Vergith, of Franklin, during the store’s going-out-of-business sale. Huff said it’s “always been a pleasure” working at the business in her hometown, and that couples have gotten engaged in the store in the past.

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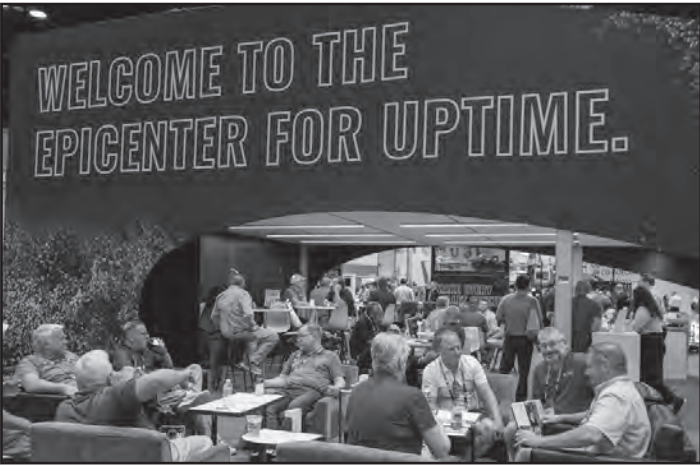
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In May, thousands of prospective customers jammed the Conair booth at NPE 2024 in Orlando to interact with our innovative new products. The result was a record number of favorable impressions and potential sales leads.

Conair’s team marks another outstanding year

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Despite challenging market conditions, Conair Group, which is now part of the global Piovan Group, turned in an outstanding performance in 2024, thanks in no small part to the efforts of the team on Allegheny Boulevard, here in Franklin.

At the Conair site, some 160 employees work in functions including operations, engineering, manufacturing, assembly, installation, sales and Customer Care. To understand the foundation of Conair’s continued success in 2024, it is important to understand how the company has responded to changing customer needs.

To help them succeed, Conair increased its range of new auxiliary equipment products, strengthened its systems engineering and installation capabilities and expanded its aftermarket training, service and support capabilities. The Conair Franklin team continues to play an integral role in all these efforts. They contributed to historically strong year-over-year growth in market share for Conair products during 2024 and are essential to meeting a bright outlook for bookings and continued growth in 2025.

New products, recycling efforts mark NPE 2024

“Historically, Conair has been known for producing innovative and long-lasting industrial equipment, and our team came through again in 2024,” explains Conair Group President Jason Ganim.

Conair met evolving equipment needs in May 2024 by introducing twelve products at NPE 2024, the world’s largest plastics tradeshow, held in Orlando, Florida.

Many of these new products are built or supported directly by the Conair teams located in Franklin. Topping the list are conveying and drying products that utilize “artificial intelligence” via the new, patented Conveying with Optimizer™ and ResinWorks with Optimizer™. NPE also saw the introduction of a new fully-automated resin selection station, called the AutoRSS, as well as redesigned drying equipment and hoppers. In addition, Conair offered new “mini” versions of blending, temperature control, and conveying control products, followed by a new “smart granulator” control with industry-first predictive maintenance capabilities. Meanwhile, at another area of the NPE show, Conair’s new Smart Granulator Control and a Viper 1736 granulator were key parts of a plastics granulation system that helped achieve the goal of recycling 100% of the plastics created at the NPE 2024 show.

Beyond NPE, Conair developed other new products as well, including its largest-ever “Ultra” plastic shredding system, a machine so large that it requires three semi-truck

trailers for shipment. Big manufacturers use shredders and granulators to recycle manufacturing scrap and increase the sustainability of their operations. Recyclers use this “size reduction” equipment to break down “post-consumer” scrap – plastic bottles, containers, packaging materials and more – so it can be resold to plastics processors for re-use.

In addition to building the new Ultra shredder line, the Conair Franklin team also added assembly operations for large-capacity railcar unloading systems that the company added through a recent acquisition.

A growing Systems engineering and installation business

Franklin-based employees form the heart of Conair’s fast-growing Systems business, which offers plastics processors fully engineered, professionally installed solutions. These solutions range in size from project-scale jobs — such as new drying or blending systems — that take a day or two to install to major, plant-wide production systems or green-field facility developments.

Ganim explains that more customers turn to Conair for systems help because equipment is becoming more complex.

As its business grows, the Systems team faces the challenge of larger and more diverse projects. One recent installation, completed for a major U.S.-based manufacturer, was an enormous system requiring over eight miles of large conveying tube.

Compared to typical mechanical contractors, Conair’s employee-led installation teams offer unique knowledge of the plastics business and of the equipment being installed, resulting in optimal system installations and performance. In 2024, to keep pace with growth in the Systems business, Conair began work to hire a fifth employee-led installation team to its roster. They will be needed, since Conair sold its two largest-ever systems projects in 2024, with both scheduled for installation in 2025.

Rising demand for aftermarket support

Beyond equipment and systems, short-staffed customers are also looking to Conair for help in managing and maintaining their processing equipment for the long haul. In response, Conair expanded its Customer Care team, adding an aftermarket business development manager and augmenting the range of service products supported by Franklin-based staff.

Already, these service products include Machine Health Assessments and annual Service Agreements, both of which attained new sales records in 2024. To



After a major donation from Conair to benefit surgical and patient care at UPMC Northwest Hospital in Seneca, Northwest Hospital Foundation expressed thanks to Bob Puleo, Vice President of Operations, who represented the Conair Franklin team.



Conair enjoyed a record manufacturing and sales month in October 2024, evidenced by neat rows of finished products on the dock, awaiting shipment to customers.



Conair created its fifth factory-based installation team in Summer 2024 to keep pace with its growing systems business.

What is ‘auxiliary equipment’ and why is it important?

Most people recognize that plastic parts are created using “primary” production equipment like molding and extrusion machines. However, few outside the industry appreciate the vital contribution that “auxiliary” equipment makes to plastics production and recycling.

That contribution is why the work of Conair Franklin employees is so important. Together, they design, engineer, assemble, test, deliver, and support the industry’s widest range of auxiliary equipment, including:

- Material handling and conveying systems that receive, store, and move plastic pellets and other raw materials to production equipment.
- Drying systems that remove moisture and pre-heat plastics prior to processing,

or that help restore the properties of recycled plastics so that they can be re-used.

- Blending and feeding systems that precisely measure and custom-mix ingredients used to create plastic products.
- Temperature control and heat-transfer equipment essential to heating or cooling complex molding and extrusion processes.

- Shredding and granulating machines that “size reduce” process scrap and post-consumer plastic waste so that both can be recycled and remolded into useful products.

Auxiliary equipment produced at the Franklin plant is essential to the production and recycling of plastics used in thousands of everyday applications: automobiles, aviation and transportation

products, appliances, food and beverage containers, construction and building products, consumer goods, lifesaving medical and surgical devices, power tools, retail food and pharmaceutical packages, and many more.

It is no exaggeration to say that Conair Franklin facility — the largest Piovan Group manufacturing facility in North America — is one of the most important centers of auxiliary equipment manufacturing in the world. The talents and capabilities of Franklin employees, together with the value of the many products produced and assembled here, are one of the reasons why Conair’s parent company, Piovan Group, ranks as the world’s largest manufacturer and marketer of plastics auxiliary equipment.

these, Conair added a new service called “SureLaunch” for processors who install their own new equipment. This one-day Conair technician visit supports proper installation and configuration of the new equipment and ensures that operating personnel are trained to use it correctly.

Co-op programs contribute to quality products

The Conair Franklin teams do a lot more than just build products. They also test, package and ship products, and provide product parts, technical support, and service, both remotely and in the field. These teams set an all-time record for Conair products shipped in October 2024.

Of course, before any product ships, it must be tested to validate assembly, performance and safety. Therefore,

the quality of the initial build of a product must be maintained at a high level, or expensive rework — considered “lost” time — is incurred.

Over a two-year period, a team comprised of seven engineering co-ops from the University of Pittsburgh, plus two Conair advisers, developed a new testing rig for Conair’s latest line of resin dryers. With the help of the new testing rig, assembly teams were able to boost initial dryer build quality — expressed as “first time correct” — to a record level in 2024. Engineering co-ops also worked with Conair staff to help develop new predictive maintenance and energy saving features in Conair’s latest line of smart granulator controls.

Two Franklin high school co-ops, Liam Reese and Brady Spencer, are learning how to build electronic panels and controls in Conair’s Panel

Shop as part of their Electronics training curriculum at the Venango Technology Center. In addition to their technical training and responsibilities, the students are “required to demonstrate our core values here at Conair, holding themselves accountable, having an open and positive attitude and supporting the team’s success,” says Panel Shop Supervisor Angelica Myers.

Building careers, recognizing excellence, embracing community

The loyalty and longevity of Conair Franklin employees reflects the organization’s focus on providing long-term career paths and promoting from within when possible. The company’s 2024 service awards recognized four employees with 50, 45, 30 and 30 years of service, respectively, as well as 17 other employees

with either 20 or 10 years of service. Eighteen qualified employees were also internally promoted into open positions, taking advantage of the chance to leverage experience gained in one area of operations, such as assembly, shipping, or finance, into others such as engineering, operations, or service.

Thanks to a Conair benefit that pays every employee for one day of community service each year, the time and talents of Conair employees are felt not only in the plant, but also in the community.

In 2024, Conair and Piovan Group employees based in Franklin used this benefit to provide 352 hours of community service to organizations and causes including UPMC’s Walk for Children’s Hospital, the Venango County Humane Society, Franklin Chamber of Commerce, and 4-H Club of Venango County.



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FICDA to mark 40 years in community

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

2024 was a year of transition and growth for the Franklin Industrial & Commercial Development Authority (FICDA). One of the most notable events was the retirement of former Director Deb Eckelberger. Her years of dedicated service to the business community were deeply appreciated by the Board, the staff and the wider community. In the wake of her departure, FICDA introduced three new employees: Amanda Power, previously the Community Development Director, assumed the role of Community & Economic Development Director. In addition, Jess Carroll was hired as the new Business Outreach Specialist; and Barry Hohn joined the team in Maintenance.

In addition to leadership changes, FICDA celebrated key milestones in 2024. Vice Chairman of the Board Vince Witherup received the prestigious Citizen of the Year award from the Venango Area Chamber of Com-

merce in recognition of his significant contributions to the community.

FICDA also bid farewell to Board member Bob Barber, who retired after 30 years of dedicated service, leaving behind a lasting legacy of commitment to the growth and development of the Authority. FICDA is pleased to welcome Mike Nightingale, President of Voyten Electric, to the Board in 2025 for a one-year term, where his expertise is expected to contribute to FICDA's continued success.

In the fall, FICDA hosted a "Meet the Team Mixer," a well-attended event with over 100 guests, aimed at introducing the new staff members to tenants, local resource partners, elected officials and economic development agencies.

FICDA's conference and training rooms continued to be essential resources for both tenants and the wider community, with nearly 400 bookings throughout the year. Tenants also enjoyed a range of valuable benefits, including high-

speed fiber, snow removal services, secure mailboxes, exterior security cameras, ample parking, flexible lease options and on-site trainings, as well as scenic views of French Creek. Visitors were greeted at the ETC Center by Office Manager Robyn Shields-Holtzman, who also serves as a resource for tenants and welcoming face for guests.

What 40 looks like

FICDA has an exciting year ahead as it celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2025. Here's a summary of the key developments and initiatives planned:

1. Rebranding and New Website

FICDA will undergo a rebranding, including a new website. This marks a fresh approach to the Authority's online presence and its communication with the public.

2. Building Acquisition at VAIC

FICDA is in the early stages of acquiring a building at the Venango Area Industrial Complex (VAIC), a project

that holds significant potential for new incubation in the future.

3. New Signage

To improve navigation

and visibility, new signage will be installed throughout the complex. This includes an updated business directory by the entrance and way-

finding signage within the complex to help visitors and businesses easily navigate the area.

See **FICDA**, Page B10

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Trails to Ales: A year of growth and community

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Reflecting on the achievements of Trails to Ales Brewery in 2024, it's clear that this local gem has made significant strides in enhancing its offerings and community impact.

One of the most exciting developments last year was the opening of a new outdoor barn pavilion at Trails II in April. Constructed from reclaimed barn materials, this space provides additional covered areas for parties, bands, reunions, weddings and receptions. It proudly hosted three weddings in 2024, marking the pavilion as a sought-after venue for special occasions.

In an effort to expand their footprint, Trails to Ales purchased the old Callaghan's Pharmacy building for more expansion. Construction is underway to remodel the first floor for retail space, with

one side welcoming Daffin's Candies while simultaneously transforming the long-vacant upstairs into a five-unit Airbnb.

The brewery welcomed 100,065 guests in 2024, a testament to its commitment to quality and community engagement. Trails also expanded their distribution in the Pittsburgh market, further solidifying their presence in the region. Through its "Shop the Block" program, the brewery continues to promote the downtown retail market, collaborating with local businesses and fostering a community atmosphere.

Trails to Ales proudly stands as one of the largest employers in Franklin, with over 50 full- and part-time team members contributing to their success. This year, they partnered with GBS Solutions to create a professional

promotional video highlighting Franklin as a destination. Scheduled for completion in about six months, the video will showcase Franklin's festivals, restaurants, retail and unique architecture, targeting key markets in Pittsburgh, Erie, Youngstown, Cleveland and Buffalo.

Trails to Ales' commitment to community extends beyond the brewery walls. The brewery sponsored, participated in, and promoted various local festivals and events, including Witch Walk, Franklin on Ice, Blues and Barbecue, Pet Fest, Old Fashion Christmas and Applefest. In October, they also sponsored a free seminar on situational awareness and human trafficking for its staff and the public, with another session held this January.

In an ongoing effort to give back, Trails to Ales donated to over 30 charities through

individual requests and their Community Quenchers program. The brewery will remain dedicated to supporting Franklin's Sip and Shop initiative, reinforcing their commitment to local businesses.

Looking ahead to 2025, Trails to Ales is thrilled to announce their role as a Season Sponsor and partner with the Barrow Theatre to bring a professional tribute band to Franklin. This collaboration aims to leverage the marketing strengths of both organizations, attract visitors, support local businesses and raise awareness of this wonderful facility.

Overall, Trails to Ales experienced strong growth in 2024 across their restaurant operations, beer production and private events. The brewery is excited about the future and will remain committed to being a cornerstone of the Franklin community.



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<p>#48490 2024 Land Cruiser Hybrid, AWD</p> <p>NEW</p> <p>MSRP: \$59994</p>	<p>#49012 2025 Camry LE FWD, 4 Cyl. Gas Engine</p> <p>NEW</p> <p>MSRP: \$30718</p>	

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The A. Crivelli Dealerships will soon offer lifetime powertrain coverage on retail used cars and trucks that are one to six years of age with less than 80,000 miles. That means, just like the Auto Giant exclusive limited lifetime powertrain warranty on new vehicles, it will be available on pre-owned, and yes, unlimited miles, unlimited time, good anywhere in the U.S.A. Never worry about your vehicle’s most expensive parts again. All other retail pre-owned inventory will be eligible for a 6-month/6,000-mile powertrain warranty.

A. Crivelli Subaru Teams Up with 519 Strong, Raises \$49,620 for Charity

Subaru USA began a charitable program several years ago. They donate a fixed amount per new Subaru sold to select charities. A. Crivelli sought approval for local charity 519 Strong to be included, and was approved. Jeremy Coast was 18 when he passed away after a 3-year battle with leukemia. He was a Franklin Area High School Class of 2015 graduate and a member of the

AWRCS—A True American Woods Racing Series. Motocross was a passion of Jeremy’s; his number, 519—also his birthday—lends itself to the name of the 519 Strong Foundation. 519 Strong raises money in Jeremy’s name to help families with medical travel, lodging, and food expenses. A. Crivelli and Subaru have raised nearly \$49,620 for 519 Strong since their partnership began.



Song-of-the-Day Contest — The Big Winner in 2024

The Auto Giant and Forever Broadcasting were singing from the same page during the 3rd Annual Song-of-the-Day Contest! For *eight days a week* through June and July, the *radio radio* sang with the *sound of music*, and deep discounts from Forever Broadcasting, A. Crivelli dealerships, and numerous area businesses. It all came down to *the final countdown* in

August when the winner took it all. 2024’s winner was Patty Barchanowicz of Jefferson, Ohio. The prize was a two-year lease or a cash prize option! Rockin’ Rich and Bullfrog provided the entertainment as emcees of the event. Join us this year for more *hot fun in the summertime* and the 3rd Annual Song-of-the-Day contest.

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THE AUTOMOTIVE GIANT

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- Bowl for Kids' Sake event conducted by Youth Connections
- Tournament Shirts for 11 years for Saint Patrick's Catholic Church
- Barrow Civic Theatre
- Cash and equipment for ORSA (Oil Region Soccer Association)
- For the past 11 years, helped support Franklin Little League
- The Pennsylvania Elks Home Service

- A participating sponsor in various fundraising golf outings: Bill Beith Memorial, United Way, Crosscreek Fall Finale, Fraternal Order of Police
- Red and Black Boosters Club
- Franklin Red and Black Club
- Slippery Rock Raceway

UPDATE: EV in Venango County

The new presidential administration has lifted electric vehicle mandates, and that's good news for the auto industry, but that doesn't mean electric vehicles are gone. What it does mean is that the electric vehicle niche will grow by natural

demand and not government edict. Manufacturers expect electric vehicles to grow to a substantial share of new vehicle sales. The A. Crivelli dealerships are making the needed investments to ensure that customers who choose to purchase an electric

vehicle would have the supporting infrastructure they would need. During the past year, A. Crivelli is proud to announce that commercial 120KW EV chargers were installed for public use. A. Crivelli Auto Group embraces EV in Venango County.

FICDA

Continued from Page B7

4. Past-and-Present Tenant Luncheon

To celebrate its 40th anniversary, FICDA will host a luncheon bringing together past and present tenants. This event will provide an opportunity to reflect on the incubator’s successes and foster discussions about supporting future business growth.

5. New Training Opportunities and Panel Discussions

Based on the results of a survey assessing local businesses’ needs, FICDA will offer new training programs and panel discussions.

6. Mentorship Program

A new FICDA offering, designed to assist new and existing businesses by focusing on pairing entrepreneurs with experienced mentors who can guide them through various stages of growth.

7. Community Outreach Initiatives

FICDA will focus on community outreach in 2025, with a strong emphasis on attracting and retaining businesses and community members.

8. Commitment to Ongoing Business Support

FICDA is committed to understanding and meeting the evolving needs of the business community, ensuring that businesses in the Franklin area continue to thrive.

FICDA is setting its sights on making 2025 a year of growth, innovation and deeper community engagement. Building on the solid foundation, the Authority plans to leverage its resources, infrastructure improvements and dedicated team to foster a thriving business environment in Franklin.



Liberty Electronics celebrates 40 years of success

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Liberty was founded at a time when several larger companies were moving out of Franklin. Thanks to support from the Franklin community, Liberty has grown greatly from the startup that opened its doors in the FICDA complex in 1985 as an Electronics Manufacturing Supplier (EMS) dedicated to the Military and Aerospace market.

Liberty’s mandate was, and still is, to be an employee forward company that helps to provide as many

jobs in the Franklin and Oil City area as possible. As part of this mandate, Liberty provides paid training to every production employee and covers their certification and recertification costs. When possible, Liberty also partners with suppliers in the region.

After 40 years, Liberty’s team is comprised of around 400 employees and growing that are still serving the Mil/Aero market, as well as several other markets that require high reliability with stringent

quality requirements. Liberty provides assembly and testing of premium cables, harnesses, electro-mechanical assemblies and electrical cabinets.

In 2024, Liberty was blessed with record sales growth in most of the markets that they serve. Thanks to the hard work and performance of the Liberty team, Liberty is continuing to have substantial organic growth with most of their customers. Liberty has also been able to forge additional partnerships with new customers that are

expected to increase over the coming years.

In addition to working with Mil/Aero partners as they meet the needs of the U.S. military and commercial aerospace customers, Liberty is working hard to support customers in rail, mining and power generation fields as they are seeing increased demand in their respective markets. Liberty supports current and legacy programs, as well as working with customers as they develop new systems from the prototype

phase all the way through and into serial production and field support.

Liberty is poised to continue expansion in 2025 and beyond. They expect to maintain consistent hiring for both support and manufacturing positions, with paid on-site training and best-in-class benefit packages.

Those interested in joining their team can be directed through their website, www.libertyelectronics.com, postings on Indeed or through their main company phone number, 814-432-7505.

Franklin Industries works smarter to stay ahead of competition

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Franklin Industries is entering its 124th year continuing to manufacture steel products made 100% from recycled scrap rail. While there remain only a handful of direct competitors to Franklin Industries in the U.S., the market is global, making the struggle to remain competitive against foreign products a constant challenge. Combating the inconsistent and sluggish economy, this steel rolling mill continues to work smarter to stay ahead of its competitors.

The improvements to the mill furnace that were completed in 2023, spearheaded by Equipment Manager Tim McDeavitt and Process Engineer Axel Kovalchick, produced the results expected in 2024, with increased cycle times and a large increase in tons per day being rolled. Franklin Industries continued with improvements in key areas of the mill, shear and highway departments throughout 2024 to support the company’s growth plans through the upcoming years.

Franklin Industries is



focused on becoming ISO 9001:2015 certified, with their Quality Manager Paul Pearson leading the effort in updating processes and enhancing document control. They also continue their focus on Lean Manufacturing improvements with ongoing training through NWIRC.

The past year Franklin Industries didn’t only see changes in their mill and departments, but saw the retirement of key individuals in the organization. Joe Frazzetta and Herb Barker both moved on to the retired life from VP of Sales and Mill Manager, respectively. Franklin Industries

continues to actively recruit the best talent available and has filled key positions throughout the year with great additions to their team.

While the company still produces its typical u-channel sign post and t-post products, one new variation has been added to the lineup, specifically a purple-tipped t-post, dubbed the “Border Guard” post. The purple tip meets the state requirements for marking “no trespassing” property boundaries and is an exclusive trademark of Franklin Industries.

Community involvement is always a priority with Franklin

Industries, which sponsors the number 11r big block modified race car driven by Brad Rapp, and the company’s own softball team. The first weekend in August saw the return of their annual FI Family Day being held at Waldameer Park and Water World.

2025 will mark the 23rd year of ownership by the Kovalchick family. Their commitment to the continued operations of Franklin’s steel manufacturing industry guarantees that Franklin Industries will remain a key employer in the region for years to come.

Feldman

Continued from Page B5

“That was a wonderful addition for us,” Niki Volmrich recalled. The Feldman Jewelers estate jewelry show and sale has been featured at Applefest for many years.

Doug Volmrich said his wife “made that store special. It’s not your average jewelry store.”

Feldman also offered bridal registries, for which Niki Volmrich said they always tried to have what was current in items such as silverware sets and china.

“Still every once in a while we get a registration. You’ll see it in the paper that they’re registered at Walmart and Feldman Jewelers,” Doug Volmrich recalled with a chuckle.

And for about 30 years, the business also has held a men’s night two weeks before Christmas, a suggestion of Niki Volmrich’s brother Dean Koumonk. The business offers special discounts on that evening, along with entertainment, food and beverages, and small gifts,



By Helen Fielding

Jennifer Huff, center, jewelry manager and a Feldman Jewelers employee for 46 years, waits on Susan Laverty, of Rochester, New York, and her partner Jack McDowell, of Rockland Township, during the store’s going out of business sale. Laverty said McDowell takes her to Feldman “every time I come to the area.”

although this past December’s event was smaller.

Running a mom-and-pop

Doug Volmrich, who had worked as an independent

fine jewelry salesman for a regional wholesaler in Pittsburgh before moving to the area, met his future wife when calling on Feldman Jewelers for business. They were married in 1997.

He kept his salesman job until 2011, when he quit that role and became involved in the daily work of running Feldman Jewelers.

In his early years as a salesman for the wholesaler, he was told there were about 22,000 independent jewelry stores — seven in Franklin and Oil City alone. “Now I bet there’s not half, not a third as many,” he said.

One of the factors in the decline of mom-and-pop jewelry stores was the demise of the wholesalers, as they were the middlemen who could sell big-name jewelry in smaller quantities to independent businesses, he said. Now, independent stores would have to make large orders costing “huge

dollars” to get inventory from big-name companies, and those companies can also sell online.

Despite that, “We always tried to stay with the trendy or the up-to-date jewelry and gifts,” Niki Volmrich said.

The wall cases in the current store, on the left from the front Liberty Street entrance, have moved with Feldman Jewelers for more than 100 years, as they can be seen in a 1918 photograph of the store’s location at that time.

Building’s future

As for the store’s current location, the Volmrichs will continue to own the building, and Doug Volmrich said last month that Something Clever, another business owned by Niki Volmrich, will be moving into the old Feldman space.

And the iconic Feldman clock, which was restored this year and has been a

Feldman Jewelers throughout the years

Feldman Jewelers was founded by B.J. Feldman in 1871.

Doug Volmrich, who now owns Feldman with his wife, Niki, said the original location was next to Feldman Way, agreeing with a 2001 article in The Derrick and The News-Herald that listed the 1100 block of Liberty Street.

However, a 1945 obituary for B.J. Feldman’s son George Feldman lists the original location as the former Park Hotel building, where the PNC drive-through currently stands. Feldman Jewelers was taken over by B.J. Feldman’s sons Harvey and George and moved in 1900, according to an old advertisement, taking over a frame building that was likely on the site of the former Vantage building at the corner of 13th and Liberty streets.

From 1945 to 1964, Arthur Maier owned Feldman Jewelers, which was then purchased by Robert Hoover and relocated once again, this time to 1280 Liberty St., where the former Sportsworld and AFSCME building now stands. Hoover moved Feldman

to its current location in or after 1974, due to redevelopment of 1280 Liberty St., according to a 1974 article in The News-Herald.

Upon Hoover’s retirement in 1986, Mr. and Mrs. Nick Cummings purchased the building, and Niki Cummings Volmrich, their daughter, managed the business before taking full ownership.

A typewritten document of unknown date in the Venango County Historical Society’s Feldman file says “the merchandise carried by the store was noteworthy for a community the size of Franklin, but there was wealth and good taste in Franklin, and the demand for quality merchandise enabled George Feldman to carry stock of the best quality.”

The document also said the store was “written up for Harvard Business School, as indicative of the quality merchandise which a small-town merchant could carry. Of course, Franklin was composed — in part — of people of wealth who wanted the best in silver, jewels, china, crystal, etc.”

— By Helen Fielding

Niki Volmrich said, “It breaks my heart to have to go out of business, but it’s time.”

HELEN FIELDING, reporter for The Derrick and The News-Herald, can be reached at helenfielding.thederrick@gmail.com or 814-677-8374.



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Benjamin’s Roadhouse looks to return to its roots

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Benjamin’s Roadhouse is located in the historic downtown Franklin at 1211 Liberty Street. Situated across from the courthouse, guests also have views of both Fountain and Bandstand Park.

The restaurant boasts three different seating sections:

- An indoor dining room offering seating for 62 as well as a full bar.
- A heated four-season patio holds 64 people and offers a cozy fireplace during the chilly fall and winter months.



- During the summer months, Benjamin’s offers a 72 seat yard where patrons enjoy the live music of the Patio Series every Friday from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

Benjamin’s Roadhouse has been owned solely by Richard Jardin since the passing of his beloved wife, Kaye. You’ll recognize Richard when you

see him planting his flowers, putting up all his Christmas decorations or enjoying a cold drink at the bar.

The General Manager of Benjamin’s is Ashley Keener, of Franklin. She has held many positions and worked at the restaurant since 2018. Megan Miller, of Franklin, was promoted to Front of the House manager upon re-opening in November 2023. The current Head Chefs are Eva Stewart and Nicholas Kahle, who orchestrate their four cooks to create amazing dishes and

menus for the guests. Benjamin’s currently employs approximately 30 individuals.

This year, Benjamin’s plans to continue to offer homestyle dishes and shift back to their roots. Menu changes will reflect more roadhouse-style dishes, as well as homemade comfort foods. They also expect to offer more seasonal dishes by creating a unique menu twice per year.

Quality and diverse menu items are offered at Benjamin’s Roadhouse, which

makes it a popular destination in the downtown area. Customers are greeted with an upscale, yet relaxed atmosphere when they dine at Benjamin’s. Customers often include patrons of the Barrow-Civic Theater, area tourists, recreational trail users, employees in the downtown area and government visitors. Customers often choose this venue for private parties and to celebrate special occasions such as bridal and baby showers, birthdays, corporate holiday parties,

etc. Additionally, customers frequently request catering services for private parties and other large events.

Benjamin’s Roadhouse is located at 1211 Liberty Street in Franklin. Winter hours for the restaurant are Sundays from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., and Fridays and Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. For more information or to make reservations, feel free to call 814-432-7010 or email benjaminroadhouse@gmail.com.



Liberty Street Antiques reflects successful 2024

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Franklin — Located at 1239 Liberty St, Franklin, PA, Liberty Street Antiques celebrates a successful 2024, marked by connecting with the Franklin community and beyond.

Their shop has become a favorite destination for those seeking antiques, primitives, vintage items and unique collectibles. In addition, they continued their commitment to showcasing local talent by offering handcrafted candles, maple syrup, soaps, lotions and other artisanal products. Gourmet fudge, a perennial favorite, and their selection of wine and spirits have also added to the charm and variety of what they provide to their customers.

As proud members of The Franklin Retail & Business Association and the Franklin Chamber of Commerce, Liberty Street Antiques takes great pride in participating in community events. These occasions allow them to honor the rich history and vibrant spirit of Franklin while fostering meaningful connections with neighbors and visitors. Being part of Franklin’s thriving business and cultural scene is both a privilege and an inspiration.

Looking ahead to 2025, they’re excited to share their vision for an even more dynamic and engaging year. At

the heart of their mission is a dedication to supporting local vendors and artisans, as well as offering quality, American-made products. They’re always on the lookout for new Pennsylvania-made and U.S.-made items to add to the ever-evolving inventory.

This year also brings something new and special: evening shopping get-togethers. These exclusive events will be for a limited number of guests and will feature specialty drinks, delicious foods and a cozy atmosphere to make the shopping experience truly memorable. Stay tuned for more details as they create these one-of-a-kind gatherings designed to bring the community together in a relaxed and festive setting.

As Liberty Street Antiques steps into 2025, they remain committed to expanding offerings and fostering meaningful connections within the Franklin community. To stay informed about upcoming events, new arrivals and special announcements, visit libertystreetantiques.com or follow them on Facebook at facebook.com/LibertyStreetAntiques.

For inquiries, please contact Liberty Street Antiques at 814-437-6550 or email libertystreetantiques1239@gmail.com.

Seneca Printing expands floor-space, staff

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Seneca Printing Express and Label, Inc. is a full-service commercial print shop specializing in lithographic and flexographic label printing in Franklin in the Venango Area Industrial Complex at 191 Howard Street, Suite 302. Complementing the print capabilities within the shop are an in-house Customer Service department and full-service art and design department.

Seneca Printing Express and Label, Inc. has been solely owned by Jeff Steigerwald Jr. since 2021 and continues to achieve steady growth. With the addition of the “Flexo” division, capabilities were expanded into the area of self-adhesive and roll-fed labels. Seneca Printing Express and Label delved into direct food contact packaging in 2023 and continues to see substantial growth with this client. Additional space has been in demand, and FICDA has secured access to an additional 8,500 square feet adjacent area for business growth. Some of this larger footprint

will be filled with skids of finished labels, available to be shipped on demand via a Vendor Managed Inventory system.

Across the business in 2024, sales increased by approximately 1 million dollars, requiring eight new full-time positions. Based on current projections, between three and five additional full-time manufacturing positions will need to be filled in the coming year. The growth that Seneca Printing Express and Label, Inc. has seen and expects to continue to see over the next year is directly related to the service that they are able to offer their customers.

The approach used at Seneca Printing is: when their customers win, they win. The staff works hard and continually reinforces that mantra. A great core base of employees has allowed Seneca Printing Express and Label, Inc. to offer quality products with a substantially lower lead time than their competitors, while remaining very flexible and readily

able to meet the expedited needs of their customers.

While they service large businesses nationwide and worldwide; they also manage many local orders from area businesses, colleges, organizations, medical offices and advertising agencies. Shipments go out daily from the Franklin facility to destinations in New York, Michigan, Wisconsin, Florida and California, to name a few. Their printing portfolio includes nationally known brands

of pressure sensitive and cut and stack labels. They continue to print material such as brochures, catalogs, flyers, tags, annual reports, multi-part forms, newsletters, business cards, letterhead, calendars, pocket folders, training manuals, yearbooks, posters, envelopes and more.

The future of Seneca Printing Express and Label, Inc. is promising and will lead to additional steady employment opportunities for Venango County.

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Resumes can be emailed directly to:
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 <p>Victoria</p>	 <p>Rascal</p>	 <p>Trinity</p>	 <p>Dunlap</p>	 <p>Dolly Purr-ton</p>	 <p>Ruma</p>

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Mangatas Muse expands options

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

In its second year, Mangatas Muse continues to shine as a beacon of tranquility, healing and self-discovery. Under the expert guidance of Wendy Mooney-Smith, a Master Reiki instructor and healer, the practice has become a cornerstone of holistic wellness in Franklin. Specializing in the transformative power of healing sound bowls and Reiki, Mangatas Muse offers an array of services designed to inspire balance, serenity and personal growth.

The business relocated to a welcoming new space at 314 West Park Street, 2nd Floor — Suite 6, Franklin, PA 16323, where it now includes the newly established Spiritual Sol Boutique, a metaphysical shop that is an integral part of Mangatas Muse. Wendy has further enriched her offerings by introducing Yoga classes catering to all levels, from beginners to advanced practitioners. These classes complement her holistic approach, providing clients with additional tools for physical alignment and inner peace.

Throughout 2024, Wendy's compassionate expertise has fostered profound transformations. Her sound healing sessions, using advanced Alchemy Quartz Crystal Bowls, have created deeply immersive experiences that promote relaxation, emotional release and spiritual connection. As a Master Reiki instructor, Wendy has elevated her practice to teach and guide others in the art of Reiki, while continuing to offer personalized sessions that



address emotional and spiritual healing with remarkable care and intuition.

Community and connection remain central to Mangatas Muse's mission. Wendy has hosted group workshops and special events, including the unforgettable Franklin's First Masquerade Ball, blending celebration and shared energy into a unique gathering. Additionally, Wendy has begun working with individuals in addiction recovery and cancer patients, extending her healing practice to support those on deeply personal journeys. In November, Wendy also launched a community book club, starting with Dolores Cannon's "5 Lives Remem-

bered." The first book was so well received that the next selection will be Cannon's "Between Death and Life."

2025 Vibrational Vision

As Mangatas Muse moves into 2025, Wendy Mooney-Smith envisions a year of growth and renewal, offering new pathways to healing and self-discovery. Wendy plans to expand her work with individuals in addiction recovery and cancer therapy, providing tailored holistic support for these communities. Himalayan salt therapy will also be introduced, seamlessly integrating with sound baths, Reiki and yoga to enhance the healing experience.

Plans include expanding sound healing techniques to incorporate binaural soundscapes and harmonic resonance, launching digital resources for a global audience and organizing immersive retreats in nature to deepen the connection between mind, body and spirit.

Mangatas Muse remains steadfast in its mission to harmonize the rhythms of the soul, foster healing and illuminate the transformative power of sound, energy and Māngata — the moonlit reflection guiding life's journey.

To contact Wendy at Mangatas Muse, email mangataasmuse1111@gmail.com or call 330-502-7847.



Iron Furnace had a big 2024, bigger 2025 plans

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Franklin's Iron Furnace Coffee, located at 1236 Liberty Street and owned by Hannah Gamble, had a big year in 2024.

The coffee shop partnered up with Weird Fish Records in the beginning of 2024 in order to elevate the guest experience. Beyond that, they expanded their food menu by adding sandwiches, soup and bringing back the staff favorite and highly requested Avocado Toast on Sourdough.

Iron Furnace also added a new Grab And Go fridge so customers could have more options to choose from. They have worked tirelessly on getting coffee roasting profiles to where they currently are by tasting every batch and adjusting roasting methods. They have developed new coffee blends to share

their love of coffee with the community, which is able to try new coffees and drip and espresso while also being able to buy retail bags of any of their coffees.

In mid June, Iron Furnace also hired on a new manager to help with day to day operations.

Some of Iron Furnace's new offerings in 2024 include breakfast sandwiches, Grab And Go, soups and homemade syrups. They also added a weekly barista special.

For 2025, they hope to add online ordering options, conduct Science of Coffee lessons, host coffee tasting events, expand their lunch menu and add more beverages for non coffee drinkers. They also have ambitions to begin holding coffee competitions, such as roasting and latte art competitions.

French Creek Kayak Rentals enters third year

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Entering its third year in business, French Creek Canoe & Kayak Rentals continues to service customers with all their water traversing needs in French Creek, the Allegheny River and other surrounding waters.

The rental company features day rentals and over-

night adventures, as well as special or private events and occasions. They offer services seven days a week, and have pick-up or drop-off options with a bus that seats 17.

They have adult kayaks, children's kayaks, big boy kayaks, tandem kayaks, fishing kayaks, and, of course, canoes.

Sassy's Clothing & Gift Boutique, a stylish addition to downtown Franklin

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

2025 has brought an exciting new flair to downtown Franklin — a women's clothing store on 13th Street, Sassy's Clothing & Gift Boutique. This charming boutique invites everyone to explore fresh fashion styles or find that perfect gift for themselves or a loved one.

Owner Stephanie Felmlee takes pride in curating a unique selection of items, offering the latest seasonal styles, delightful home décor, stunning jewelry and adorable baby gifts. With an array of special events lined up throughout the year, Sassy's promises endless excitement, including the highly anticipated Four Season Sales. These sales are held on the first day of each season, offering only four days when the entire store is on sale.

Stephanie's commitment to community shines through Sassy's new line of Shining Star products, with profits donated to local nonprofits. "It's been exciting developing new products to support our local Shining Star organizations," Stephanie said. "Our night light collection was especially popular at Christmas," Stephanie shared. These

unique night lights are manufactured by the talented students of Franklin High School's Innovative Technology program, making this initiative a true win-win for the community.

Sassy's Clothing & Gift Boutique also champions community support by hosting a vibrant Fashion Show at the Barrow Civic Theatre. This lively event, featuring collections from Boho Daisy and Cali Rae's Haute Spot, promises an entertaining afternoon while raising funds for the Barrow Civic Theatre. Mark calendars for this year's Fashion Show on Saturday, April 12. Tickets can be purchased by calling the Theatre at 814-437-3440.

Staying connected with customers is a priority for Sassy's, achieved through both in-store visits and the popular Facebook Live shows. Every Thursday at 6 p.m. and Saturday at 10 a.m., Stephanie showcases the latest arrivals and offers exclusive Facebook deals. Sassy's regular operating hours are Tuesday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., or join the fun on Amy's & Sassy's Facebook page and Facebook Live Shows.



Oak Hill welcomes new assistant manager

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Oak Hill Apartments welcomed Robin Hanahan as the new assistant manager and service coordinator in 2024, as well as staying involved with the community by helping with or hosting multiple events.

2024 saw Oak Hill Apartments assisting 30 families with swimming pool passes to

the Miller Sibley Community Pool with help from the Leon E. Weiner Foundation. They also held a festival with train rides, a bouncy house, snow cones, hot dogs and bungee jumping. The also continued to serve their residents with full holiday meals for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

There are currently some apartments available for lease

at Oak Hill. Applicants are able to use vouchers from the housing authority.

The Oak Hill maintenance staff is like no other, including Todd Shawgo, who has been with them for 45 years and James McCauley, who has been there for 35 years.

In 2025 they plan to continue to promote decent and sanitary housing for residents of

Franklin. They will also continue to: hold their monthly drawing for a resident, help with swimming pool passes, hold the Easter egg hunt and their annual festival.

Oak Hill Apartments employs four full-time workers. Those wishing to learn more can contact them at 814-432-4035 or email them at oakhill@abcmgt.com.

Maurer's 44 years of growth

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Maurer's Trading Post originally opened in spring of 1981 and has been in operation for 44 years with the help of their loyal customers and employees, and they continue to expand their business year after year.

Starting out in a 20-by-30-foot building, they store has now expanded to 26,000 square feet on two floors.

The building houses approximately 4,000 firearms, ammo, reloading supplies, archery equipment, a fishing department, clothing, footwear, cutlery and much more.

They are constantly adding new products and inventory to keep up with the market and new trends of the outdoor industry. Each year, Maurer's also offers an Outdoorsmen

Club Membership where they give out many prizes.

For customers who can't find what they're looking for, Maurer's also offers special orders. For those looking to sell, the trading post will pay top money on used firearms and will purchase estate firearms as well.

They are the leaders in gun raffles in the area, fundraising for: Fire halls, clubs, groups and other organizations.

Maurer's is also a big supporter of Sportsmen Rights, both in and out of the Country.

In 2025, customers can look to the return of their yearly March Customer Appreciation Sale.

Maurer's is also always accepting applications for individuals wanting to learn the outdoor industry.

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Bear’s Furniture celebrates growth and community

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Bear’s Furniture & Mattress 1st, located at 3854 Route 322 in Sugarcreek, continues to offer home furnishings and bedding to the area. They provide jobs for 23 full-time employees and one part-time employee. Bear’s Furniture & Mattress 1st had a blessed and successful year in 2024. For their customers, they made website improvements and instituted a new messaging system for getting information more accurately and quickly. For their community, they

held a fundraiser called “Kiss Cancer Goodbye” that raised money for cancer research and direct outreach for patients. Ladies’ Day in November was also a huge success, and they raised over \$1,400 for the Venango County Humane Society. For their employees, they purchased a new delivery truck, promoted a new serviceperson and held an Employee Appreciation Day with drawings for prizes, food and special treats. One of the new services they are working on for 2025 are integrative website updates and adding more pricing for

customer convenience. They are also working on adding some new La-Z-Boy groups, sleepers from a new company called Overnight and occasional from Null Furniture. Their new Simmons and Serta mattress lines are out in all five of their locations to help everyone get a better night’s sleep. In 2025, their Ladies’ Day will be held in the spring at their Greenville store and in the Fall, like always, at the Franklin location. They hope everyone will stop out to see the vendors, food and auction for charity. Throughout the year, they will

also have lots of new sales and events along with new products hitting the floor weekly. Their goals this year are customer and employee-focused, since they would not be Bear’s without both of those things. Their employees, their customers, and their community are what makes Bear’s successful and able to sustain this family-owned business. Those wishing to learn more can call 814-437-7823 or visit their website at www.bearsfurniture.com. Homeowners have been

DES marks 43 years providing power needs

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

2024 marked 43 successful years in business for Drayer Electrical Service (DES). DES has been busy servicing industrial and commercial customers by troubleshooting and performing maintenance on conveyors, lathes, mills and various machinery and equipment. They realize down time is costly to businesses, so they answer emergency calls quickly to keep assembly lines moving. One major project last year was the remodel of one of the largest churches in Franklin. It required relocating the main electric service and coordinating with Penelec to accommodate the demolition of part of the building. They also installed power to new heat and air conditioning units throughout the building. LED prices have been dropping, so upgrading old lighting is still a constant request on shop floors and retail spaces. They also have their own boom lift for upgrading parking lot pole lights to LED’s.

requesting upgrades to main service panels for increased loads due to EV chargers and air conditioners. Many insurance companies now require the replacement of old fuse panels to continue policies with fire coverage, therefore realtors encourage upgrades to people buying or selling homes. Due to the threat of more frequent power outages, they’ve seen a significant increase in demand for whole house generators and receptacles with breaker interlocks for portable generators. They supplied and installed many Kohler brand generators, but also repaired and performed annual maintenance on many other brands last year. As always, DES continues to offer a professional service with parts and labor warranties, using only commercial grade materials purchased locally when possible. In most circumstances, they provide free estimates and strive to offer their best recommendations and options to get the job done in the most efficient and cost effective way.

Twisted Tees Designs increases customer base

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Twisted Tees Designs is owned and operated by Scott and Angie Armburger and located at 112 Redneck Lane in Cooperstown. Twisted Tees Designs has been in business for six years, first opening in October of 2018. They offer custom screen-printed shirts, embroidery

items and other custom designs. Their business includes personal, business, benefits and school fundraising. They also travel to on-site sporting events. Twisted Tees Designs offers 24/7 hours by email and messaging apps. The business website is www.facebook.com/twistedteesnow. The Armburgers attend webinars

and conventions in order to stay on top of the newest technology as related to the screen printing and embroidery business. Over the last year, they have added more equipment in order to stay current and meet the demands of their customers. They recently purchased an industrial size DTF printer.

This past year, they were able to host two different on-site events in the same day. Over the past year, they hosted 45 on-site events spanning over six different states. Twisted Tees Designs received a dramatic increase in their customer base in 2024, which they attribute to the facts that they offer full-time

business hours, as well as positive word-of-mouth from happy and satisfied customers. Clients can rest assured that their work is done correctly the first time. For 2025, Armburger said the level of business is expected to increase as they look to expand to more businesses and opportunities.

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B & M Floors: 25 years of excellence in flooring and design

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

As B & M Floors commemorates its 25th anniversary, the company reflects on a proud history of service, quality craftsmanship and dedication to the community. Since its founding, this family-operated business at 1969 Allegheny Blvd (Route 8), Reno, PA, has set the standard for flooring and tile installations in the region, serving Venango, Clarion and Forest counties with unparalleled expertise.

A year of growth and innovation

2024 was a banner year for B & M Floors. Under the ownership of Lynn Morrow, the business reinforced its reputation as the area's go-to provider for luxury vinyl tile (LVT). Boyd Morrow, the lead floor installer with over 20 years of hands-on experience, has been instrumental in maintaining the company's high standards of quality and craftsmanship.

The store boasts the largest display of 100% waterproof LVT in wood and tile looks, perfect for modern and classic styles alike. In addition, the team expanded their offerings to include intricate ceramic

tile backsplashes for kitchens and custom-designed shower installations.

Unlike other businesses, B & M Floors stands out for its commitment to in-house excellence, never relying on subcontractors. This ensures that every project is executed with consistent quality and attention to detail.

Contributing to the local economy

With a full-time staff dedicated to customer satisfaction, B & M Floors continues to invest in the local economy, purchasing materials from trusted suppliers and participating in community events. This year, the company undertook updates to its showroom, creating an inviting space for customers to explore a wide range of flooring options.

Looking ahead to 2025

As the business steps into its 25th year, B & M Floors has big plans to continue evolving and serving its customers. Expanding product lines, offering new styles in LVT and embracing innovative installation techniques are all on the horizon. The company remains steadfast in its mission to provide high-quality flooring



solutions and exceptional customer service to every home and business it touches.

B & M Floors would like to thank its loyal customers for 25 years of support. For

more information or to schedule a consultation, visit their website at bandmfloors.com

or follow them on Facebook at B & M Floors Facebook Page.



Anderson Furniture deemed Franklin business of the year

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Anderson Furniture Co., one of the oldest retail businesses in downtown Franklin, was awarded Business of the Year by the Franklin Area Chamber of Commerce for 2024.

The award was presented at the chamber's annual celebration in April which by coincidence was being held at Anderson's store.

"I was very surprised and honored to be recognized by the Chamber," said owner Stephen Teig. He also thanked the Franklin community and surrounding communities for their long-standing support.

Some physical improvements were completed in 2024,

including installation of a new metal roof on the Buffalo Street warehouse location as well as painting and interior repairs to several areas in the showroom.

Debbie Wiegel rejoined the company as a part-time sales associate and in-home design consultant.

The furniture company was founded in 1910 in the Liberty Street building that now houses DeBence Antique Music World. Anderson's moved to its present location at 225 13th St. in 1915. The Teig family has owned the store since 1945. Today the business is operated by 3rd generation proprietor Stephen Teig.

Anderson's also has a second location in Volant which

opened in 1992. This store is housed in a rebuilt barn and features more rustic styles, with an emphasis on accessories. It continues to be a shopping destination for Pittsburgh and Ohio, as well as local customers.

Anderson's added several new vendors, including upholstery at popular price points and solid wood furniture from Archbold, made in Ohio. The company also carries furniture from Mavin, Craftmaster, Liberty, Sunny Designs and Smith Brothers, as well as mattresses from Scott Living.

Anderson's currently has a total of 11 employees — five are full-time and six are part-time workers.

Jacob A Weaver Co. receives long-awaited tractor units

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Jacob A Weaver Co., a family-owned manufacturer and distributor of pallets and other wood manufactured products located in Cochran, celebrated another exciting year in 2024, including the promotion and addition of some key employees.

Eric Ebner, the company's longtime Facilities manager, took over leadership of the company as the General Manager in October, which allowed for the addition of Jason Miller as the new production/facilities manager in December. These men lead a manufacturing and administrative team of almost 100 employees.

The company's transportation division also took possession of a brand-new fleet of 2024 International tractor units to replace their outdated

fleet and allow them to continue to directly service their pallet customers with delivery of the product.

These units had been on order since 2020 and had been long delayed due to the supply chain issues created by COVID-19.

Established in 1994, Jacob A Weaver Co. provides sustainable pallet solutions to common pallet design and pallet procurement challenges.

A state-of-the-art pallet manufacturer, their customers depend on them to react immediately to their need-it-now requests. They deliver full truckload pallet orders in quick situations, thanks to their extensive inventory and high-volume production.

At every level of production, employees are responsible and empowered. From

equipment upgrades through final product inspections, they are constantly offering valuable improvement suggestions that are incorporated into daily routines, resulting in a better, more consistent, higher quality product for customers.

At any given time, over 10 million board feet of lumber is on-hand and being processed through multiple facilities on over 20 combined acres of property. They are vertically integrated from log to finished product. Raw materials are processed through our automated machinery where they quickly and efficiently manufacture final product to customer specifications.

To learn more, visit their website at thepalletshop.com or call sales team members John or Scott at 814-425-2500.

Silver Valley offers lakeside escape

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Silver Valley Rentals offers area residents or visitors to stay in cabins on beautiful Silver Valley Lake, only three miles out of Franklin. It is a hidden gem.

The cabins are on a five acre lake about 200 yards from the Allegheny River,

Big Sandy Creek and the bike trail. For those who like the outdoors, this is the place to be, with a wide variety of breathtaking views and outdoor animals to see.

Cabins have two bedrooms and sunken fire places, with a beautiful view of the lake. They are all newly remodeled.

Great for quiet getaways, vacations, big meetings, reunions, club events, birthday parties, training sessions and much more. For anyone looking for that "cabin in the woods" getaway spot, this place will simply take their breath away.

Cali Rae's added infrared sauna

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Cali Rae's Haute Spot, located at 303 13th St, Franklin PA, 16323 and owned by Christina Ali, is a women's clothing store and tanning boutique that offers UV tanning beds, spray tanning, teeth whitening and an infrared sauna. They employ three part-time employees.

They offer four levels of tanning beds, an automated



spray tan booth, 20 minute \$99 teeth whitening service and a Far infrared sauna with chromotherapy, which was

added in 2024. They also have a women's clothing boutique.

In 2025 they hope to expand their boutique area and add a new level three tanning bed.

Those wishing to learn more about Cali Rae's Haute Spot can call 814-673-9020, email Caliraeshautespot@gmail.com or visit their website at www.caliraeshautespot.com.



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PMP Printing marks 10 years in Franklin

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

PMP Printing Inc, located at 626 13th Street in Franklin, is celebrating their 10th anniversary this year, and they are eager for many more successful years ahead.

In addition to a diverse array of printing solutions, they also provide fulfillment mailing services to ensure customers' materials reach their audience effectively. They can also help with any promotional products customers can think of, allowing them to elevate brand presence. To stay ahead in the evolving market, they consistently introduce new materials and maintain their competitiveness within



the printing industry.

New to the business, they recently acquired a large format press capable of printing on 4'x8' sheets of coroplast, foam board or maxmetal. This new equipment allows them to produce large signs and yard

signs at a significantly faster pace. Additionally, this year, they are offering on-site t-shirt printing for large events.

For 2025, they are expanding their inventory to include dye sublimation and a large heat press to enable more in-house printing. This expansion will allow them to diversify product offerings and improve printing capabilities.

PMP Printing employs 12 full-time employees and one part-time employee. Those wishing to learn more can call them at 814-346-0045, email them at mgoodwill@pmpprinting.com or visit their website at www.pmpprinting.com.



Boho Daisy Boutique opens brick and mortar in Franklin

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Boho Daisy Boutique, a small business owned by Jessica Moss, officially opened a storefront in downtown Franklin at 1246 Liberty St., Franklin PA in October 2024.

Boho Daisy Boutique started as a micro store set up in local businesses in Franklin and then moved to a mobile boutique operating from a 1966 vintage airstream camper. Boho Daisy Boutique still operates two stores in Clearfield and Medina, Ohio. Boho Daisy Boutique offers curated

women's clothing, jewelry, handbag shoes and a small selection of home decor items.

A unique offering of Boho Daisy is collaboration with small businesses to bring consumers small batch items made locally, some of these being signature burned hats, as well as hand-poured soy wax candles from Fairview Farms.

Coming in 2025 Boho Daisy Boutique will be launching a children's line of clothing and will also begin to introduce a men's clothing line. Expansion will also be occurring as Boho

Daisy Boutique opens a satellite store in Pittsburgh.

Look for Boho Daisy boutique to be operating locally with Daisy the Airstream in both Oil City and Seneca in 2025.

For local business looking to add a new element to customers, Boho Daisy Boutique is available to book and offer a unique shopping experience for customers at other business venues.

To learn more, come say hello to their storefront, visit their Facebook page, or shop with them online at www.shopbohodaisy.com.

Continuing the Gardinier-Warren legacy

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Gardinier-Warren Funeral Home is deeply honored to continue a legacy of faith, trust and service that has spanned more than a century. They consider it a privilege to uphold the compassionate and caring traditions established by the generations who came before them.

Under the dedicated leadership of Ryan and Amy Warren, they remain committed to providing the highest level of care, comfort and gentle guidance to families during life's most

challenging moments.

"From our family to yours, we extend our heartfelt gratitude for allowing us the honor of serving you and your loved ones," the Warrens said.

The dedicated staff of Jubal Kelly, Heather Brown and Sam Saeli, Jr. make everything all possible and are here to serve. Their commitment to excellence and genuine care for the families they assist form the heart of everything the funeral home does.

They are also profound-

ly thankful for the trust and participation of the community. Together, the funeral home has created a space that cherishes treasured memories while fostering the creation of new ones — making them a true part of this community we all hold dear.

At the heart of their mission is the desire to help families make thoughtful and well-planned preparations during their time of need. They strive to provide a peaceful and comforting environment where loved ones

can gather to honor and celebrate a life. By preserving and celebrating longstanding traditions and customs, they ensure that every service reflects the individuality and uniqueness of the life it honors. Above all, they are committed to reaching out to the greater community with compassion and care, standing by their side in life's most tender moments.

Gardinier-Warren Funeral Home thanks the community for letting them walk with their families through these meaningful journeys.

Foremost Logistics makes a difference in shipping industry

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Foremost Logistics, located in Reno, PA, is a 3PL. What is a 3PL? It is a Third-Party Logistics firm.

Its function is to match available loads with trucks in the area wanting to go to the load's destination point. This is an important link in the transportation chain, enabling shippers to move their product in a timely and cost-effective manner and provide work for truckers with empty equipment looking for cargo to load.

The resulting outcome reduces the cost of empty miles for transporters and increases efficiency for shippers. Fore-

most is constantly expanding and creating relationships with shippers and transporters all over the country to help solve some of the supply chain shortage issues which we have all experienced at one time or another.

Continually updated software helps to provide extremely accurate information regarding a shipment's location and estimated time of arrival, which is critical information that is vital in today's transportation network.



HomeTown Hype first year in Franklin

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

HomeTown Hype Custom Apparel, 1246 Liberty Street, Franklin PA 16323, enjoyed a strong first year of business in 2024. The store, owned by Sean and Kia Wirth, specializes in creating customized apparel with screen printing and embroidery, as well as running apparel fundraisers, employee webstores and live event apparel printing. Clothing available in-store features locally inspired designs, and they also have locally

inspired "gift shop" items available.

After moving their garage business into the location on Liberty Street, the Wirths experienced a whirlwind of growth in 2024. They invested in the future of the custom apparel industry by purchasing new generation commercial printing equipment. This allows them to remove most of the frustrations customers experience when working with traditional "screen printers." They have no order

minimums, no setup fees, no color limitations, short turnaround times and competitive prices.

They also had major success in 2024 in their retail space. They launched a revolving line of unique and original apparel featuring locally inspired artwork and designs that they create in house. They come out with new designs regularly, and there is always something new and fun to check out at the shop.

Changes they made in-

clude taking a major leap of faith with their largest investment yet, the purchase of a brand new, top-of-the-line, 6-head embroidery machine. This will allow them to: produce embroidery work 6x faster, offer more competitive prices, and produce A+ quality embroidery work for customers.

For 2025, they are aiming to provide meaningful employment to two to four additional team members by the end of the year.

French Creek Fall Safety enjoyed record sales

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

French Creek Fall Safety can proudly state that 2024 was both a year of new growth and new records. They began the year strong in Indianapolis, where they received a very positive reception at a promising tradeshow overlooked by other members of the fall protection industry.

Aiming to improve their overall performance as a company, they turned inward and upgraded their internal ERP system. This change streamlined day-to-day operations, smoothing out communication lines, resource management and

inter-department efficiency.

They also focused on improvements around the facility, adding new machines to their production line, as well as their testing environment. Their test tower now has a newly poured concrete floor and improved testing equipment.

September saw them reaching a peak all-time high for products shipped in a single month. Adding on to this was the leap in online leads generated by their ever-improving website. This resulted in a 20% increase of orders from what they received last year, which brought them to the highest web traf-

fic they've experienced as of yet.

Just as they were celebrating their newest accomplishment, they brought on new sales teams. While they've always been accessible throughout the country, with their new network of sales professionals, French Creek Fall Safety's reach now completely covers all 50 states. Their team in house has also grown in the past year, with a 14% increase in their employee count for 2024.

Their best-selling products by far were their ladder safety and confined space systems. They've also been

busy when it comes to their R&D this year. Not only have they put three new products out, they have also started an entirely new production line to bolster their already massive catalog of available fall protection equipment.

2024 also saw them honor the passing of their founder, Carl Wible. Since his founding of the company in 1992, French Creek Fall Safety has been committed to its employees and community. As 2025 begins, they push forward, ensuring that the principles they were founded on remain at the core of everything they do.

Salon Dolcé celebrates 15 years of beauty

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Owner Elizabeth Breene Amoroso opened Salon Dolcé 15 years ago. Located at 507 13th St., Franklin, Salon Dolcé offers services for women, men and children. They include haircuts and styling, color and specialty color, perms, treatments, braids, facial waxing, lash lifts and tints, nail services and spa pedicures. They also have tanning beds and offer spray tanning.

They also have jewelry, cosmetics, boutique-like items, and specialty hair and tanning products for sale.

The Salon has three full-time stylists, Elizabeth and two other long-time stylists, Missy Opitz and Shianne Shetler. They are also looking to hire another cosmetologist in the near future. Looking ahead, the salon plans to add new salon services, as well as esthetician-like services, facials and massage therapy.

Daffin's Candies to move

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

A local staple in Franklin, Daffin's Candies, located on Liberty Street, will be moving in 2025.

Daffin's Candies will continue to serve Franklin and the surrounding communities in 2025. The candy retailer is planning to relocate to a soon-to-be remodeled storefront at 1262 Liberty Street, which is next to the Trails to Ales Brewery. Look for more details regarding

the relocation in spring 2025.

The chocolate retailer, which has been offering an assortment of candy, cards and merchandise for years, has their production based out of Sharon. The company employs 14 full-time workers (one in Franklin) and 80 part-time workers (seven in Franklin).

Those wishing to learn more can call them at 724-342-2892 or visit their website at www.daffins.com.

Chief Security and Investigations provides safety for individuals, businesses

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

2024 was a busy year for Chief Security and Investigations, LLC. They've worked at fairs, festivals, weddings and private parties, providing security to keep everyone safe. Along with event security, they saw an increase in private detective work, handling more cases for individuals and businesses. From back-

ground checks and surveillance to legal investigations, their services stayed in high demand. They also expanded their subpoena services, helping law offices and clients with delivering important legal documents.

The security company is located at 1086 Patchel Run Rd, Franklin PA, 16323, and is owned by Alan Heller, employing one full-time and five

part-time employees.

They didn't make big changes, but they focused on doing their job well and keeping up with demand. Their main goal has been to stay reliable and ready for any event or case that needs them.

Looking forward

Next year, they're planning to expand their armed

security services. They'll offer more options for businesses, private events and individuals looking for extra protection. They'll continue to grow their private investigative services, including background checks, surveillance and legal cases. Additionally, they will broaden their subpoena services to better assist legal profes-

sionals and clients who need prompt and professional document delivery.

Their team stays up to date with the latest training to make sure they're always ready for new challenges. They also hope to build stronger relationships with local businesses and law offices that need investigative services or subpoena delivery.

They're proud to serve their community, and will keep looking for ways to grow while staying committed to keeping people safe.

Those wishing to learn more can call or text 814-673-1386, email aheller@chiefsecurityandinvestigations.com or visit their website at www.chiefsecurityandinvestigations.com.