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BUSINESS QUARTERLY
Summer 2023

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District in Focus: Erie's Parade Street Corridor

How a dozen eastside organizations are helping to revitalize a commercial epicenter

Innovating Our Regional Economy

Building on our strengths: To imagine where Erie's headed, economists look to the past

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Innovating Our Regional Economy: Building on Our Strengths

To imagine where Erie's headed, economists look to the past

By: Ben Speggen

"Stable, but slightly sluggish."

That is how economist Ken Louie told me he sees the state of the economy, as a whole, in Erie, during a recent Zoom call.

"We are probably less sluggish than we had been – that's two negatives there. So to say it in a more positive way: We are, I think, growing at a little bit faster pace than we had been before," Louie, the director of the Economic Research Institute of Erie (ERIE) at Penn State Behrend, said. "It's still too early to tell, because it hasn't been that long since we've had that dramatic drop."

The drop Louie was referring to came as the Covid-19 public health crisis began to have a pronounced impact on global, national, state, and local economies. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Erie's unemployment rate reached 16.8% in April 2020 – a half of a percent higher than Pennsylvania's unemployment rate at the same time, and more than 2% higher than the U.S.'s national average.

One way of understanding the "stable" part of Erie's economy today, as Louie describes it: unemployment in June 2023 has dropped from nearly 17% to 4.2%. In Pennsylvania, at the same time the data was recorded, unemployment dropped to 3.8% and to 3.6% at the national level.

But, sluggish?

Comparing January 2020 (pre-economic impact from the pandemic) to June 2023 (the most recent data Louie presented at ERIE's annual conference in July), Erie recovered 97% of its total nonfarm employment. The U.S. economy, however, is nearly 3% higher in June 2023 than January 2020.

"If you are a pessimist, you would say, 'Well, the U.S. economy has already gone beyond the pre-pandemic employment level,'" Louie told me. "But if you are a more optimistic individual then the observation is that the movement has been a continual upward movement – even though it's been a very, very sluggish pace."

PENN STATE BEHREND

The Northwest Pennsylvania Innovation Beehive Network, like the chapter at Penn State Behrend, is a collaborative, innovation-rich partnership between area universities and the county's public library system that is successfully working to generate economic development output.

It stands to reason that, over time, Erie's economy will get back to, and then potentially exceed, where it was just three years ago. How much time that will take remains unclear.

The sixty-four thousand, er, million dollar (adjusted for inflation) question, now, is: Why is the Erie economy sluggish? There are, of course, many factors, but Louie points to a need to strengthen the region's ability to create more jobs.

"Jobs are the ultimate source of other positive effects, because jobs create income, income generates purchasing power, purchasing power stimulates business activity in terms of new business, startups, investments, expansions," Louie said.

"One of the most rational strategies [to generate more jobs] is this emphasis on innovation hubs," Louie told me, pointing both to an October 2022 report published by the Brookings Institution and to Penn State Behrend's new Project Resolve initiative. That is, rather than a scattershot approach to economic development (i.e. casting wide nets), take a targeted approach and, say, cast specific lines to work on reeling in specific catches.

Local Spark Plugs Helping to Jumpstart the State's Innovation Economy

Authored by Mark Muro, Rob Maxim, and Yang You, *Commonwealth of Innovation: A Policy Agenda for Revitalizing Pennsylvania's Economic Dynamism* makes the case that despite its asset-rich position (world-class research universities, break-out companies, diverse, talented workforce in both urban centers and rural areas), "Pennsylvania has not been able to convert its assets into abundant, high-quality economic growth or broad-based employment across an array of high-tech, high-pay advanced industries." Peer states

are outpacing the commonwealth, and if nothing changes, Pennsylvania might continue drifting along at best, or at worst, decline.

The report makes key recommendations on how to invigorate Pennsylvania's economy – the new state administration must make a commitment to advance innovation with policy and investments, accelerate commercialization and growth in the state's major innovation metro areas, foster innovation and entrepreneurship outside of major metro areas, and insist on inclusion in growing its innovation economy.

The recommendations come with concrete examples of what is already working, and how such examples could work on larger scales and elsewhere. One such example is The Northwest Pennsylvania Innovation Beehive Network, a collaborative, innovation-rich partnership between area universities and the county's public library to create an ecosystem capable of generating economic development output similar to that of a Research 1-level university (which Erie does not have).

"Erie has put itself in a good position with admirable initiatives such as the Beehive effort," Muro, a senior fellow at Brookings told me on a recent Zoom call. "And the work of Penn State Behrend over a long time is one of the sources that I think Rob and I saw that gave us confidence that the medium-sized and smaller regions can play in the kind of innovation game that we think is the right place for Pennsylvania to play over time."

"Jobs are the ultimate source of other positive effects, because jobs create income, income generates purchasing power, purchasing power stimulates business activity in terms of new business, startups, investments, expansions." -Ken Louie, director of ERIE, Penn State Behrend

On the same call, Maxim, a Brookings senior research associate told me, "[the Erie] region is doing a lot on its own to start changing that kind of fundamental underlying metric that dictates the future of your region's innovation economy."

"Erie is one of the sources of the kind of innovation that we are arguing for," Muro added.

What Muro and Maxim are watching now is the attention being paid to the state's innovation economy by the Shapiro administration. With just eight months in office, and the first state budget much younger, it is too soon to expect significant changes, but Muro and Maxim told me they're encouraged so far. What's more encouraging: imagining state-level policy that benefits places like Erie to a whole-of-region, and thus a whole-of-state approach to economic development in the innovation ecosystem.

Building a Stronger Future on Past Foundations: Project Resolve

"Project Resolve," which Louie chose as the theme for this year's ERIE conference,

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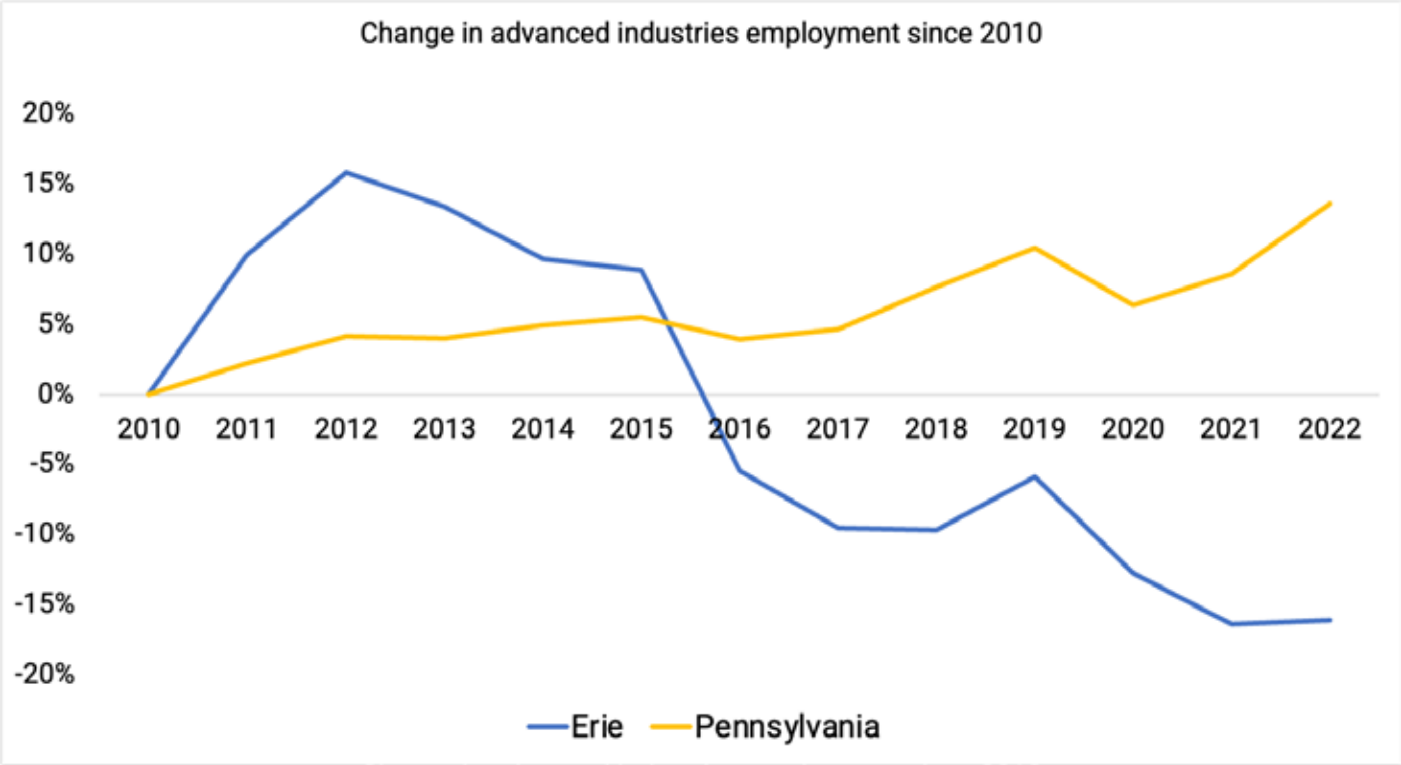

According to Brookings' analysis of data from Lightcast, between 2010 and 2022, the Erie metro area lost about 2,200 advanced industries jobs, as opposed to the rest of the state which added about 55,000 jobs.

"is probably the best recent example that I can think of that follows along that model of developing an innovation hub that really is very, very focused," Louie told me.

That focus means cultivating the strength of two areas Erie has been historically economically strong: plastics and metal casting.

According to Penn State Behrend's website, "Project Resolve is a regional strategy for shifting the plastics, metal-casting, and transportation industries to a circular economic model to address plastic and waste pollution that ultimately affects the health of freshwater supplies such as Lake Erie. Resolve will advance manufacturing competitiveness and environmental vitality in parallel rather than in traditionally oppositional actions."

The five elements of the 10-year, $120 million regional strategy include a new Center for Manufacturing Competitiveness, Lake Erie Data Collection and Transfer, Regional Growth Cluster Placemaking, and the NWPA Innovation Beehive Network.

The Erie Investment Playbook (2022), now known as Infinite Erie, identified it as a high-profile, shovel-ready project. And it aligns with recommendations proposed in the Comprehensive Economic Development Study released in 2012 and 2022 by the Northwest Commission and the "Commonwealth of Innovation" report, which, as Penn State Behrend's website acknowledges, "found that advanced industry employment in Pennsylvania has declined over the past decade, particularly in Erie County."

According to Brookings' analysis of data from Lightcast, between 2010 and 2022, the Erie metro lost about 2,200 (a 16% decline) advanced industries jobs while the state added about 55,000 jobs (a 14% increase). Yet, the plastics manufacturing industry, the region's largest advanced industry in 2022, gained more than 700 jobs and accounted for 32% of the total advanced industries workers in the region.

And that focus compliments wide-ranging economic development initiatives already underway.

"We're all impatient to see the whole community get better economically," Louie told me. "Project Resolve, I think, has the advantage that it forces us to focus in on the strengths."

Unleashing Erie's Economic Potential

Like knowing what the direction and impact of the state government's focus on innovative economy, in light of the Brookings report, and knowing the long-ranging impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on local, state, national, and global economies, it is, of course, too early to know what the impact of Project Resolve will be. The work there has just recently begun.

But it isn't hard to imagine, and to be optimistic about Erie's future.

Louie told me that every year, when he puts the conference together, he spends a lot of time thinking up the title that captures what he thinks distills the essence of what he wants the community to learn. This year's title: "Unleashing Erie's Economic Potential: Harnessing the Region's Strengths through Project Resolve." Sometimes to look forward, it helps to look behind – to know where you've been in order to understand where you are, to plot and plan where you want to go.

Ben Speggen can be reached at bspeggen@eriereader.com

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Parker Philips: Merging High Impact Consulting and Creativity

Women-owned business offers a multitude of consulting services

When Nichole Parker and Kate Philips recognized a gap in the economic impact analysis market, they knew their combined talents could not only bring success to any business they began, but also to other businesses in need of their services – this was the catalyst for the creation of Parker Philips.

"We decided our combined expertise could lead to an innovative new product," Philips stated. "The Parker Philips economic impact study combines numbers, narrative, and creativity, which has become a gold standard in the industry."

Prior to the launch of the company, successful economic impact studies from firms across the country were mainly composed of a slew of numbers and Excel spreadsheets in document format, something that Parker Philips sought to transcend. "By combining my communications and marketing expertise with Nichole's data analysis and research expertise, we created a market-facing, professionally designed report that dug below the surface of quantitative analysis to help our clients tell their stories," said Philips.

Parker (company president) and Philips (CEO), both native Erieites, have a long history together. Having attended Iroquois High School a few years apart, they became close friends after college. In her twenties, Philips served as press secretary to Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell, while Parker led an economic impact practice for a Pittsburgh-based consulting firm. Their professional paths often crossed in their thirties. At the time Parker Philips was created, Philips had just relocated back to Erie after 15 years away and Parker was living in Minneapolis (she has since relocated to Erie).

As a women-owned, 12-person team, Parker Philips leads marketing and public affairs work for dozens of clients, with a robust research and consulting arm producing defensible products on behalf of clients nationwide. "We are rooted in excellence and quality, with many of our clients coming to us when they are seeking a way to make complex narratives easier to understand," Philips explained. "We don't deliver cookie-cutter consulting; we create momentum and build the case by developing a winning narrative and staying on message. We understand how to move public policy, expand market share, and advance ideas through well-rounded research, clear communications, distinctive design, and customized content … what separates us from the competition is that we can work from the grassroots to the grasstops – whatever your budget, we get results."

Parker Philips offers a multitude of services, some of which have evolved and changed over the years. "We are a full-service consulting firm that has now grown its service lines and skill sets," Parker stated. "From a marketing and communications perspective, we offer the full array of services from websites to social media management, event planning to public relations, and also crisis communications. Our research and economic impact side competes with top firms around the country to win RFPs [requests for proposal] because our work is rooted in academic training but written for a broader audience."

With clients all over the country, Parker Philips has found that preferences can differ drastically, from the work they request to the format of the work. "We were a virtual firm prior to the pandemic, so working nationally has always been built into our model," Philips said. "In fact, when I moved back to Erie 10 years ago, I didn't have a single client here." She continues, "Our time in Erie and quality of life have increased dramatically since the pandemic, as most clients are very comfortable forgoing the in-person meetings we used to travel to accommodate. We still travel to clients, but try to utilize every available technology to optimize our time and our clients' resources."

Both in and out of Erie, the firm has worked with dozens of nonprofit, government, and corporate clients, offering the services best suited to each entity's needs. "From PA Association of Broadcasters and University of Pittsburgh to University of Washington and the Minnesota State system – which includes 30 colleges, 7 universities, and 54 campuses – we offer the same expertise to every client, large and small," Parker stated. "Here in Erie, we've worked with clients from ECGRA to VNET, the County of Erie to ReJuv, and more. Our firm did the feasibility study for the Erie Community College and helped craft the campaign that ended in Erie County becoming the local sponsor – we were particularly proud of that victory."

Working within the community is a big part of Parker Philips' mission as well, both in the firm's work and among their employees. "Part of our ethos is to encourage civic and community service, as we firmly believe it is vital to the fabric of our communities," Philips stated. "We give each of our employees $500 to contribute to a nonprofit that they personally believe in, and we offer our employees 8-hours paid time to perform

Parker Philips
assess. analyze. assert!

Nichole Parker (left) and Kate Philips began their business, Parker Philips, after the two long-time friends recognized a gap in the economic impact analysis market. They were able to combine their educational and professional experiences to the ultimate benefit of those businesses in need of their services.

community service." In embodying this mission, Parker currently serves on the Iroquois School District Foundation Board as treasurer, while Philips serves as Chair of the Redevelopment Authority of Erie County as well as on the boards for the Police Athletic League and the Erie Zoo, and Children Matter Action Fund — a statewide entity dedicated to advancing policies that increase the life chances of children.

Although Parker and Philips are currently at the forefront of the business, they know the future of their company is bright because of their employees: "The future is less and less about Nichole and me, and more about the amazing employees we have – young rising stars like Mary Wassell (one of the Erie Reader's 40 Under 40 class of 2023), Julia Ferritto, and Abby Harris, road-tested professionals like Kristi DelGrande and Kate Nash, and quiet, behind-the-scenes creators like Chris Stuart, Tori Townsend, and Kyle McMillen," said Philips.

The health and happiness of their employees is something Parker Philips takes seriously: "Nichole and I have worked hard to create a firm with outstanding health and employment benefits, and a flexible work environment rooted in respect and hard work," Philips emphasized. "Our firm also prides itself on paying fair wages to all our employees, including our interns."

> "We don't deliver cookie-cutter consulting; we create momentum and build the case by developing a winning narrative and staying on message."
> -Kate Philips, co-founder of Parker Philips

As certified "Swifties," the team at Parker Philips completed an economic impact study this summer of #Swiftenomics and the impact of Taylor Swift's shows from her most recent U.S. tour. "This research was exciting and allowed our entire team to collaborate from the research and economic analysis side to the creative and communications side," Parker explained. "Our summer intern Nick Devlin got to exercise his Penn State research chops and learn how to take a study from beginning to end. Our impact of $4.6 billion was right on track with the Federal Reserve, but is still a conservative number."

As for the immediate future, Parker Philips has some exciting projects in the works, including working with the Erie Community Foundation to tell their story: "Getting the opportunity to work with such an impactful and respected Erie institution is a real pride point for our team," said Philips. They are also weeks away from launching an economic impact study for the Erie Philharmonic – stay tuned!

Allegheny Beverage Company's Local Focus

Serving Pennsylvania's employee, customer, and beer culture

Brewers make the beer – whether they're large national brands or small independent local brewers. Retail stores and distributors then sell the beer to customers. But how does the beer get from the brewer to the store's shelves? That's where Allegheny Beverage comes in. Allegheny Beverage is a beer wholesaler responsible for delivering beer to every bar, restaurant, gas station, grocery store, and beer store within 13 counties throughout Northwestern Pennsylvania. Their mission is, quite simply, to bring the people of Pennsylvania the best beer in the most efficient way possible. Serving communities from the shores of Lake Erie to the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains, their goal is to provide customers with great beers and outstanding service.

That's no easy feat, and Allegheny Beverage Company President John DiMario (who recently became one of Erie's 40 Under 40 in 2023) credits his hard-working team for making the day-to-day operations of such a large organization run smoothly. He comments, "Our sales team spends their days working with all of the local retailers to help their businesses and provide them with the best possible service. Our delivery team will then deliver beer to these stores at least once a week – they are always out there working hard in all the elements."

The beer wholesaler Glenwood Beer had been a staple in Erie since 1961 and in 2018, the long-standing business was acquired by the company, who then spent a great deal of time and effort rebranding to reflect new goals and a new atmosphere while at the same time expanding the scope of their service. The name was changed to Allegheny Beverage to better reflect the breadth of the area of Pennsylvania that they serve, and along with the name change came some much, much bigger changes.

Most significantly, a brand new, 110,000-square-foot facility that was designed around helping their 80+ employees' daily tasks run more smoothly, and to make the building more comfortable, and, simply, more fun. The buildingwas completed in April of 2022, is a brand new facility located in the Fairview Business Park at 7265 Klier Drive. It was exclusively designed and built by local architects and contractors. The new, state-of-the-art space was designed with employees' well-being in mind and includes areas like a company gym, multiple up-to-date kitchen and break spaces, and an outdoor beer garden with a grill and ping pong table.

CONTRIBUTED

Construction was completed on a brand new, 110,000 square foot facility to house Allegheny beverage. The building was designed and built by local companies and the goal of the design was to help employee's work more comfortably and efficiently.

Allegheny Beverage takes great pride and care in making sure that the work culture they have created at their facility is healthy, comfortable, and in line with what the employees need and want. DiMario comments, "Upper management can try to direct their culture statements to their team members, but it only takes shape when they really choose to embody those standards and values." Those standards and values have been understood, adopted, and taken seriously – and the result is visibly reflected within the employees themselves. The average tenure of an employee at Allegheny Beverage is 12 years. DiMario credits the work culture and environment that has been fostered by the employees and management; while the company also offers many competitive benefits and upward opportunities for their team members, which keeps morale and overall work ethic high.

"We are a local business and everyone lives here, locally. All of the employees know each others' families. In fact, most of our employees have been hired based on recommendations and referrals from other employees. We have multiple team members who are family members or spouses. The beer business is supposed to be a fun business and we always try to emphasize that to our team through trips, company events, and Friday happy hours in our new tasting room," DiMario reflects. This focus on staying local

is clearly important to Allegheny Beverage, not just in their building and employee choices, but in the beer business as well.

Some of Allegheny Beverage's beer distribution clients represent the well-known, ubiquitous national beer brands that everyone is used to seeing available, but they also spend a significant effort seeking out smaller, independent breweries and helping them to expand their reach beyond their brewpubs. DiMario comments, "Our largest brands are Miller, Coors, Mark Anthony, Yuengling, Boston Beer, Constellation, Pabst, Pittsburgh Brewing, and many others, including a diverse portfolio of local and national craft beers. We have the ability to sell the largest beers in the country, while also partnering with small, local breweries to give them the ability to compete with national brands." In Erie County alone, the number of beer brands distributed is over 60 with larger brands like Miller and Corona alongside local and regional favorites like Voodoo Brewery and the Brewerie.

In another recent acquisition, Allegheny Beverage recently took over Edinboro Beer in June of 2023, which is yet another step forward in extending their regional reach while also buoying the local economy. This addition has created even more jobs at the local level, as they have added multiple new employees to their already robust roster, while also being able to provide the area with more beer brands like Sierra Nevada and Yuengling.

> "Our sales team spends their days working with all of the local retailers to help their businesses and provide them with the best possible service. Our delivery team will then deliver beer to these stores at least once a week – they are always out there working hard in all the elements."
> -John DiMario, President, Allegheny Beverage Company

Local people, local beer, local builders – Allegheny Beverage Company is committed to making sure that the focus stays on supporting and sustaining local businesses, local families, and local breweries, and they have been wildly successful at achieving those goals in the five short years since they've come together under their new name. With all of the investment that Allegheny Beverage has put into our local economy, we're sure to feel their impact through further job creation, stellar customer service, and their ability to help small brewing businesses grow for generations to come.

Ben Franklin Technology Partners of Central and Northern Pa.

Investing in innovation, fueling small business growth, and creating jobs

Powering innovation. Fueling growth. Creating jobs. These are the goals of the Ben Franklin Technology Partners of Central and Northern Pennsylvania (BFTP/CNP), an initiative of the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development dedicated to economic growth and job creation in communities across the commonwealth.

Since their creation in 1983, BFTP/CNP has invested in tech-based startups and small manufacturers throughout their 32-county (of the 67 in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania) footprint. Stretching from Erie to Mercer to Venango to Centre, Lancaster, Harrisburg and Allegheny counties, there are four regional offices strategically-positioned to support the specific needs and strengths of Pennsylvania's diverse communities.

Ben Franklin's portfolio companies use individual capital investment – ranging from $10,000 to $500,000 – to develop new and innovative products and processes as well as to enter new markets. Because the staff is made up of experienced entrepreneurs who have successfully built, operated, grown, and in some cases exited their own companies, they also understand that turning an idea into a flourishing business requires more than capital. That's why portfolio companies also have access to the Central Skills Team, which provides business support services including legal, HR, finance, research, and access to other tools and personnel,all at no cost. Further, because great entrepreneurial companies are more successful with more community support, Ben Franklin personnel have spent decades cultivating an accessible and innovative entrepreneurial ecosystem throughout Cen-

tral and Northern Pennsylvania.

Recent investments have included a wide variety of businesses throughout Northwestern Pennsylvania (and beyond), including those that engineer medical devices to treat vascular diseases, develop tech products to convert classic cars into electric vehicles, develop advanced power and energy solutions to address the growing need for more energy in more places, develop innovative hardware and software to help manufacturers become more energy efficient, integrate smart home devices into senior living communities, and create non-alcoholic beverages now available in more than 1,000 stores nationwide – all from Northwestern Pennsylvania communities.

In order to find more interesting companies pursuing large markets, BFTP/CNP also hosts events like the Big Idea Contest – where companies compete for a $50,000 grant and programs like the TechCelerator – a 10-week "startup boot camp" with a top prize of $15,000.

They also operate a variety of Co-Investment Funds in Mercer County and two in Erie County in partnership with the Erie County Gaming and Revenue Authority and the Erie Community Foundation. These community funds empower regional partners to invest their capital in partnership with Ben Franklin's investment expertise to capitalize and support entrepreneurial ventures that might otherwise not receive the investments needed to grow.

They also manage the Ben Franklin Learning Center, which is open to anyone desiring to expand their business knowledge and skills. It includes professional development opportunities covering topics such as digital marketing, finance, human resources, and more.

Collaboration and partnerships are vital. BFTP/CNP teams with state, county, and regional partners such as Penn State University and the Hershey Center for Applied Research, Penn Northwest Development Corporation, the Venango Chamber of Commerce, the PA Wilds, the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership, the NWPA Innovation Beehive, the Entrepreneurial Assistance Clinic, the Small Business Development Centers, Gannon's Erie Technology Incubator, the Penn State Innovation Commons, and many others to provide business incubators with a wide variety of resources.

They also have a proven track record: all of these investments into the Ben Franklin program, as well as individual companies, have generated more than $4 for every $1 invested and hundreds of thousands of jobs.

In Erie, with offices operating out of Knowledge Park, local investments have included well-known brands such as AcousticSheep, Altered State Distillery, MIDEO Medical, Blind Tiger Spirit-Free Cocktails, Whitethorn Digital, PSNergy, Sphere Brakes, and many, *many* more.

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You'll also have weekly one-on-one sessions with an experienced business mentor to discuss your startup's individual needs and challenges.

At the end of the 10-weeks, you'll have a 6 minute pitch presentation, giving you a chance to take home up to $15,000 to help launch your startup.

TOPICS COVERED

- Business model overview
- Who's your customer?
- What's your market?
- What's your value proposition?
- Customer relationships
- Basic financials
- Operating & startup costs
- Revenue/pricing/costs
- Funding options
- Business structure & ownership

TECHCELERATOR COST

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SEE THE UPCOMING TECHCELERATOR SESSIONS AT

CNP.BENFRANKLIN.ORG/TECHCELERATOR

Business District in Focus: Parade Street Corridor

Connecting Erie's past with its future

By: Erin Phillips

Starting out as a dirt road connecting the Fort of Presque Isle to another Fort in Waterford, Parade Street was one of the first main thoroughfares way back when the plan for the City of Erie was initially laid out in 1795. Named Parade Street because of the soldiers who practiced their marches on it, and due to its early use as a main road, it quickly became a center for business and commerce. And although much about Parade Street has changed over the years, there are a number of businesses serving as anchors to the past while remaining, to this day, a contributing part of a historic street of connectivity and commercial activity.

From Kraus Department Store to Mighty Fine Donuts, Nickel Plate Mills to Pulakos Chocolates – these businesses have made their home on Parade Street for generations. Those long-standing establishments are now accompanied by enterprising New Americans businesses such as Fadak International Food Market, Almadina, and UK Supermarkets. With the investment of LECOM and a nascent ErieBank branch, along with the efforts of neighborhood revitalization organizations like the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network, the Bayfront East Side Task Force, and the East Side Renaissance, Parade Street is poised to reclaim its legacy as a commercial epicenter of Erie as the stalwarts of the past join the investment of the future. Let's take a deeper look at all of the businesses and community players contributing to this history and revitalization.

JESSICA HUNTER

A familiar sight in Erie since 1886, Kraus Department Store has been providing exemplary customer service and bringing a consistent stream of consumers to Parade Street for over 130 years.

Kraus Department Store

810 Parade St.

When speaking about anchor buildings on Parade, one can essentially start and stop with Kraus Department Store. Their history begins in 1886 when Edward Kraus, a German immigrant to Erie, built a small shop on the site of the current Kraus building. There he operated a five and dime general merchandise store which grew, expanded, was passed on through family, and remains operational within the fifth generation of family ownership to this day (with members of the fourth generation still at it, working hard and pictured on the cover of this publication).

Kraus is synonymous with reliability. If you can't find what you need anywhere else, you're bound to find it at Kraus. It is this commitment to customer service and satisfaction that has served Kraus well over the years (while they, in turn, serve Erie well). According to their published family history, "Kraus weathered the Depression years and World War II because of its loyal customer base and its reputation for personal service, a reputation that

JESSICA HUNTER

You can find whatever you need (or didn't know you needed) at Cobb's Second Time Around Thrift Shop. What? What? Reusing a large commercial building in the heart of the Parade Street business district, Cobb's encourages reuse through their inventory, as well.

proudly continues today."

In 2012, Kraus won the first ever Commitment to Erie award and in 2013 they won the PRO Hardware's Paul L. Cosgrave Memorial Award and PRO Retailer of the Year award. Kraus is a clear choice for these awards, as they are a business that exhibits neighborhood pride and care. "Kraus Department Store still has the old-time feel of a family-owned business, personal service, and good advice. It remains the place to shop for those hard-to-find items. And yes, the candy counter still draws wide-eyed children and the customer is still king."

A steward of Erie's past, Kraus Department store continues to serve people from all around Erie and their presence and reputation brings thriving business and consistent consumers to Parade Street daily.

We at the Erie Reader would like to extend our condolences to the Nowosielski family upon the recent passing of a reliable and familiar face behind the Kraus counter, Joe Nowosielski.

Denny's Ice Cream Stand
929 Parade St.

Summertime in Erie can't be beat: the beach, the community events, the ice cream stands that host scores of customers throughout the warm months. Denny's is one such staple for icy confections in Erie and is a representative of thriving business on Parade Street.

Back in the day, blue moon ice cream (which is ubiquitous in Erie now) originated on Parade Street and was served as the name implies: once in a blue moon. But Denny's came to recognize that the desire for the vaguely minty, vanilla-scented, aqua-tinged dessert arose much more often than once in a while, and they have made blue moon soft serve available daily along with another Erie familiar favorite: the orange sherbet vanilla twist.

If the long lines for tasty treats all summer weren't enough of an indication, the footprint of Denny's – which now includes a coin laundry and car wash – keeps ex-

panding and giving life and commercial success to their corner of 10th and Parade.

UK Supermarket, Almadina Supermarket, and Fadak International Food Market

1115 Parade St., 2325 Parade St., and 2601 Parade St.

Many areas of Erie have the unfortunate distinction of being a "food desert." A food desert is officially defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a low income tract with at least 500 people who live either one mile away from a grocery store in urban areas or 10 miles away in rural areas. Historically, Parade Street was a hub for fresh produce and the Parade Street Market, which was constructed in 1895 and was located between ninth and 10th streets on Parade, was a massive, open air market the likes of which developers are keen to recreate today. This historic food market had dozens of stalls which hosted local vendors offering fresh vegetables, fruit, meat and poultry, cheese, fish, eggs, dry, and baked goods aplenty. This market closed down in the 1960s, which aligns with the time when the east side of Erie was redlined, and declined from its early days of commercial vibrance.

> "Our customers benefit from tried and true knowledge that has been passed on from generation to generation. Over the years, we've continued to learn from what works the best from our valued, loyal customers."
> -Owners, Nickel Plate Mills

Enter Erie's New Americans and today, the Parade Street food desert is starting to blossom with life. All three of these independent, immigrant-run food markets offer what the Parade Street Market once did: access to fresh produce, baked goods, fresh meats and dairy products, along with imported ingredients that many of the New American citizens of this neighborhood find a comfort.

Cobb's Second Time Around Thrift Shop

1215 Parade St.

What what?? The originators of one of the catchiest local commercials in recent Erie history, Cobb's Second Time Around Thrift Shop has given purpose to a historic building on Parade Street to house their one-of-a-kind store. Historically known as the Gorney Building, the structure at 12th and Parade was built in the early 1920s and traditionally housed a retail establishment in the storefront at street level, while the upper floors were occupied by various offices.

When the longtime tenant of the expansive commercial space moved on, Cobb's stepped up to make sure the location did not stay vacant for long. With consignment options, as well as thrift and vintage finds, you're sure to find something unique

JESSICA HUNTER

Consistently voted best donut shop for the Erie Reader's Best of Erie Awards, there's no denying that Mighty Fine Donuts on Parade Street is a local favorite.

or useful at Cobb's. While reusing a historic building on Parade Street, they are also ensuring that many of the items for sale in their shop (including apparel, decor, furniture, etc.) do not end up in a landfill and are, in fact, given a second time around.

Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority
127 E. 14th St.

The EMTA has made 14th and Parade their main hub in recent years and has enthusiastically embraced being a part of the fabric of the neighborhood. Sponsoring public art projects as well as a now-annual 14th Fest celebration (taking place on June 14 each year) bringing food, fun, and live music to their neighborhood, they are making their presence visible. According to EMTA's CEO Jeremy Peterson, "The EMTA is excited to do our part by bringing vibrancy to the new, inviting, mid-city neighborhood of Erie."

The mission of the EMTA is "to provide integrated mobility solutions to safely connect people to places and contribute to the region's economic and environmental sustainability." Their presence as Erie's only form of public transportation speaks to their importance in the community, and making their home within such a large footprint in the Parade Street corridor speaks to their commitment to the city.

Red Hot Restaurant
1301 Parade St.

Talk about staying power. Red Hot Restaurant has been a familiar sight on Parade Street since the 1980s and little about their offerings have changed in all that time. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. This tucked-away mainstay diner serves Erie favorites like Greek dogs and burgers (and if you're not from Erie, beware: no feta cheese or olives are involved) – it's the kind of place that seems to always be open and always serving food that will evoke real local nostalgia.

Their menu is simple, affordable, and delicious. They offer their one-of-a-kind "Greek sauce" by the pint or quart – which is not quite a chili, not quite a sauce, but somewhere in between: a slow-cooked, ground-beef based, spiced, unctuous taste sensation that every carnivorous Erieite can attest is worth every single calorie.

St. Martin Center, Inc.
1701 Parade St.

Making their home at 17th and Parade since 1975, St. Martin Center of Erie's mission is to "strengthen lives and support our community by providing immediate assistance, education, and long-term services, consistent with our Catholic values." St. Martin Center serves in a crisis capacity – helping senior citizens, students, veterans, families, and others with emergency

provisions like food, rental assistance, utilities, life-sustaining prescription medication, transportation, and clothing while also helping folks reach long term goals through financial literacy and basic budget counseling as well as home buying education.

For those who are suffering the effects of poverty, displacement, homelessness, hunger, etc., the doors at St. Martin Center are always open to lend a helping hand and their presence on Parade Street is key to employing their impact in the community.

Nickel Plate Mills
1932 Parade St.

Nickel Plate Mills has been in business and in the same location on 19th and Parade since 1922. Begun by Phil and Frank Schmid over 100 years ago and with ownership remaining within the same family all this time, Nickel Plate Mills is a story of reliable customer service, dedication to their community, and sound business practices.

Beginning their business providing farm animal feed products and milled goods of all varieties, Nickel Plate Mills – named so for their proximity to the old Nickel Plate passenger line railroad that ran along 19th Street for generations – continues to provide quality, holistic pet food, as well as agricultural and home gardening products, greenhouse plants, and flowers under the ownership of Gretchen and Bob Bonadio. They also offer pet obedience classes from local trainer Isabelle Wolf.

While the scope of the business has had to adapt with the times, their overall work ethic has not changed at all. According to their history, "Our customers benefit from tried and true knowledge that has been passed on from generation to generation. Over the years, we've continued to learn from what works the best from our valued, loyal customers."

JESSICA HUNTER

The local phenomenon of blue moon ice cream had it's origin on Parade Street and that tradition is proudly carried on today at Denny's Ice Cream stand which serves the hard-to-describe flavor daily.

Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network (SSJNN) Community Garden
E. 22nd and Parade St.

The SSJNN was originally established to serve the neighborhood of Little Italy near 18th and Walnut streets and surrounding areas, however in recent years their reach has expanded to include eastside neighborhoods, including the midtown area of the Parade Street corridor. One of their more noticeable initiatives on Parade is their community garden on the corner of East 22nd and Parade streets.

According to the SSJNN, "Garden plots not only address healthy food, but they also are spaces of beauty, education and community for neighbors. SSJNN and its dedicated volunteers now maintain five thriving gardens and an urban farm in Little Italy and two gardens in our eastside neighborhood." The garden at 22nd and Parade is one of two gardens on the east side of Erie. Having reclaimed a lot left vacant from demolition, the group is bringing life, vibrancy, fresh produce, and educational opportunities to the neighborhood.

Pulakos Chocolates
2530 Parade St.

The founder of Pulakos Chocolates, George P. Pulakos, brought his handmade candy business from a push cart in Philadelphia to the city of Erie 120 years ago, in 1903, and the people of Erie have been delighting in his recipes for generations since.

His flagship store opened at 926 State St. in 1916 and gave Pulakos 926 Chocolates its namesake. Since 1971, the base of production and retail business has been at their Parade Street storefront and remains there to this day. According to their history, "While we're always changing, we make sure that the important things – our goal of bringing you the best and freshest candy, our belief in outstanding customer service, and our chocolate artisans' commitment to bringing our founder's recipes to life on marble tables and in copper pots – remain the same."

Mighty Fine Donuts
2612 Parade St.

If someone asks who has the best donuts in Erie, any answer besides Mighty Fine would be wrong. Consistently voted Best Donut Shop in the Erie Reader's crowd-sourced Best of Erie awards, the community can't help but share their love for the nostalgic goodness provided by the old favorite: Mighty Fine on Parade Street.

Established in 1967 by the Brigaman family, it rounds out the list of long-standing generational mainstays on Parade Street with its consistently delicious breakfast confections. The locally famous donut shop's long-time owner recently sold the shop, but the listing agent for Mighty Fine assured worried patrons that the new owner intends to continue on with making the traditional donuts so well loved in our city. Realtor Greg Rubino was quoted in an August 3 interview with the Erie Times News as saying, "They have every intention of keeping the brand and bringing it into the 21st century. I think the community is going to be very happy."

As long as we can keep our glazed twist and custard-filled cravings satisfied, I'm sure Erie will welcome the new owners with open arms.

LECOM Eastside Medical Center
2625 Parade St.

While a doctor's office may not seem like an important addition to a neighborhood, the LECOM Eastside Medical Center represents an area of medical care that has been scarce or missing from the Parade Street corridor for many years. Including providers that specialize in geriatrics, podiatry, obstetrics and gynecology, and family medicine, the residents of the neighborhoods surrounding Parade Street now have easier access to the medical care they require within a state-of-the-art, modern medical facility.

According to Dennis Styn, president of the Medical Associates of Erie, "Eastside will be able to accommodate more patients and decrease overall patient wait time to see a physician or specialist." This development is life-changing for many neighbors who may have previously forgone medical care due to lack of easy access or transportation to medical facilities outside of their neighborhood. LECOM is proud to be a part of the neighborhood and to play a role in its revitalization.

Revitalization Through Neighborhood Groups

Those who have had businesses on Parade Street for generations can speak to how much the neighborhood has changed, developed, and struggled throughout the years. There are many players at work to keep moving the needle of progress, development, access, and inclusivity forward within the Parade Street community.

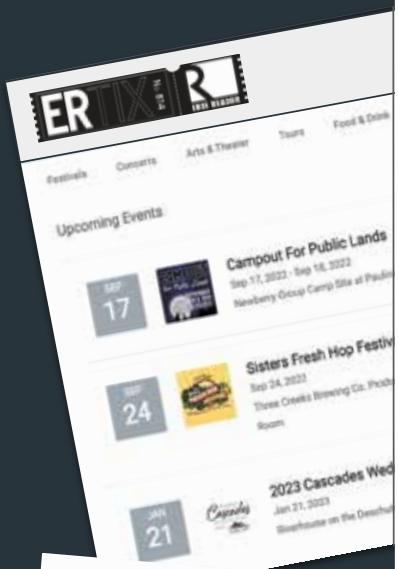
Neighborhood revitalization groups like the Bayfront East Side Taskforce (BEST) and the East Side Renaissance are working to improve blighted properties, increase access to fresh food, beautify the neighborhood while improving safety, offer incentives to new business, and stand as a beacon for the community, saying: we care about making Parade Street better for everyone.

One of BEST's major upcoming projects will be implementing the grant funding they received to improve pedestrian safety and public park space. The organization received a $10,000 grant from Safe Routes to Parks Pennsylvania Activating Communities to improve active travel to parks and greenspaces. This funding will aid in snow removal, improved pedestrian infrastructure, and pocket park improvements that will enhance the safety and quality of life for all the residents who utilize these spaces.

The East Side Renaissance is just getting started in its mission to help revitalize Parade Street and their goal is a lofty one: "Enriching Parade Street via investment, the restoration of properties, and other improvements – expanding the development plan for Erie's east side." They work towards their goal of enriching Parade Street by acquiring previously vacant properties, many of which would have otherwise remained in disrepair or become blighted. Their mission statement continues, "Eighteen properties on or near Parade Street have plans for the eastside neighborhood. Plans also include a new bank office, which is missing and leads to a low banking participation rate among area residents."

With this bank office goal, the East Side Renaissance has already succeeded. Currently in the planning and development stages is a new ErieBank office set to be built at 10th and Parade Streets. This is a million-plus dollar investment in the neighborhood that will provide a long-missing service to the residents of the east side of Erie. This banking facility will not only offer traditional banking services, it will also provide educational opportunities for community members like financial literacy and best practices when considering purchasing a home.

This type of investment in the Parade Street corridor will build upon the already established and thriving businesses in the area to lift up their micro-economy and build upon it. With newer investments like ErieBank and LECOM's Eastside Medical Center, the Parade Street corridor is witnessing investment that has been lacking for generations, bringing the neighborhood's past in line with a brighter future.



ERIE'S ONLY LOCAL EVENT TICKETING

ER Tix is the only ticketing platform created exclusively for Erie's local, community events. It's free, easy to use, and fully customizable with all-access ticketing features to meet your event's unique needs.

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