



BUSINESS

Review & Forecast

Friday, Feb. 14, 2025

Section H — Clarion County



Once the renovation of the Clarion County Courthouse is completed this year, county residents and other visitors will see a whole host of improvements. In addition to being a self-funded project, the county received matching grants for it.

By Jamie Hunt

Section

H

Section H of the Business Review & Forecast focuses on the businesses and organizations that look to put Clarion County on that next level of growth in all facets.

There's the ongoing rehabilitation of the Clarion County Courthouse, expected to be completed by the latter portion of 2025. It's a project that county officials self-funded as opposed to borrowing money and saddling the county's taxpayers with the bill.

This section includes a look at the work done by the Clarion Area Chamber of Business & Industry, which includes the organization's Autumn Leaf Festival, and the Clarion County Economic Development Corp. Both nonprofits keep the development of Clarion County businesses at the forefront.

Readers also will see articles from Clarion County-area businesses. They provide the community with an idea of the products and services they offer, while contributing to the county's overall economic growth.

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Courthouse project has been huge undertaking

BY RANDY BARTLEY
Staff writer

2025 will be a year of beginnings and endings in Clarion County.

“One the biggest things is the completion of the courthouse project,” Clarion County Commissioner Wayne Brosius said. “We hope to have it completed and everyone moved back in by the end of October 2025.”

The county chose to self-fund the renovations at the Clarion County Courthouse instead of borrowing the money. The county also received matching grants for the project.

At an earlier meeting Commissioner Ted Tharan said the county’s share of the funding came from money the county had saved for the past five or six years. “We did not expect to be doing as much as we are doing,” he said during an October meeting.

The contractor, Tharan recently said, is currently working on the heating and ventilation system and in the basement of the courthouse.

An appropriation of \$1.8 million that Braxton White had said had been arranged by U.S. Sen. John Fetterman has yet to be completed. The money would be used to install four new restrooms, accessible parking, new sewer lines and re-wiring of the entire building.

Tharan said in October that because the basement floor was deemed to be of historical value, a new sewer system had to be devised for the entire building. “We couldn’t use any of the lines under the building because the floor tile was historic; so we had to route every thing down to Liberty.”

According to Brosius the final cost will be about \$6 million.

“The employees seem to have adjusted pretty well to the complex building, but I’m sure they will be glad to get back into the courthouse,” he said.

According to White, the move to the complex, which was done with trailers by maintenance staff to save money, “went very well.”

Brosius said there are some projects in the county with which the commissioners don’t have to directly deal.

“There are several new businesses opening in 2025, like the new UK Travel Plaza at the Strattanville exit at Exit 70,” Brosius said. “That has been closed for about 20 years; so it is great to see that open again. There is a new Sheetz plaza going in at exit 62 (Clarion).”

“The new Foxburg Riverstone Estate will be transformed into a 77-room wellness resort that will create many new jobs. That isn’t due to be open until 2028, but construction will start in 2025.”



By Jamie Hunt

Safety fencing in front of the Clarion County Courthouse lets the public know the renovation project, which lasted throughout most of 2024, continues. The project is scheduled to be completed late this year.



Contributed photo

Clarion County Tourism Director Hind Karns took a spin in one of the airplanes at the first STOL event at the Clarion County Airport in June.

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation also is doing several projects in the county.

“There is the road expansion project between Aldi and Trout Run to make it three lanes in Clarion,” Brosius said. “There will also be sidewalks installed. This is not a county project. We are not responsible for the headaches people are going to experience. People are going to need a lot of patience for the next year. Once it is done, people will appreciate it.”

In addition, he said, “The I-80 bridge replacement project will be with us for several years.”

Aviation event

Brosius said the county will be hosting the second Appalachian Short Takeoff and Landing (STOL) event at Clarion County Airport in August. About 14 pilots participated last year, including

the current champion.

Woodfest

Clarion County celebrated its lumber heritage with the first annual Woodfest in March.

The event included an indoor marketplace and vendor show the Clarion Mall, crafters, artisans and kids games. The Lumber Heritage Region and the Allegheny Hardwoods Utilization Group’s educational displays will be on hand again this year.

The Pennsylvania Woodmobile, a 34-foot-long trailer that provides an interactive experience educating visitors about Pennsylvania’s forests, also was at the mall. Chainsaw carvers were at Veterans Memorial Park in Clarion.

Governor’s Cup

This year, the Governor’s Cup golf tournament will be held at Foxburg Country Club. “Gov. Josh Shapiro visited the golf course and I

guess he liked it well enough to hold the tournament there this year,” Brosius said.

The Foxburg course was started in 1887 and is the oldest continuously operating golf course in the nation.

Brady’s Bend Overlook

Brosius said the county plans to do some work at the Brady’s Bend Overlook. The trees and brush need to be trimmed back, and the hopes is to secure a grant to update some of the fencing.

The overlook provides a 1,500-foot panoramic view of the magnificent bend in the Allegheny River. Brady’s Bend was named after Samuel Brady (1756-1795), the legendary frontiersman from Shippensburg who traveled throughout western Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Ohio.

“This is part of our effort to enhance our tourist promotion efforts,” Brosius said. He noted hanggliding is no lon-

ger permitted at the overlook.

Jail enhancements

Brosius said there is a possibility of hosting out-of-county inmates in the Clarion County Jail. “We have the space for additional inmates and it won’t cost that much extra. We will charge a daily rate for housing the inmates. That will help the bottom line.”

The county also has employed a re-entry Coordinator through an agreement with the Clarion, Armstrong, Indiana Drug and Alcohol Commission. The commission will pay the counselor from the opioid settlement fund. The re-entry specialist will help the person being released from jail with housing, medical information and appointments.

Mental health

Clarion County President Judge Sara Seidle-Patton initiated the Clarion County Mental Health Judicial Task Force.

“It started mainly with county people like the public defender, district attorney, commissioners and others to see what could be done to tackle the mental health crisis through the court system,” Brosius said. “We are still pulling that board together.”

White said the criminal justice system has become “a catch-all” for some people with mental health issues. “If you have someone in a mental health crisis, an ambulance or a police car may not be the right choice for them. We don’t have another tool for them right now. Finding another solution for them in a rural county will be a challenge.”

Reassessment

Although the physical reassessment has been completed, the company that conducts the reassessments is not finished. “We have the appeals process to go through,” Brosius said. “When people get their cards in the mail, they can call the Assessment Office and state their grievances.”

Tourism

The county recently completed the Clarion River Access Study that outlines numerous projects for access to the Clarion River. Funding is an issue.

“I am not certain at this time where the money would come from at this point,” Brosius said. “The county doesn’t have a lot of extra cash sitting around to build piers and boat ramps. It will depend on what grants we can obtain.”

White said part of the plan was the creation of an advisory board. “It will work better if the recommendations come from a group of stakeholders rather than us.”

Emergency medical services

White said the state Legislature “doesn’t seem to be interested in creating new avenues to raise revenue for emergency medical services. Since we haven’t done an assessment since 1975 in the county, we can’t go beyond a half-mill, which doesn’t raise a lot of scratch.”

“It has to be more than money. There are staffing issues. We shouldn’t be comfortable with people waiting 45 minutes to an hour for an ambulance. It is a matter of life and death.”

He said the Clarion County Task Force has put in for a study; at the end of which “there should be some sort of plan. After that, it would be up to the municipalities to implement that plan.”

In the wake of the first county real estate tax increase in more than a decade, the county is watching expenses closely.

“My top priority has always been running the county government as efficiently as possible,” Brosius said.

CCEDC looks to a pivotal year in 2025

BY RANDY BARTLEY
Staff writer

The Clarion County Economic Development Corp. had a “transformative” year in 2024, and CCEDC Executive Director Jarred Heuer expects 2025 to be a “uniquely pivotal” year.

“2024 has been an overwhelmingly successful year for our organization,” he said during the CCEDC annual dinner in December. “The very DNA of the CCEDC has been reshaped for the better, and I am excited about what lies ahead as we continue our work in 2025 and beyond.”

The CCEDC grew from a staff of one person to five people. They include Tourism Director Hind Karns, Community Development Coordinator Eric Funk Jr., Marketing Director Callie DeMasters and Office Manager Rachel Bennett. The addition of new staff members led to a new office in Clarion, at 162 S. Second Ave., Suite B.

In 2023, the CCEDC created the county’s own tourism office, along with a new image and marketing operation. In partnership with the Clarion County commissioners and Bull Moose Marketing, the slogan “Discover Clarion County” was created.

“We had to set up everything from scratch,” Karns said. “We have finished



Hind Karns

Phase One, which was planning, and now we have a strategy in place.

“Since July, we have started to execute the plan. We hired our staff and planned what we are doing in terms of marketing. We are looking at social sites and websites that are tools to promote the area.”

Karns said there is still a lot of work to do.

“We have a vision and now we want to break that vision into smaller parts,” she said. “Our vision is to set up Clarion County as a go-to, prime location for families who are outdoor lovers.”

Karns said other outdoors areas, such as Ohiopyle, are over-saturated. “Visitors don’t get the freedom and quiet they are looking for.

We want to attract families who are upper-middle income from large cities, like D.C. and Pittsburgh, to come and have their vacations here.”

Karns said marketing strategies will be based on feedback from stakeholders.

“We need to start thinking about product. The products are events that will encourage people to come here, she said. “We have many roadmaps to follow.

“The first is to establish a strong brand. Right now, not many people know about Clarion County. We are going to continue to work on that through advertising and our app.”

The Clarion River Access plan is important to CCEDC’s plan.

“There are places along the river that are not very accessible,” Karns said. “We have to figure out how we can get grants to help finance the development of those sites.”

A board will be established to select sites along the Clarion River for development.

“Part of building a strong tourism economy is to deliver on your promise,” Karns said. “You want to make sure you have facilities that are well-maintained facilities for your visitors.

“This is not a short-term effort. We have to keep building as we go.”

Heuer said the CCEDC launched the Clarion County Regional Main Street Initiative that includes the boroughs of Clarion, East Brady, Foxburg, Knox and New Bethlehem. Heuer said the program is a “partnership-driven effort aimed at fostering downtown revitalization.”

In his budget address, Gov. Josh Shapiro proposed the creation of a new state program — “Main Street Matters” — designed to support main streets across the state.

In November, the CCEDC submitted two funding applications to the program for a regional facade program and a regional business improvement program.

The CCEDC was awarded a \$500,000 Brownfields Community-Wide Assessment grant from the state Environmental Protection Agency designed to address challenges associated with brownfield sites in the county.

The grant will be used to identify, assess and mitigate obstacles; ensuring the sites can be redeveloped and remain viable for future growth and revitalization.

In 2024 the CCEDC assisted with the founding of the Rural Pennsylvania Healthcare Collaborative, which led to the acquisition of two new emergency vehicles, an ambulance and a squad SUV at Clarion Hospital.

Clarion anticipates stormwater projects to be a major task

BY RANDY BARTLEY
Staff writer

Stormwater projects will be a major issue in Clarion Borough in 2025, according to Projects Manager Todd Colosimo.

Stormwater projects are under the direction of the Clarion Borough Stormwater Authority (CBSA), which Clarion established in 2016.

The authority board consists of the five members, all of whom are borough taxpayers. The CBSA was created to manage, repair and improve the borough’s extensive system of stormwater infrastructure.

There is fee structure in place for impervious areas and are based on the square footage that is paved. That fee has not increased since it was started.

“It was supposed to go into effect in 2020, but when COVID hit it was delayed,” Clarion Borough Secretary and Chief Administration Officer Linda LaVan-Preston said. “With so many people at home, it wasn’t fair to start it at that time. It really went into effect in the fourth quarter of 2020.

“We collect the fee, but one large project will wipe the whole thing out. We have numerous projects in the borough that would cost \$500,000 each.”

The authority has received a Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority (PEN-IVEST) loan that is guaranteed by the borough for the Grand Avenue storm-sewer replacement project.

“It is an old system, the inlets are bad and sinkholes have opened up,” Colosimo said. “There are four major sinkholes we thought were dangerous.

Technically, it is a simple project but it will require a lot of material. The old, rusted steel pipe will be replaced with plastic pipe. There will brand new inlets and headwalls.”

He said a trench drain project was undertaken at Fourth Avenue and Franklin Street, which was “kind of new for us,” he said. “The stormwater was sheeting across the road, and this will channel the flow. Eventually, we will get a bigger project going on Fourth Avenue. We will have a grant for that work.

“Just digging out an old inlet and installing a new one will cost \$10,000 to \$12,000. It is expensive, but it has to be done.”

RANDY BARTLEY reporter for The Derrick and The News-Herald, can be reached at 814-715-3093 or at randybartley.thederrick@gmail.com.



Photos by Randy Bartley

The Clarion High School Band leads the 2024 Autumn Leaf Festival parade along Main Street.

2025 AFL adjusts to change in university's homecoming

BY RANDY BARTLEY
Staff writer

The 2025 Autumn Leaf Festival will be held later in the month of October due to a change in the PennWest-Clarion football schedule.

Mercyhurst, the Golden Eagles scheduled opponent, moved into another NCAA division, which created a hole in PennWest's schedule. ALF traditionally has been held in conjunction with the university's homecoming.

"There are only two home games on the university's schedule this year, one in September and one in October," Clarion Area Chamber of Business & Industry Executive Director Tracy Becker said. "Sometimes, people forget that the ALF is also the university's homecoming. When ALF started back in 1953 it was done with the university."

She said the board talked about options as to when to schedule this year's festival, and the consensus was to go with Oct. 18 to 25. The university's homecoming game is scheduled Oct. 24.

"We have had Autumn Leaf the second and third weekends (of October), but never this late," Becker said. "Hopefully, the weather will be as good as it was last year. The weather was kind of on our side. The weather did not cooperate for the car show, however. Any outdoor event, like the Autumn Leaf Festival, is subject to the weather."

Becker said once the media published this year's date, the phone started ringing within an hour. "People were upset that the ALF was so late. We called all the motels to inform them because many people make their reservations a year ahead of time."

"We don't know at this point if the university can rearrange their schedule in 2026. That is probably the biggest challenge we face in the future."

2024 marked the return of the carnival after the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Tim Krise, the owner of GDK Entertainment, from Punxsutawney, brought some great rides," Becker said. "We had positive comments daily. People said the rides were clean and bright."

She explained Krise has an arrangement with Hershey



Seven year-old Piper Amsler, of Shippenville, adds her name to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation snowplow at the Touch-A-Truck event at the Clarion Mall during the 2024 Autumn Leaf Festival.



2024 Autumn Leaf Festival queen Jada Runyan and first runner-up Reginee Blanchard.



Breanna Armstrong, left, shows a towel that she likes to Lindsay Schmadler during the 2024 Autumn Leaf Festival's Farmers and Crafters Day.

Park that says if the park has a ride it is replacing, the park will call him and he will buy the old ride. This year, Krise might bring a train to Clarion.

The hope, Becker said, is AFL organizers and Krise can reach a deal on a long-term

agreement for him to be the rides supplier.

The chamber annually holds a contest that determines the ALF theme and logo. For 2025, Becker said, "We had about 150 theme nominations." The logo will be announced at

the annual dinner on March 22.

In regard to music and announcements, Becker said the hope is to more utilize the speakers that Clarion Borough erected on Main Street.

She said there are several new food vendors coming this year.

"People complained last year that there wasn't enough candy thrown during the parade," Becker said. "Candy prices have gone up and it is hard to judge how many kids are going to attend the parade. Last year, there were kids lined up from the university to Third Avenue."

She explained a lot of candy remains on the street, where it is tramped on or run over. "The street cleaner gets quite a workout."

According to Becker, organizers have been approached about a pickleball tournament. "I told them if they want to organize the event, we would advertise it for them. We are always open to new ideas and new events."

The ALF committee is seeking volunteers.

"We lost our parade chairman last year," Becker said. "The previous chairman and woman had done the parade for 25 years. It can be an individual or a group of people."

Julie Stroup Beichner is ALF chair. She is the granddaughter of ALF co-founder Don Stroup.

Chamber ramps up for another eventful year

BY RANDY BARTLEY
Staff writer

The past year was a busy one for the Clarion Area Chamber of Business & Industry, and 2025 promises to be even busier.

"In February, we did our first ever sportsmen's raffle and now we are getting ready for our second one," chamber Executive Director Tracy Becker said.

March saw the Second Annual Women in Business Gala. "It was very successful and we are working on the third one on March 13 at the Haskell House," she said.

The annual awards dinner is set for March 22, during which time the logo for the 2025 Autumn Leaf Festival will be announced.

"We know there are businesses out there that are seeking employees; so we held a job fair. We are going to have another job fair at the Clarion Mall," Becker said.

In May, the chamber held its annual Cheers and Beers event, which is held to offset the cost of fireworks for the "I Love Clarion" event," according to Becker. This year, the 10th Cheers and Beers will be held May 10. Sixty-three vendors have received invitations.

The annual golf outing was held May 24 and another is scheduled for 2025.

"Delta Contracting has been excellent to work with," she said. "We alternate between Clarion Oaks and Hi-Level Golf courses. This year it will be held at Hi-Level."

In July, the chamber hosted the "I Love Clarion" celebration at the Clarion Mall. The event includes a touch-a-truck attraction, with a wide range of vehicles, kids games, a live band and fireworks.

"August and September was all about preparing for the

Autumn Leaf Festival," Becker said. "We did the Gala right before Autumn Leaf Festival and are planning to do it again in 2025."

The year ended with the illumination night and the Ugly Sweater parade in December. "That's always a big hit," she said. "We had about 14 people working on the Santa float."

The chamber, however, absorbed some personnel losses in 2024.

"At the end of June we lost Tammy LaCross, our events coordinator, who accepted another position," Becker said. "She was here for 14 years and was, literally, my right and left hand."

The chamber hired an office manager, but she resigned just before ALF. "We are actively seeking a replacement," Becker said. "We hope to have someone on board by early March."

"I have been a one-woman show since before ALF. The board members have been great. Many of them will help with special events or help in the office."

The chamber also is seeking new board members.

"We always have board members whose terms have expired," Becker said. "We have two board members who will be stepping down because they have met the term limits."

The board can have up to 17 members, according to Becker, and currently there are 15.

Olivia Keltz, of Burns & Burns, is the new chairwoman of the board.

"I am looking forward to working with her," Becker said.

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Schirmer Computer Services expands offers

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Summerville based Schirmer Computer Services expanded their services in 2024, offering cloud services and procurement, high end computer and network security, music recording and promotional services and virtual networking.

Also this year, Schirmer Computer Services improved their AWS and Microsoft Azure services, added custom backup services and data recovery services, and contin-

ued to offer quality computer and technology repairs for their customers.

Looking to 2025, the computer and networking business plans to further enhance their music production services and expand preexisting computer and security services.

Schirmer Computer Services is owned by David Schirmer and is located at 1018 Aaron Rd. in Summerville.

For more information, call 814-764-5630 or visit www.facebook.com/scomserv/.

Curt Wray Roofing provided quality services in 2024

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Curt Wray Roofing completed many jobs for homeowners, churches and businesses in Clarion and surrounding areas in 2024.

Wray Roofing prides itself in their ability to complete roofing and siding jobs within a time frame that will keep the disruption

of the homeowner's life to a minimum.

The company purchases all their materials locally.

Curtis M. Wray is the owner of the company, which employs six people. Curt Wray Roofing is located at Po Box 156, Knox PA, 16232. They can be reached by calling 814-797-1201.

Computer Support & Associates Inc. ensures customer runs smoothly

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

For Computer Support & Associates Inc. co-owner Fred Cherico, 2025 starts the 42nd year of his passion, supporting customers in the IT industry.

Cherico said the Microsoft releases, Meraki, VMware, cybersecurity-related events and responses, integrating data lakes, monitoring and managing services "requires our team to be ready to roll out at any time".

What's offered

Computer Support & Associates, located in Clarion near interstate 80's Exit 62, said it has numerous strategic computer and networking partners to help provide clients a full range of services. They include installation, maintenance, support and training with cost-effective, trusted solutions.

The business said it does so by providing specialized products to its retail walk-in customers, while its business division specializes in servers, professional workstation, business desktops and daily IT services for the small- and medium-sized business community.

The experienced employees use quality parts to design, deliver and deploy innovative IT solutions for companies of all sizes including engineers, architects, graphic designers, day-traders, manufacturing product designs, real estate, insurance agents, volunteer fire departments and military organizations, government, health care, education, energy, and many more creative professionals.

Computer Support & Associates, which offers a wide range of technology products, is a value-added

reseller that has built a relationship over the decades with multiple industry-leading vendors in each area of expertise.

That relationship, the company said, enables it to provide an "objective approach" to designing and implementing solutions to cyber security and data management, including backup/recovery/archive, big data, cloud computing, integration,

consolidation and migration.

The business showcases various manufacturers' equipment, including HP Inc., Hewlett-Packard Enterprise, Acer America, Barracuda, Meraki, Epson, VM-ware, Veeam, Microsoft and many more.

Current sales trends of security cameras for their clients as well as VoIP business phones have kept the Computer Support's team busy. The year 2025 will be a year

of client refreshes, with Windows 10 going end of life in October and AI workloads on the PC requiring higher memory requirements, many large aging bulk purchases that were made during 2020

will need replaced.

Open weekdays from 8 am to 5 pm and by appointment. For more information, go to www.ComputersUp.com, the company's Facebook page or call 814-226-7456.

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Clarion’s nontaxable properties present a financial challenge

BY RANDY BARTLEY
Staff writer

Clarion Borough, like many small municipalities in the area, was forced to raise real estate taxes. For Clarion residents, that meant an increase of 3 mills, and the first tax hike since 2015.

The borough appears to have ample properties available for taxation, but that is deceiving.

“Clarion is the county seat and hosts PennWest-Clarion University, the county buildings, churches and the Clarion Area School District buildings, all of which are nontaxable,” Clarion Borough Secretary and Chief Administration Officer Linda LaVan-Preston said. “That leaves only 25% of the borough to pay for all of the services.”

The borough also has an earned income tax, real estate transfer and a fire protection tax. The borough owns and maintains the fire department’s building and gives the department \$13,000 annually.

The 2025 budget cut the millage for the Clarion Free Library and put a freeze on any new hires or any new vehicle.

“Cutting millage for the library was a hard decision,” she said.

Major reasons for the tax increases, LaVan-Preston explained, are to pay for labor and health care benefits. “We had a 7% increase in health care this year. For the last couple of years, we were able to hold the line. We have a good health plan and don’t want to change it. If we are

“Everyone — the county, the university and the borough — all need to work together to make our town what it is.”

Linda LaVan-Preston
Clarion Borough Secretary and Chief Administration Officer

going to keep our employees, we have to have a competitive wage and benefit package.”

She said the borough tries to “pinch the pennies” where possible. “There is nothing frivolous in this budget. We are going to live within the budget and, hopefully, nothing unusual shows up. We have to do things that are necessary versus wants.

“We have put in grant requests for equipment through the Local Share Account. It is a competitive bid, and if we are fortunate enough to get one it won’t be available next year.”

The borough employs 20 full- and part-time people, and seven police officers and the chief. The borough is currently seeking a zoning officer to replace Scott Sharrer, who left in November.

Recycling

The borough was unable to continue the curbside recycling program.

“Our population fell below 5,000; so the state does not mandate the program any longer,” LaVan-Preston said. “The bids for recycling collection came in at \$70,000. The recycling company was also cutting the items they would collect.

“We asked if we could put dumpsters in the borough,

but they said if one piece of household trash was in the dumpster everything would be thrown away. We have received a lot of phone calls about the program, but it just wasn’t feasible.”

She said residents may take recyclable items to the Advanced Disposal site in Shipperville. Clarion County also operates an electronics collection every year.

Streets

LaVan-Preston said the borough receives liquid fuels funds from the state, “but that only goes so far” as it can only be used for eligible projects. “We try to mill the streets down and fix them the right way. You can only do one or two streets a year. That money goes so quickly.”

A major project will be the rehabilitation of Gemmel and Tippin Drive.

“We have applied for a grant through Department of Community and Economic Development; if we get it, the project will be completely paid for with no local match,” she said.

One-quarter of Gemmel Drive will be reconstructed, including storm-sewer work and new sidewalks.

The borough is not responsible for the roads through

the university, but does maintain the streets adjacent to the campus.

Second Avenue Park

The borough is a partner in the development of Second Avenue Park.

“We are talking with PennDOT about sidewalks along the street,” LaVan-Preston said. “PennDOT prefers to have the walks on both sides of the street.

“Initially, we weren’t going to have walks in front of the cemetery. According to the grant agreement, any cost overages are the responsibility of the borough. We have never done a project that did not have cost overruns. In a perfect world, we would go along with it, but the question is can we afford it?”

She said the Stormwater Authority and the school district are supporting the project’s engineering fees. The plan also calls for the installation of trees and decorative lighting.

LaVan-Preston said the school district has expressed an interest in using the park for students.

“Everyone — the county, the university and the borough — all need to work together to make our town what it is,” she said. “Our council puts the Rs and Ds aside and works together.”

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Car Mate’s new optional Step-Out Awning Door for 7’ Wide trailers makes hauling large UTV’s easy to get in and out of once the UTV is inside the trailer.



Car Mate’s new Knife-Edge Ramp Door.

Car Mate supplies people with all their trailer needs

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Car Mate Trailers, Inc., located in Leeper, PA, begins 2025 looking forward to another year of building high quality, American made enclosed cargo and open utility trailers.

Established in 1982, the company has been using the winter months to build up stock for its network of over 60 dealers located in the north-eastern United States and in eastern Canada. Although Car Mate was building the annual spring stock for dealers, custom orders of trailers remained strong through the winter months, as well.

Car Mate builds each trailer from top to bottom from scratch, using a weld shop with eight bays, a fabrication shop, two state-of-the-art paint booths and two cargo shop production lines.

Car Mate continues to make purchasing a majority of USA manufactured components a top priority. Sourcing quality United States made materials not only ensures top quality trailers, it helps our neighboring businesses continue to flourish. The company employs 83 full-time workers in the community.

Car Mate introduced several innovative updates to its extensive trailer lines last year. A new optional Step-Out Awning Door for 7’ Wide trailers makes hauling large UTV’s easy to get in and out of once the UTV is inside the trailer. A new Knife-Edge Ramp Door option exclusively available on the 8’ and 8.5’ Wide enclosed trailers offers an all-steel “mini ramp” at the start of the ramp door for easy loading of items with smaller wheels. Several lighting innovations were added, including optional reverse-integrated tail/brake lights, 3ID light w/load lamps, and new and improved fender lights.

Other onsite improvements included the addition of several large access garage doors to the rear of the Cargo Shop to allow for large, custom trailers with numerous options to be built outside of the two regular assembly lines, without delaying overall pro-

duction progress and speed.

Car Mate Trailers teams up with NATM (National Association of Trailer Manufacturers) every year to help raise safety awareness for dealers, trailer owners and local government officials. Trailer safety educational resources are available on Car Mate’s Facebook business page and on the special NATM website www.trailersafetyweek.com. The 2025 Trailer Safety week is scheduled for June 1 through June 7, 2025.

In mid-August, 2024, Car Mate held its first Dealer Open House weekend after cancelling both the 2020 and 2022 events due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The weekend was a huge success, with dealers coming in from as far away as Massachusetts and New Hampshire. In addition to factory demonstrations and tours, the dealers were able to enjoy some relaxation, fellowship and plenty of delicious food. The next open house is planned for the summer of 2026.

Please keep in mind that Car Mate owns and operates the truck garage on Route 66 in Lucinda. The garage offers car, truck, trailer, camper, bus and RV state inspections. Their skilled mechanic also does maintenance and repair work on vehicles and engines of all types. The Car Mate Garage phone number is 814-226-4712.

Car Mate would like to remind potential buyers that an open or enclosed trailer is considered a motorized vehicle which requires registering and titling in Pennsylvania. Please use caution when purchasing a used trailer from a private party unless they have all of this documentation available prior to the sale.

Anyone interested in purchasing a Car Mate trailer is encouraged to visit their local dealer. Visit the Car Mate website at www.carmate-trailers.com and use the “dealer locator” to find your closest dealer.

Car Mate Trailers, Inc. is located at 32591 Route 66 / P.O. Box 155

Leeper, PA 16233 and can be reached by calling 814-744-8855.

Broadband represents ‘a real key’ to unlocking county’s potential

BY RANDY BARTLEY
Staff writer

The Clarion County Planning Commission is working on some projects it hopes to bring to fruition in 2025.

According to Chief Planner Kristi Amato, a couple of new private communication towers received preliminary approval.

“That’s interesting because with all the talk about fiber, they still need poles,” she said. “I think that is a realization that fiber isn’t going to work everywhere.

“I’m looking forward to see how broadband is going to change the county this year. I think, in at least some parts, it will make a change. The Northwest Commission has filed an application, and if they are successful I think it will put this region on the map.

“Businesses may not all come to Clarion County, but if they come to counties in the region and our residents can drive to them, we still win. Broadband is a real key for us.”

A comeback project is the rehabilitation of the old Union 76 Truckstop at the Strattanville exit of Interstate 80. University Korner developed the plaza, which will have about 100 parking spaces.

On the property are a Dunkin’ drive-through, a Jimmy John’s and an Indian-style restaurant. The plaza is

expected to employ about 20 people.

Another tourist plaza opened at the Clarion exit of I-80 at Trinity Point. The GJAMS plaza will not only offer fuel, but an electric vehicle charging station. The construction was delayed due to a lack of steel but is now fully operational. The plaza offers food from Jimmy John’s, Sbarro pizza, Fatburger and a Dunkin’.

A new Sheetz is schedule to open this year across from the Clarion Mall, which Amato said has created excitement among some people.

In addition, she said the commission received a lot of applications from people putting in parks for storage buildings. A total of six projects were approved in Madison, Farmington and Paint townships.

“We have had a lot of phone calls about developing solar fields,” Amato said. “Currently, there are two that have been approved and one, near Lake Lucy, is under construction.

“Stormwater applications were twice as busy. A lot of the bigger ones were Amish barns. They account for at least one-third of the applications.”

She explained the commission requires an application for any new impervious areas. Anything under 5,000 square feet can be approved by her office. However, the county has contracted with

the Eads Group to review anything over 5,000 square feet.

“There was a steady stream of applications last year starting about February,” she said. “It is cyclical.”

Many of the applications, according to Amato, were from people doing small projects on their homes. “I think that shows that people are taking pride in their homes. It is a general trend across the county.”

Amato sees some movement on the Clarion River access plan this year. “I think we can start with some of the smaller, easier, projects like signage that will get the committee moving forward. There are some different opportunities there and I would hope some of it gets done this year.

“That all starts with a committee that is interested in moving forward with this project.”

And, the county is forming a committee to oversee the access project.

“We have heard about different things over at the Cricket fields, including more fields,” she said. “I have heard they draw large crowds for the games, and if that is the case I would expect to see some development there.

“It is unusual to have Cricket fields in western Pennsylvania, but If we have something other counties do not, let them come here.” The Cricket field is located in

Beaver Township.

She said development of the Riverstone Estate, near Foxburg, “will give Clarion County something other counties around here don’t have. I think since COVID, more people are looking for a change of pace, and what they are offering provides that.”

Amato believes the development of affordable housing is a must for the county.

“I think the county needs to have a program for the rehabilitation of housing,” she said. “There is funding out there for whatever entity, regardless if it is an authority or a private developer. That is a true need. You have to start with a housing study to determine the true need.”

She believes there are “some basic things” that must be accomplished to entice people to come to Clarion County. “If we are behind on that, people will keep on driving. It is a chicken and egg type of thing.”

Overall, Amato said, “I think we have some interesting things coming our way. Things are turning slowly for us and that is as it should be. If things move too fast, we won’t be able to handle it. It could go a little faster, though.”

RANDY BARTLEY reporter for The Derrick and The News-Herald, can be reached at 814-715-3093 or at randybartley.thederrick@gmail.com.

Tom’s Riverside Quality Foods marks 55 years in community

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

2025 marks the 55th Anniversary of Clarion County’s last full-service grocery stores, Tom’s Riverside Quality Foods. As one of the first independently owned franchisees of the Penn Traffic Company, the first Tom’s opened in 1970 in New Bethlehem, followed by Knox in 1977 and Rimersburg in 1983. With over 100 employees, it is one of the oldest and largest employers in Clarion County.

The goal of Tom’s Riverside is to provide their customers with clean, friendly stores with a good selection of top quality products at fair



prices. Their dedicated long-time associates as well as an enthusiastic younger staff take pride in providing service and quality that their customers deserve and expect at Tom’s.

Food Inflation has been a challenge for both the grocery business and its customers, but the worst appears to be over. Staffing has also been an ongoing issue, and the company appreciates their customers’ patience as they

continue to work to get back to full employment.

A new exciting service coming to Tom’s Riverside in 2025 is Instacart, an online grocery delivery service that allows you to buy groceries for delivery via website or phone app. They know that it’s difficult for some to make it to the store, so they’re trying to make it easier for them to get groceries. In the stores, they continue to make upgrades to make things more pleasant and convenient for customers across the board.

“We are thankful for our great team and loyal customers,

both past and present,” said Tom Ray, Jr., president of Tom’s Riverside.

“Without our customers, we wouldn’t be here for our 55th Anniversary and without our caring and dedicated team members, we wouldn’t have customers!”

Tom’s Riverside is dedicated to its communities, supporting them with discounts and/or donations to local groups such as area clubs, sports teams, churches, school activities, local festivals, emergency services, as well as county-wide organizations such as the Clarion County YMCA and United Way.

What’s on offer

- Tom’s Riverside Quality Foods offers the freshest meats at all of their locations; each with experienced in-house cutters who can custom cut your meats.
- Fresh produce is shipped in several times a week, and they can make fresh veggie or fruit trays for any occasion.
- Their bakeries bake tasty bread, rolls and donuts daily, and decorated cakes for special occasions are also available.
- Fresh meats, cheese, salads, rotisserie chicken and party trays are available in their delis.
- A larger-than-you’d-ex-

pect selection in their grocery department that will appeal to all shoppers.

- They continue to offer a 5% senior citizen discount on Tuesdays and double eligible manufacturer coupons up to .99.
- Their New Bethlehem and Knox locations have popular beer and wine sections and their Knox location also features an in-store Pharmacy and Bank.
- PA Lottery, propane, greeting cards and flowers, rug shampooer rental, money orders and more.
- **New — PA Skills Games are now at their Knox location.**

Clarion Monuments celebrates 70 years of family legacy and craftsmanship

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

For the past 70 years, Clarion Monuments has stood as a cornerstone in the heart of Clarion County and Western Pennsylvania, providing families with lasting tributes to their loved ones. What started as a small, family-run business in 1955 has grown into a respected name in the memorial design, sales and manufacturing industry.

The company's journey began with Paul McKee, a visionary who founded Clarion Monuments with a deep commitment to quality craftsmanship and personalized service. Over the decades, this commitment has passed through the hands of his son-in-law, Mike Aaron, to his grandson, Steve Aaron. Through each generation, the company has evolved, expanding its product lines, embracing technological advancements and maintaining its reputation for exceptional service.

A family tradition begins

Paul McKee's venture into the memorial industry began in the mid-1950s, a time when small businesses were the backbone of America. What started as a modest operation soon grew as Paul's craftsmanship and attention to detail gained the trust of families in the region. The company's ability to create beautiful, custom granite monuments quickly became known, and Clarion Monuments began serving not only the Clarion County area but also the wider Western Pennsylvania region.

Paul's legacy was carried forward in 1980, when his son-in-law, Mike Aaron, made a bold decision to leave his stable job at Owens-Illinois glass plant and apprentice under Paul. It was a significant life change motivated by his passion for the craft and his heart for serving others. In 1985, Paul retired, passing the torch to Mike.

Under Mike's leadership, Clarion Monuments saw substantial growth, driven by his exceptional organizational skills and commitment to expanding the business. One of his key strategies was to diversify the company's offerings. Mike introduced custom styles and a broader array of granite



Contributed photo

Clarion Monuments Owner Steve Aaron, right, and his father, former-owner Mike Aaron, hold a photo of Paul McKee, Steve Aaron's grandfather and Mike Aaron's father-in-law, who founded the company in 1955.



colors, sourced from quarries across the United States and around the world. The business soon became known not just for its craftsmanship, but for its ability to meet the unique needs of every family that walked through its doors.

Embracing technology

A defining moment in the company's history came in 1991, when Clarion Monuments made a significant leap into the digital age by adopting Computer Aided Drafting & Design (CAD) technology. This

transition was a game-changer, allowing the company to work more closely with families to design and visualize memorials before they were ever etched into stone. The new software streamlined the design process, offering clients a much more personalized experience.

In 1995, Mike's son, Steve Aaron, returned home after college to join the family business. Armed with a fresh perspective, marketing experience and a background in computers, Steve helped usher the business into a new era of technological

innovation. Under his guidance, Clarion Monuments continued to expand its offerings, bringing cutting-edge tools to the memorial-making process.

In 2004, the company took another giant step forward with the introduction of a state-of-the-art laser engraving machine. This new technology allowed Clarion Monuments to engrave incredibly detailed artwork and even portraits onto memorials, adding a deeply personal touch that set their products apart from others in the industry. Today, the company still utilizes

both laser engraving and traditional sandblast carving techniques, offering clients the best of both worlds.

A continued commitment to quality

Now, as Clarion Monuments celebrates its 70th anniversary in 2025, the company remains a full-service design center and production facility, continuing to meet the needs of the families they serve with dedication and care. Steve Aaron, who now serves as the company's owner, emphasizes the family values

that have shaped the business for three generations. "We approach every memorial like we are making it for one of our own family members," he says.

Clarion Monuments has built its reputation not just on quality granite, but on its unwavering focus on the individual interests and needs of each family. Whether a memorial is a simple tribute or an intricate custom design, the company's commitment to personalization has been a hallmark of its success.

Looking ahead: Special anniversary celebrations

To commemorate this significant milestone, Clarion Monuments is offering special discounts and promotions throughout 2025, with details to be announced on the company's Facebook page. It's a way for them to thank the community for supporting them through the years, while continuing the legacy of providing lasting tributes for generations to come.

As Clarion Monuments celebrates 70 years, the company's history is a testament to the strength of family, the value of tradition and the importance of embracing change. From a small shop in Clarion to a leader in the memorial industry, the company has remained true to its roots — offering not just a product, but a service built on compassion, craftsmanship and care.

About Clarion Monuments

Clarion Monuments is a third-generation, family-owned business specializing in custom granite memorial design, sales and manufacturing. Since 1955, the company has proudly served families in Clarion County and Western Pennsylvania, offering personalized memorials crafted with the highest level of expertise. With a legacy rooted in quality craftsmanship and technological innovation, Clarion Monuments continues to be a trusted partner for families in their time of need. For more information about Clarion Monuments or their 70th anniversary, visit their Facebook page or website at ClarionMonuments.com.

Route 66 Sporting Goods celebrates 21 years in business

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Route 66 Sporting Goods is looking to celebrate their 21st year in business under the ownership of Linda and Lee Dechant. Route 66 Sporting Goods is located on Route 66, 1.5 miles north of 322 in Shippensburg, PA.

Route 66 Sporting Goods employs a knowledgeable staff including, Lori Gadley, Mike Beveridge, Mindy Maurer, Joe Winger, Pam Bauer, Rich Edwards and Justin Barrett. They pride themselves on being able to answer any question about their vast selection of merchandise for the great outdoors. They will work one on one with the customer to give them the ultimate personal experience.

Route 66 Sporting Goods has something to meet the needs of all hunters, fishermen, reloaders, campers, archers and trappers, carrying many high quality brands and are the largest retail trapping supplier in Western PA.

New for 2025 are fur buying events. Keith Winkler from Sterling Fur will come in a few times during the year and pay cash for furs. Check out the Facebook page for updates.

Route 66 will also continue to host buck scoring events throughout the year.

If there is something they don't have in stock, Route 66 will order it in for the customer. They also offer layaway and gift certificates. You can also purchase gift certificates online at www.route66sportinggoods.com.

They are always expanding and adding to their large inventory to better suit the customer.

Archery

Their large archery section is run by Lori Gadley, daughter of Lee and Linda Dechant,

and Mike Beveridge. Route 66 is the areas Mathews Archery Dealer. Besides Mathews, Route 66 also carries Hoyt, Bowtech, Tenpoint, Excalibur and Bear, with all the accessories to complement the bows.

Route 66 carries recurve accessories as well as carrying a wide selection of recurve and long bows.

The archery section continues to include many accessories including 3D targets, arrows, sights, range-finding sights and much more.

New for 2025, Route 66 is now stocking Mathews Branded Ultra View sights!

Firearms

Route 66 Sporting Goods carries a vast selection of pistols, rifles and shotguns from the following manufacturers: Browning, Weatherby, Ruger, Bergara, Christensen, Remington, Winchester, Smith & Wesson, Mossberg, Walther, Taurus, Savage, Heritage, Sig Sauer, Kimber and Beretta. They also carry black powder equipment, with a fine selection of Inline and Flintlock rifles as well as black powder pistols.

Flintlock rifles by Pedersoli can be found in stock year round.

Route 66 Sporting Goods is now stocking Bergara Carbon Fiber Rifles as well as Christensen.

There are over and under shotguns in stock year-round by companies such as: Franchi, CZ, Stoeger, Browning, and Mossberg. There are also side-by-side shotguns in stock too!

Route 66 Sporting Goods stocks a vast selection of scopes by Leupold, Bushnell, Hawke, and Vortex. They also have an extensive selection of bases and rings by Weaver, Leupold, Talley and Browning.

Fishing

Route 66 Sporting Goods carries an extensive selection of equipment for any type of fishing, including fly fishing, fly tying and ice fishing.

Route 66 has also expanded the Bass fishing selection! Be sure to stop and check out baits from Gary Yamamoto, Z-Man, Strike King, Bass Assassin, Rapala, Fish Bio and many more!

The camping section is always well stocked with tents, Palmer (MADE IN USA) cast iron pie irons, flashlights, Coleman fuel and propane and so much more.

Apparel

The clothing section at the store is stocked with clothing by Under Armour, Gamehide, Badlands, DSG and Rocky. Route 66 also has boots and shoes from LaCrosse, Rocky, DSG and Muck boots.

New for the summer Route 66 has the all new Muckster Clog and ankle boots! They are great for slipping on and heading out into the yard!

Route 66 also now stocks snake gaiters and snake boots.

You are also able to find Badlands packs, and accessories at Route 66.

Route 66 is also a Kenetrek Boot dealer for Those that Take the Trail Less Traveled.

Licensing

All Hunting and Fishing License can be purchased at Route 66 Sporting Goods. Allegheny National Forest ATV/OHM Trail permits can also be purchased at the store (only season passes).

Canning

Did you know Route 66 has a canning section? Be sure to stop in and get your lids, bands and canners made by Wisconsin Aluminum Foundry! Route 66 also has a large selection of LEM grinders and accessories, including the juicer attachment and screens! Along with the grinders, Route 66 has the MaxVac sealers and New for 2025 the vacuum chambers as well as the bags for all models!

Shooting sport accomplishments

Route 66 would like to

congratulate their shooting team, Alexis Dehner, Greg Dehner, Tom Prody, Larry Shindledecker, Ethan Conway, Shawn Hawke, Chase Card, Rich Smith and Kevin Gensler, on a great season!

Ethan Conway is the reigning 2023 & 2024 Hooiser Pro Am 690 Champ, 2024 Lancaster Classic Men's Bowhunter Champ, 2024 Great American Outdoor Show Champ, and 2024 IBO Worlds Semi Pro Champ. He also placed second at IBO Semi Pro Team for the National Triple Crown and OH State ASA.

Shawne Hawke finished in the top 10 of all the IBO shoots, 2024 OH ASA Champ and Shooter of the Year, and was on the first place team for the Triple Crown.

Tom Prody took first and second place throughout the IBO season in IBO Field and took second in the National Championship. On top of shoot Tom also runs the 2nd leg of the IBO Triple Crown

as well as the Rinehart 100 at Two Mile. He also runs Fertigs Archery 3D Course.

Greg Dehner took 5th at the first leg of the Triple Crown and 3rd place at the 2nd leg.

New for this past year, Route 66 added a Fishing Pro Staff comprised of Wayne & Terry Gadley. Wayne and his rider Brian Zimmerman placed 2nd and Lunker in a KVBA Bass Tournament in July and 4th place in the Jay Depto.

2024 proved to be another interesting year and Route 66 is thankful for all of their customers continued support. The team at Route 66 is always placing orders and trying to get product in during these crazy times.

The store is open seven days a week. Monday through Thursday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Friday 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. They can also be found on Facebook and Instagram.

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