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Baking up something good

NEPA Inclusive announces plans for new bakery

By **Tony Callaio**
For Times Leader

PITTSSTON — A new bakery will be added to the ever-growing line-up of businesses to downtown Pittston when Bake Inclusive opens its doors in March of 2024 at the Waterfront Warehouse Building at 22 East St., Floor 2, Pittston.

Bake Inclusive is a springboard company coming off the heels of the successful Coffee Inclusive, a coffee shop employing people with diverse abilities and Autism, which will be adjacent to Coffee Inclusive.

According to Frank Bartoli, NEPA Inclusive president and CEO, the new bakery could hire as many as 20 employees. He also stated many of the Coffee Inclusive workers will be cross-trained to work in the bakery as well.

Opening in March of this year, Coffee Inclusive has been growing exponentially and Bartoli felt it was a good time to expand seeing the need for a bakery to accom-



Frank Bartoli, NEPA Inclusive president and CEO, stands between his daughter Ellie, left, and Christina Wesley, right, an employee of Coffee Inclusive, to announce a new business venture, Bake Inclusive, a bakery that will sit next to Coffee Inclusive at the rear of the Waterfront Warehouse building, Kennedy Blvd., Pittston. The bakery is expected to open in March 2024.

Tony Callaio | For Times Leader

pany the coffee shop.

“Coffee Inclusive is in a small location and we were looking at how we could impact more people and the space is available (at the Waterfront Warehouse building) and we thought, what would be better to celebrate our one-year anniversary than an expansion project,” Bartoli said. “The timing would be good for that and give us a little more time to get the money we

need to open the bakery.”

Bartoli said the need is now for a bakery; it’s just a matter of how they would achieve that goal.

The goal NEPA Inclusive set out, is to raise funds of \$150,000 in 150 days. Money raised will go towards purchasing ovens, display cases, mixers, slicers, workstations, refrigerators and baking utensils.

Donations will be accepted any time,

particularly on Nov. 28, also known as Giving Tuesday, a day touted as a “global generosity movement unleashing the power of people and organizations to transform their communities and the world” by doing good deeds and donating money to charities and non-profit organizations.

In getting the ball rolling, a lead grant check for \$22,500 was donated by the Discount Tire Care

Foundation of the Diane & Bruce Halle Foundation. The Halles, founders of Discount Tire, created the foundation to make larger gifts that have a deeper impact in communities across the country.

On hand to present the \$22,500 check were Zach Ratliff, a Discount Tire store manager from western Pennsylvania, and his wife Nicole.

See BAKERY | 2A

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN

Small businesses can apply for funding

By **Jennifer Learn-Andes**
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Applications are now being accepted for a “Small Business Sustainability Grant Program” that Luzerne County Council funded with a \$5 million federal American Rescue Plan allocation, officials announced Wednesday morning in the county courthouse rotunda.

Information is available at luzernecountyready.org.

The program is for for-profit businesses with fewer than 50 full-time equivalent employees. Only employees receiving W-2s can be included in the count, and 1099 contractors are excluded.

One-time awards of \$5,000 will be distributed to eligible businesses with fewer than 20 full-time employees, and businesses with 20 or more full-time employees may be eligible for up to \$10,000 as funding allows.

To be eligible, businesses must be based or located in the county, independently owned and operated, have been fully operational prior to Dec. 31, 2019, and have less than \$15 million in annual gross revenues for 2022.

See FUNDING | 2A



Reflecting on 30 years at the River Street Jazz Cafe, owner Rob Friedman is looking forward to Saturday’s anniversary celebration. On the wall behind him is a mural painted by artist Robin Glazer.

Mark Guydish | Times Leader

Marking 30 years of music at River Street Jazz Cafe

Anniversary celebration set for Saturday

By **Mary Therese Biebel**
mbiebel@timesleader.com

If you’ve been to the River Street Jazz Cafe recently, you know it hosts much more than jazz.

“Now it’s any genre of music,” said owner Rob

Friedman, whose love for jazz and blues led him to establish the Plains Township venue 30 years ago. “Each band brings in a different group of people. The Dead Head crowd is different from a rhythm and blues crowd, different from a jam-based crowd, which I find interesting.

But for the 30th anniversary celebration, set for Saturday, Nov. 18, the River Street Jazz Cafe will return to its roots

and host Scranton-based blues and jazz guitarist Clarence Spady and The Electric City Band, with saxophone player Tony Carfora as guest artist. (Doors open at 8 p.m., music begins at 9; tickets are \$8 in advance and \$12 at the door.)

Friedman likely will join in with the professional musicians that evening, he admitted with a grin.

See JAZZ | 2A

Issue 2023-320



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Zach and Nicole Ratliff of Discount Tire, presented a lead grant check for \$22,500, to NEPA Inclusive to kickstart the \$150,000 in 150 days initiative to raise money to fund the Bake Inclusive bakery project that is scheduled to open in March 2024. Left to right: Zach and Nicole Ratliff, Joleen Lazecki, NEPA Inclusive board chair, and Frank Bartoli, NEPA Inclusive president and CEO.

Bakery

From page 1A

“NEPA Inclusive is making such a difference in the community. Driven to Care shares their vision of providing equal opportunities to all people,” Nicole

Ratliff said. “The goals and beliefs of NEPA Inclusive closely align with those of Discount Tire, reassuring our decision to support the NEPA Inclusive’s next endeavor, Bake Inclusive. Seeing what NEPA Inclusive has done with our initial donation to Coffee Inclusive, we

are confident in the vision of Bake Inclusive. We are proud to provide a portion of the funds needed to complete the \$150,000 in 150 day goal and encourage other businesses to invest in something so vital to our area.”

Prior to Bake Inclusive, Coffee Inclusive purchased



Tony Callaio | For Times Leader

Coffee Inclusive, located at the rear of Waterfront Warehouse, floor 2, is shown during the grand opening held on March 13, 2023. Coffee Inclusive will be adjacent to the newly announced Bake Inclusive bakery scheduled to open March of 2024.

baked good from outside vendors while having to mark up prices on those goods. Bake Inclusive will supply all baked goods to the coffee shop, according to Bartoli, and by baking goods in house; it would give Bake Inclusive a

higher profit margin.

Although baked goods will be purchased at Coffee Inclusive only, the bakery will compliment the coffee shop with additional seating.

NEPA Inclusive offers programs and services

to people with diverse abilities in 13-counties in Pennsylvania that is headquartered at Pittston.

For more information on NEPA Inclusive or to donate to Bake Inclusive, visit www.nepainclusive.org.

Funding

From page 1A

Businesses also must attest that:

- They experienced a negative economic impact due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing economic environment that followed.

- All business owners, managing partners/ members and/or officers are current on all business and personal federal, state and local taxes and have not been convicted of any financial crimes within the past five years.

- The business is not suspended or debarred from the use of federal funds.

The grant opportunity is not open to nonprofit entities, for-profit businesses approved for American Rescue Plan funding from the county this year, passive businesses generating passive income or home-based multi-level marketing, rideshare or other similarly structured businesses.

Applicants will be required to submit:

- 2019 and 2022 tax returns (1040 with a Schedule-C, 1040-SR with a Schedule-C, 1065, 1120 or 1120-S)

- W-9 Form
- Proof of a Luzerne County business address, such as a utility or property tax bill or receipt, insur-



Jennifer Learn-Andes | Times Leader

Applications are now being accepted for a ‘Small Business Sustainability Grant Program’ that Luzerne County Council funded with a \$5 million federal American Rescue Plan allocation. Gathered in the county courthouse rotunda to announce the program Wednesday, from left, are: Matthew Bickert, Greater Wyoming Valley Chamber; Mary Malone, Greater Hazleton Chamber; county Manager Romilda Crocamo; Lindsay Griffin Boylan, Greater Wyoming Valley Chamber; Michelle Mikitish, Greater Pittston Chamber; and county Councilwoman LeeAnn McDermott.

ance declaration page, invoice for equipment or inventory or a bank statement.

Also, businesses with 20 or more employees must submit 941s for the last two quarters to be considered for additional funding.

Tough times

County Manager Romilda Crocamo said during Wednesday’s announcement that recent economic challenges have put a strain on local entrepreneurs and small businesses.

“I am delighted to inform you that help is

on the way due to the foresight and commitment of our Luzerne County Council,” Crocamo said.

The grants will “serve as a lifeline” for growth and recovery and can help fund a range of needs, including business expansion, technological advances and employee training, she said, urging businesses to “seize this opportunity.”

Grants must be used for expenses related to supporting ongoing business operations.

“Our goal is to empower our small businesses, to help them not only survive, but to thrive,”

Crocamo said.

County Councilwoman LeeAnn McDermott said the program will help many businesses throughout the county and thanked the Greater Pittston, Greater Hazleton and Wyoming Valley chambers of commerce for making the program possible by jointly designing and administering it.

Mary Malone, of the Greater Hazleton Chamber, said the resulting application process was designed for simplicity and speed, with many ways for applicants to obtain answers to their questions.

“At the heart of what we’re doing today is to echo resiliency. We understand at the chambers the powers of small businesses for all of our economies across the county,” Malone said.

Michelle Mikitish, of the Greater Pittston Chamber, said applications will be processed in batches.

Those submitting all required documentation by Dec. 8 could receive funding the end of this year or in early 2024 if they are approved, she said.

The second batch will be completed by the end of March. If any funding is

still left for awards, there will be a third batch.

To advance, businesses must complete an applicant information and attestation form through the website.

Applicants will then receive an email indicating if they meet initial eligibility screening requirements and, if so, access to a secure folder to download necessary documents.

A committee of representatives from the three chambers will then process applications based in order of priority, with greater consideration for businesses operating in qualified census tracts and those that are minority-owned, woman-owned and veteran-owned.

Priority also will be given for businesses disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as hair salons and restaurants, she said.

The website contains responses to many questions and a calendar listing both virtual and live informational sessions for applicants to obtain more information, she said.

Lindsay Griffin Boylan, of the Greater Wyoming Valley Chamber, said all chambers of commerce in the county have information and resources to help applicants.

Many partners are involved in assisting and getting the word out to businesses, she added.

Jazz

From page 1A

“Clarence, who’s a friend, usually pulls me onstage,” he said. “I play a little guitar.”

Friedman has long been an admirer of Spady, whose talent helped inspire him to establish the River Street Jazz Cafe, in a space where furniture was once manufactured.

“I really wanted to bring blues and jazz back to the area,” Friedman said. “I used to travel to New York and Philly to hear it, and I thought maybe there’s a following here.”

He invested in a sound system and acoustics that show the musicians’ talent to advantage, and brings in professionals from Rock Street Music in Pittston to handle the sound and lighting.

“Musicians appreciate

that we’ve designed for them,” he said. “They’re not being crammed into the corner of a bar.”

Here the music is center stage, Friedman said. “People are interested in the music, whether they come alone or with friends. It’s not a pick-up bar.”

Over the years the River Street Jazz Cafe has hosted such luminaries as Bo Diddley, Lionel Hampton, Maynard Ferguson,

Dickey Betts, Joe Cotton, Average White Band and Roomful of Blues.

Clarence Spady has been a regular, performing at the venue about once every three months for 30 years. He put together the Electric City Band, and Friedman predicts they’ll provide “a great show, with a little blues, some funk, some classic rock.”

Guest artist Tony Carfora likewise has a long history at the River Street Jazz Cafe, starting when he was an eighth grader from West Pittston who accompanied his parents

to the club and asked to play along on a song.

“He was a shy little kid,” Friedman said, explaining Carfora is now a successful musician in New York. “There’s nothing shy about him now.”

Friedman is founder of the Friedman Hospitality Group, which includes the restaurants Kevin’s in Kingston, Bank + Vine in Wilkes-Barre; Salt & Pepper Pub in Nanticoke, Cork in Wilkes-Barre, Gri-co’s in Exeter, Rikasa in Pittston, The Beaumont Inn in Dallas, The Greens at Irem in Dallas and Fire & Ice on Toby Creek in Shavertown.

But the Jazz Cafe, with its hardwood floor and lower-level rathskeller ambience, is his labor of love.

“The numbers to make a small music club successful in an area like this one are difficult,” he said. “You’re busy on Friday and Saturday night, between 9 and midnight. Basically you’ve got six hours to generate enough money to pay all the bills. It’s not profitable by any measure.”

Still, he loves the place. “When I come here and

the musicians are playing well and the place is full and people are bobbing their heads in time to the beat,” he said, “there’s nothing like it.”

The first 100 people to come to Saturday’s 30th anniversary celebration will get an anniversary t-shirt which incorporates a design of the colorful mural that artist Robin Glazer painted on the cafe wall in 1993. And everyone who comes to this celebration or future concerts will have the joy of supporting live music.

“Even if you don’t recognize the band, come on a whim,” Friedman urged. “This is where famous bands get their start. So you’ll have an opportunity to hear somebody that could be famous in a few years.”

Don’t hesitate to dance, he added.

“We encourage the dancing,” he said. “If you like the music, don’t be afraid to get up and move.”

The River Street Jazz Cafe is located at 667 N. River St., Plains Township. Tickets are available at www.riverstreetjazzcafe.com.

TIMES LEADER

(USPS 499710) • Publishes 365 Days a Year Print and Digital Combined

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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to
Times Leader, 90 E. Market St., Wilkes-Barre, PA 18701

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Pick 2: 3-7
Pick 3: 7-0-9
Pick 4: 4-4-2-1
Pick 5: 4-2-8-2-7
Wild: 5
Treasure Hunt: 05-12-16-17-20

Evening Drawing

Pick 2: 9-3
Pick 3: 0-5-8
Pick 4: 9-8-5-3
Pick 5: 4-8-1-3-7
Wild: 0
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