914 INC.



Healthcare In the Spotlight

Q&A With
Dr. Philip O. Ozuah
President & CEO,
Montefiore Medicine

2021 ECONOMIC FORECAST

What to expect in healthcare and seven other major sectors of Westchester business

\+

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VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLE:
BUSINESS SUCCESS IN THE COVID-19 ERA

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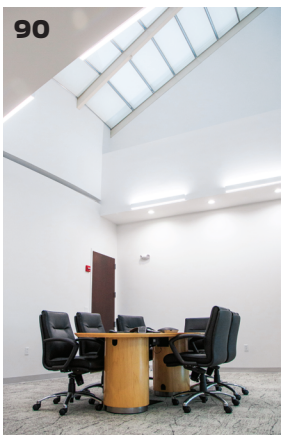
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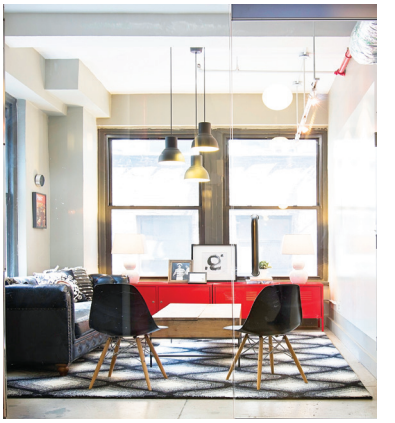
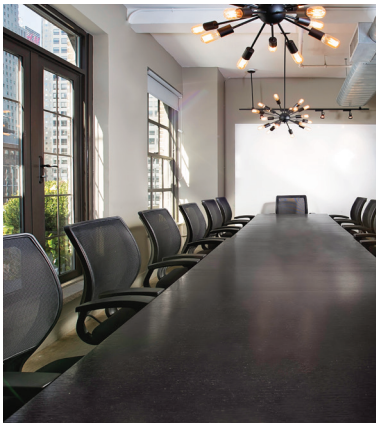
TODAY MEDIA

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More Is Better

Though 2020 was not much of a year for celebrations, it was the year in which *914INC.* passed the milestone of its 10-year anniversary. And after making it through the worst 365 days in recent memory, we're positively thrilled to be starting our 11th year in publication with some exciting news: We are expanding, with two additional issues per year. Since its founding, we have striven to make *914INC.* an integral part of the fabric of Westchester's business community. We have become a trusted source for all things business in the county, offering detailed and insightful information on Westchester's local entrepreneurs, small-business owners, corporate executives, nonprofit leaders, and government officials. In addition, we spotlight the lighter side of the executive lifestyle, sharing ways to make the office more fun, the best things to do after 5 p.m., local places to go for power lunches, or where in Westchester to find the best work wardrobe. And, our events have reached must-attend status for anyone looking to mix and mingle with the best and brightest of Westchester business.



Sam Wender, Publisher



Amy R. Partridge, Editor

We are excited to be able to do all of this at a greater frequency this year. What to expect? More of what you already love about *914INC.*, plus, among other things, a new annual story highlighting the best places to work in the county (nominate your business today at *www.bestplacestoworkwestchester.com*), as well as an in-depth supplement examining the future of workforce development in Westchester.

The decision — and the ability — to expand from four to six issues at a time when many businesses are struggling to stay afloat is not something we take for granted. Tremendous debts of gratitude go to our devoted advertisers and readers, who are almost as passionate about the *914INC.* brand as we are.

Through 10 years of covering local businesses in our pages, online, and at our various events, one thing has always shone through: The members of this business community love to come together to support one another's accomplishments. It is what has helped to bring *914INC.* to this point, and we know it is this same community-mindedness and collaboration that will continue to help us get through the COVID-19 crisis and on to bigger and brighter things ahead.

Here's looking forward to the next decade of Westchester business…

Sam Wender
Publisher

Amy R. Partridge
Editor

WELL QUOTED



"Every generation, if it is lucky, is called upon to make enormous sacrifices and serve a greater purpose. Meeting the many challenges of the coronavirus pandemic is just such a calling." (page 14)



"We are trying to shift our strategy to capture any business that's out there. It's a matter of survival, keeping ourselves relevant in the market." (page 23)

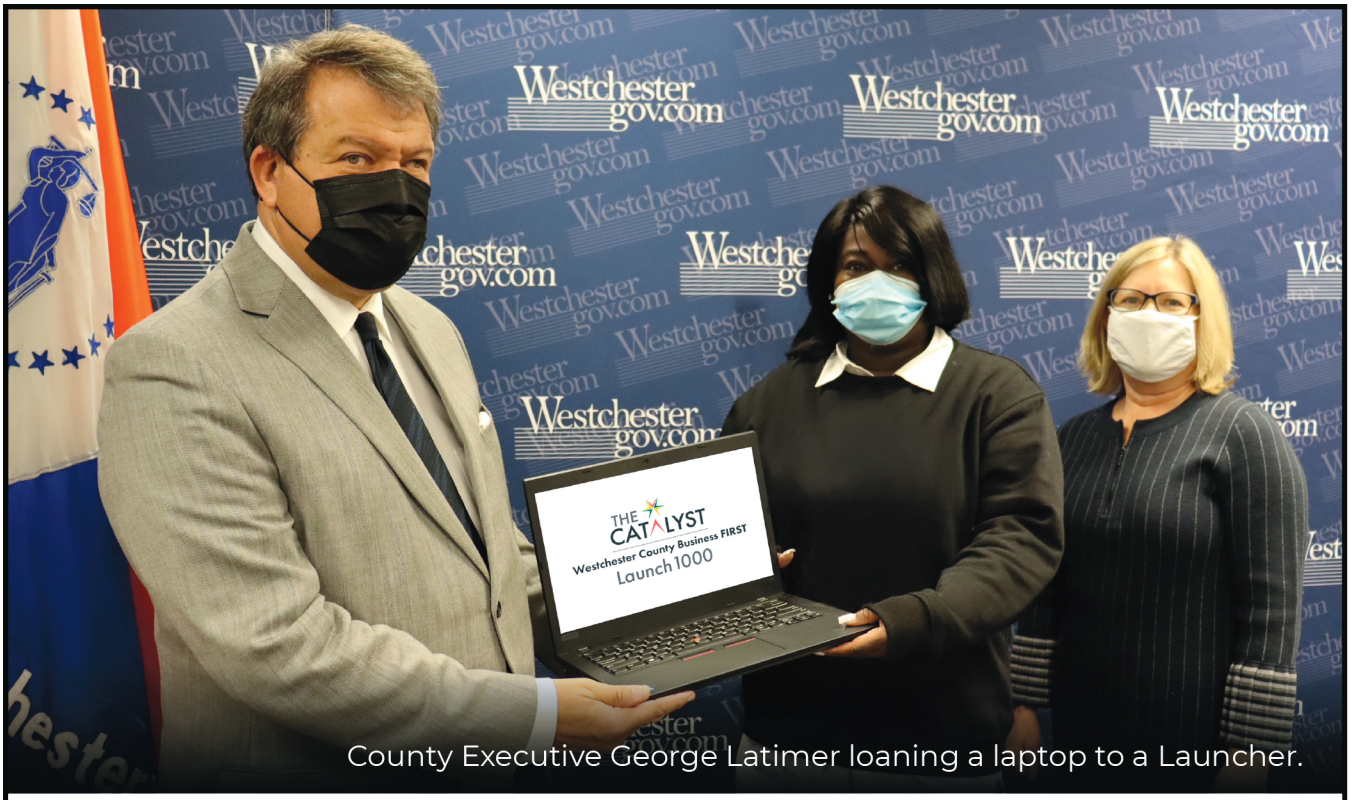


"[Employees who have been laid off or who did not finish college] are not necessarily going back for a four-year degree. They may be thinking: *What can I do in three months, in six months*?" (page 48)



"We don't need the deployment of 4G/5G wireless cell antennas — effectively mini cell towers — installed up and down our neighborhood blocks next to our homes and schools that involuntarily expose residents to radio-frequency radiation 24/7." (page 94)

PHOTOS (*LEFT*) BY ENORMOUS CREATIVE; (*RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM*): BY SERGE NEVILLE; COURTESY OF TARRYTOWN HOUSE ESTATE; BY SIRIN SAMMAN; PAGEBACKGROUNDS/ADOBE STOCK



County Executive George Latimer loaning a laptop to a Launcher.

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[wuhn-der-kind] -noun. plural. a person who succeeds, especially in business; at a comparatively young age.



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POWER POINTS

Edited by Nick Brandi



Dr. Philip O. Ozuah

The Doctor Is In

As the president and CEO of Montefiore Medicine, Dr. Philip O. Ozuah has a huge job at a huge time in history. Turn the page to learn more about this intriguing leader, who shares his thoughts on Westchester and the humanitarian role of medicine.

Plus:

Biotech is still booming in Westchester.
PAGE 17

What you need to know about cybersecurity.
PAGE 18

PHOTO BY SERGE NEVILLE

INC.Quiry

Shared Humanity Through Medicine

Philip O. Ozuah, MD, president and CEO of Montefiore Medicine, discusses healthcare during the pandemic, his goals for the Montefiore Health System, and thoughts on Westchester. **By Tom Schreck**

From his start as a 14-year-old medical student in Nigeria to his current post as head of one of the nation's largest health systems — with more than 200 locations in the Lower Hudson Valley and the Bronx — Dr. Philip O. Ozuah is nothing if not inspirational. We sat down with the president/CEO of Montefiore Medicine recently to learn more about him and get his take on the state of healthcare in our region.

Tell us about your career at Montefiore.

My Montefiore career started in the summer of 1989, as an intern recently arrived from Nigeria. I spent the first 18 years as a community physician in the South Bronx. Fifteen years in, I became a full professor at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, physician-in-chief of the Children's Hospital at Montefiore, and the university chairman at the medical school. In 2012, I became chief operating officer for the entire system, and seven years after that, was appointed the CEO.

What are your goals for Montefiore going forward?

My goal is to provide the residents of Westchester with the full benefits of the Montefiore Health System, to ensure that they receive the best quality of care, the best patient experience, and the best outcomes — at the best possible value. I want people to know that we are here for them, that the full weight of our knowledge and experience as a world-class academic healthcare system is available to them at all times.

What are the biggest ways in which COVID-19 changed the healthcare landscape?

COVID literally blew up the landscape. It changed everything, almost overnight. We went from two COVID-19 patients on March 11 to more than 2,000 one month later. Now, [nearly one year later], the battle continues. The vaccines [are here], and we know so much more about the virus and how to treat it. We also know the pandemic exposed an underlying public healthcare crisis: the poverty, substandard housing, and other factors — what we call the social determinants of health — that can leave entire communities more vulnerable to multiple diseases, including COVID. As the pandemic recedes, we must come up with strategies to address the sys-



"If we as citizens can address the virus of social inequity with the same selfless determination and courage we have brought to bear on the coronavirus, I dare to hope that we can finally prove the true strength of our shared humanity."

—Philip O. Ozuah, MD
President & CEO, Montefiore Medicine



PHOTOS: BY SERGE NEVILLE (*TOP*); COURTESY OF MONTEFIORE HEALTH SYSTEM (*BOTTOM*)

temic inequities that plague our poor and minority communities.

How has our county faired during the pandemic?

Westchester is a vibrant, thriving, diverse community that has been battered by this pandemic. But, as I have seen firsthand, COVID-19 has also brought out the strength and compassion of its people. I believe that positive energy and shared community spirit, the lessons we've learned about working together to defeat this terrible foe, will carry us through and drive our recovery.

What are your thoughts about our future and where we are today as a people?

Every generation, if it is lucky, is called upon to make enormous sacrifices and serve a greater purpose. Meeting the many challenges of the coronavirus pandemic is just such a calling. So, I say to young people, embrace the challenge. Stay strong, stay vigilant, stay positive. Take care of yourself and find ways to help your family and your community. Find ways to help the world emerge as a better place than you found it.

I see lots of positives in the way we rallied as a nation and changed our behaviors in profound ways to combat the coronavirus. If we as citizens can address the virus of social inequity with the same selfless determination and courage we have brought to bear on the coronavirus, I dare to hope that we can finally prove the true strength of our shared humanity.

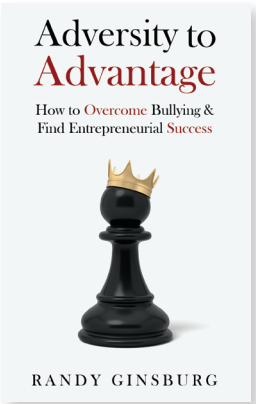


Montefiore Hospital Moses Campus

Biz Reads

Beating the Odds

These three books, by authors with local ties, promise to give you a leg up on the competition. **By Nick Brandi**



Adversity to Advantage: How to Overcome Bullying & Find Entrepreneurial Success

By Randy Ginsburg

In this book, 23-year-old Randy Ginsburg of Chappaqua tackles the subject of successful entrepreneurship from a unique perspective: through the eyes of those who had been bullied in adolescence. Recounting numerous stories and citing several clinical studies (including at least one that claims 47% of bullying victims report a positive effect on their adult lives) and experts in the field, Ginsburg uses his "INVENT Framework" to help inspire others to navigate a pathway to success despite the dark backdrop of an American adolescent epidemic.

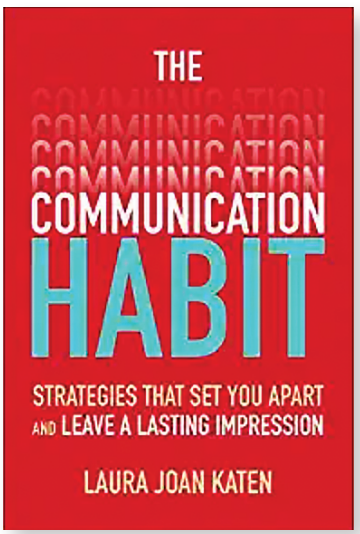
222 pages (pbk), New Degree Press (2019)

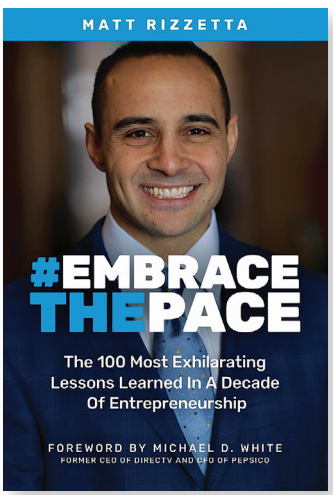
The Communication Habit: Strategies That Set You Apart and Leave a Lasting Impression

By Laura Joan Katen

President of the Harrison-based, WBE-certified, professional-development training company Katen Consulting, this communications guru from Carnegie Mellon advises that it takes seven seconds or less to make a first impression. The goal, then, is to make a positive and lasting one through techniques such as speaking someone else's "language," nonverbal messaging, impactful listening, and the art of confident (but not arrogant) self-promotion. Chock-full of real-life success stories, the book includes exercises and questions that will help the reader conduct accurate and utilitarian self-assessments that catalyze professional growth and development.

273 pages (pbk), McGraw-Hill (2020)





#Embrace the Pace: The 100 Most Exhilarating Lessons Learned in a Decade of Entrepreneurship

By Matt Rizzetta

When former DirectTV and PepsiCo International CEO Michael D. White calls you "an innovative young entrepreneur who has built something from scratch," your career as a biz-book author is off to a flying start. That thing from scratch, btw, is N6A, which in 10 years has become (per *Observer*) one of the 50 most powerful PR firms in the U.S. An Iona College alumnus and former Golden Gloves boxer from Westchester, Rizzetta translates this meteoric success into a list of best lessons learned about entrepreneurship, with practical stories as easy to digest as a great PR campaign.

234 pages (hrd/pbk); BookBaby (2020)

BOOK COVERS (*TOP TO BOTTOM*) COURTESY OF RANDY GINSBURG; COURTESY OF MCGRAW HILL; COURTESY OF N6A

Niche Business

Griddle Me This

A Croton couple use culinary experience and entreprenuership to elevate English muffins along with their community. **By Joel Eliach**



The journey to wholesale success for Denise and Ross Weale began when they had homemade English muffins at a friend's house. "They were amazing," Denise says. "Very difficult to go back to a store brand."

So, the couple, residents of Croton-on-Hudson for upwards of 20 years, started creating their own English muffins, drawing on their pedigree as Johnson & Wales graduates. One day in 2016, when the Weales were walking and discussing returning to their culinary roots, they stumbled onto a piece of trash. It was a Thomas' English Muffins box.

"This is kind of a sign," Denise said at the time. "All right, let's go for it!"

Back in 2002, the Weales had established an S corporation to publish a cookbook they'd written. Around the end of 2016, the Weales decided to begin doing business through that entity as Dam Good English Muffins (*www.damgoodenglishmuffins.com*), allusions to both their town's dam and the quality of their product.

A watershed moment in the fledgling company's history occurred in early 2017, when they brought their product to Susan O'Keefe's popular Croton bakery, Baked by Susan. O'Keefe says she doesn't sell anyone else's products but made an exception for the Weales' English muffins because they were *that* good. After selling out during a trial run, Baked by Susan continued carrying the muffins, and the Weales leveraged that success to begin selling their all-natural, non-GMO, soy-free English muffins not only at local farmers' markets but also to other stores in the area, including Chappaqua Village Market and Mt. Kisco Seafood.

Following a stint in a restaurant basement in Peekskill, Dam Good English Muffins leased a new 1,500 sq. ft. production facility last fall on John Walsh Blvd in Peekskill, where they're keeping up with orders for such popular products as the vegan sourdough and cinnamon swirl, through their website and for curbside pickup at the production facility. One of the secrets of their success involves the process, which includes a cold-fermentation period, followed by cutting their artisan sourdough muffins, then griddling them, like pancakes, often in avocado oil.

According to Denise, she and her husband take great pride in their products, but she says that applies equally to their community. Using open-hiring practices inspired by Yonkers' Greyston Bakery, Denise asserts, "It's important to give people second chances and opportunities to learn a skill, and we can provide that here." The company also donates products to Fred's Food Pantry in Peekskill.





Top: The Weales in part named their business in tribute to the New Croton Dam. *Left:* Denise Weale holds up the Thomas' English Muffins box that inspired her new business. *Above:* For maximum effect, Dam Good English Muffins griddles its artisan sourdough muffins.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAM GOOD ENGLISH MUFFINS

By the Numbers

Budgeting for the Future

Coming off a year fraught with uncertainty and peril, County Executive George Latimer and the Board of Legislators passed a 2021 operating budget that wasn't the doom and gloom some had anticipated. In fact, there was some upbeat news in the offing, including another tax reduction and targeted allocation increases, drawing approbation from leaders in both the business and nonprofit sectors. Here are some of the key features of the budget:

$2.092 billion
Total proposed operating budget for 2021

$1,000,000
Proposed tax-levy reduction

0
Number of anticipated layoffs/furloughs of county employees (includes no loss of services)

$15.7 million
Total spending reduction

$695 million
Projected 2021 sales-tax revenue (up $33M from 2020)

$5 million (each)
Targeted allocation increases for economic-development and housing-assistance programs

$2 million
Targeted allocation increase for food-insecurity programs

$1 million
Targeted allocation increase for emergency-services response/PPE

$75 million
Projected amount of the county reserve fund (same level as year-end 2019)

3.5%
Scheduled funding increase for nonprofits in 2021

$0
Amount of supplemental federal assistance factored into 2021 budget

20%
Potential state-aid reduction in the absence of supplemental federal assistance

Editor's note: On Dec 14, 2020, the county legislature unanimously approved $231.8 million in new appropriations from the capital budget proposed by the county executive two months earlier. This includes $138.8 million for the general fund, $80.4 million for the sewer and water districts, $1 million for the refuse district, and $11.6 million for the county airport, for such things as the storm-water enhancement program and COVID-related enhancements to the main terminal —NB.

PHOTO BY TILIALUCIDA/ADOBESTOCK

New to the Neighborhood

The Biotech Boom Continues

Oligomerix joins the ranks of Westchester-based bioscience companies.



There wasn't a whole lot to be cheerful about in 2020, though even in the darkest of times, an opportunity may arise. James Moe, PhD, MBA, and his cofounding partner, Eliot Davidowitz, PhD, experienced this firsthand with their biotech company, Oligomerix, which recently relocated its administrative and executive offices from the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx to White Plains' Westchester Park Center.

Founded in 2006, Oligomerix is an interesting company. It focuses most of its energy on the small-molecule tau protein, which is very important in the stabilization of healthy brain cells. When tau proteins are damaged, either by genetic or external (e.g., traumatic brain injury) factors, they can bind to each other and become pathogenic, which can lead to neurodegenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer's. Oligomerix is developing a drug treatment that, if successful, will prevent damaged tau proteins from binding to each other, basically thwarting the degenerative process before it begins.

While the R&D and lab functions will remain in the Bronx for the time being (Moe is already eyeballing potential lab facilities in the county), the move was precipitated by cross-purposes. Oligomerix was already expanding as a company, but the exigencies of the pandemic forced many healthcare institutions to reallocate space, to accommodate COVID-19 patients.

"Because of COVID, [Einstein] was really in need of all of their space and needed to expand," says Moe, who has a doctorate in molecular biology/molecular biophysics from Wesleyan University. "For our own long-term growth, we decided to move to Westchester, where we could also expand."

Moe went on to say that he loves his company's new location, which it occupied as of October 1 (not coincidentally, two weeks after Oligomerix was awarded a $3.19 million grant by the NIH's National Institute on Aging) because "it's where multiple healthcare complexes are building satellite locations, which will bring a lot of people to this region. There's a lot of capacity for expansion here and I think a lot more interest in Westchester since the COVID outbreak," he says before pointing out that his 1,600 leased square feet and the staff who occupy it are right in the nexus of Interstates 95, 287, and 684, as well as the Bronx River Parkway. "Also," says Moe, "the big office spaces here allow for plenty of social distancing, and we definitely want to keep our employees safe." —*NB*

Cybersecurity

Hack Attack

Unlike the innocent, prepandemic times of yesteryear (or yesterday), doing business in the new normal means smaller companies are right in the crosshairs of hackers.



As everyone knows, cybercrime looms larger now than ever before — not just personally but for businesses, too. Such high-profile companies as Sony, Adobe, Equifax, Marriott International, and Yahoo! have learned this excruciating lesson firsthand. Traditionally, it was only big companies like these that were the target of cybercriminals and hackers. But now, thanks to some of the more insidious effects of COVID-19 — like an exponentially increased need for videoconferencing and a literally overnight switch to remote data exchange and work sessions — companies large and small must face the sober reality that cybercrime is an existential threat. In fact, according to a 2019 CNBC report, 43% of cyberattacks are aimed at small businesses, with an average damage cost of $200,000, while *Security* magazine reported last February that 60% of small businesses could "go out of business due to damages associated with a cyberattack."

Robert Cioffi, COO and cofounder of Progressive Computing, in Yonkers, agrees. "Small and midsize businesses have historically remained below the radar when it comes to cybersecurity threats — but now that's changed," he says. "Hackers are focusing on them like never before."

Cioffi, who launched Progressive Computing in '93, went on to say that infiltrating large corporations has become more difficult in recent years, as such companies have the deep pockets to bolster their IT infrastructures. This has forced hackers to redirect their energy to less protected entities, like small businesses. Yet, paradoxically, it is the comparatively modest budgets of smaller businesses that make a formidable cybersecurity infrastructure even more vital, as they are less well-equipped to absorb the financial loss that cyberattacks often inflict.

5 Surefire IT Tips
That All Small Businesses Should Know

From Robert Cioffi, Progressive Computing

1. **Get hardcore on software.** Be sure all your software, including security software, is current and up-to-date.
2. **Don't crack up, back up.** Invest in strong backup systems. Make sure you back up your data both locally and to the cloud. If you work in the cloud, then make sure that data is saved elsewhere.
3. **Get onboard the train(ing).** Train your workforce on good user hygiene. Most breaches happen because someone on the inside was tricked to do something.
4. **Cyber insurance can be a company saver.** Cyber insurance can save your bacon if you ever get fried by a hacker. Do your homework and ask lots of questions before you buy.
5. **Leave it to the (IT) Pros.** Two key terms: *trust* and *pro*. Have someone in your corner who checks off both boxes.

Additionally, says Cioffi, the coronavirus has ripped open portals of vulnerability that hadn't existed before. "If I've got a house with one door, I really only have to secure that door. But now, the house got a lot bigger, so there are a lot of windows and doors to get in," he says, referring to what his industry calls the "attack surface area." Hackers exploit these areas by expanding their target pool to include not just entities at the corporate level but also their employees.

The good news, says Cioffi, is that small businesses don't have to spend themselves into chapter 11 in order to muscle up their cybersecurity. "Rome wasn't built in a day, and if yours is a million-dollar-a-year business, you don't need to spend six figures on cybersecurity." He recommends getting an experienced, trusted advisor as a first step, then doing a risk assessment to expose the "low-hanging fruit," meaning areas of most critical vulnerability.

Lastly, says Cioffi, businessowners should keep a close eye on their social media habits. "Your social media footprint reveals a lot about who you are, what your likes and dislikes are. It gives a lot of psychological information about how to potentially breach you, so be mindful of what you are putting out there." —*NB*

PHOTO BY PUTILOV_DENIS/ADOBESTOCK


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Oil's Well at Robison

Robison Oil CEO David Singer discusses the importance of people, service, and his time with *The Street Frogs*. **By Tom Schreck**



▲ From law school to Hollywood to the family business, David Singer has always followed his passions.

"In the home-oil business, the product all comes from the same bucket. Every company is selling the exact same thing," says David Singer, CEO of Robison Oil. "My personal philosophy is that you differentiate yourself by the quality of the company. That means service, safety, and being personable."

Robison Oil was founded in 1921, and the Singer family acquired it in 1984. The Port Chester business employs roughly 200, has been named a ConEd Green Team Leader, A Westchester Sustainable Partner, and has been inducted into the Business Council of Westchester Hall of Fame. David Singer is a third-generation oilman, but if that conjures an image of a guy who was born into something and never gave a thought of doing anything else, think again. Singer is a man as diverse as that bucket of oil is singular. Sure, Grandad and Dad were at the helm of the family oil business, too, but David went down a different path, which just so happened to deliver him to the same destination.

> "My personal philosophy is that you differentiate yourself by the quality of the company. That means service, safety, and being personable."
>
> —**David Singer,** CEO, Robison Oil

"I went to law school, and my plan was to make practicing law a career," Singer says. "I clerked for Judge Philip M Halpern, now a federal judge, then joined the law firm of Collier, Cohen, Shields, and Boch, practicing commercial litigation. In '92, I got distracted by some creative adventures that took me out to the West Coast," says Singer with a measure of reticence, needing to be drawn out of the more familiar how-I-got-into-the-oil-business narrative.

"Well, okay… I've always loved animation," he starts. "I remember growing up, there were shows like *The Monkees* and cartoons with the Jackson 5. They'd sing and dance, but they'd also get into capers and solve crimes. I had a vision for an animated series like that, except with a group of rappers."

That's how *The Street Frogs* was born. During the early days of rap, Singer wrote a pilot and headed out to Los Angeles to chase his dream. He landed a production company, got budding rap superstars, like Curtis Blow, Ice-T, and Melly Mel, to do the

PHOTO COURTESY OF ROBINSON OIL

soundtrack and secured a meeting with some big-time animation producers.

"It was off the hook! It was all going great, and it felt like my dream was about to be realized," Singer reminisces. "Turns out, the executives were the guys who produced *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer*. They weren't expecting the rap lyrics, and when they heard them, oh man, they fired us on the spot! That was it."

So, in '98, it was back to the practice of law and a trip home to the East Coast. He worked for the same firm practicing commercial litigation and began to represent Robison in their acquisition deals. Soon Singer realized he'd rather be making the deals instead of just advising and in 2001 he became Robison's VP of Sales and Marketing. When his dad retired in 2010 he took over as CEO.

At that time, the sons and daughters of oil businesses didn't want to follow in their parents' footsteps, so companies in the industry began to merge and consolidate. "My dad saw these roll-ups, and companies [in the business] were growing through acquisitions. It looked like an interesting challenge. My oil DNA kicked in, and I went back into the family business," Singer says.

It wasn't his father's oil-business world anymore. There was a time when almost every single home in Westchester County used oil heat. Gas and electric changed that, and those commodities aren't delivered and serviced in the same way. Back in the day, it was about taking orders, but now, with 50% or more of the homes being heated by something other than oil, it was a whole new venture.

"When my dad and grandfather ran the business, everyone needed it. Today, it is different, and when I came back onboard, I started to ask the questions: What are we? Are we an oil company, or are we a home-service company?" Singer says.

It was in asking those questions that Singer's itch for the creative got scratched. Maybe he wasn't writing and producing *The Street Frogs* anymore, but the challenges in the family business inspired him. Local oil companies started to sell their businesses, and there were many opportunities to consolidate.

"The families that had the companies for generations, the mom-and-pop organizations, wanted to sell to people they knew. I don't like the term 'acquire.' The families came to us because they knew us," Singer says. "It started a new challenge. We had to develop relationships with new customers and deliver to them the same quality service."

It also meant making good on his question about what Robison was or would become. Robison diversified into gas, electric, and air conditioning and insulation, to broaden their market. He learned lessons along the way, adjusted, and continued to move forward.

"When we moved into insulation, it was part of the philosophy of offering solutions to home problems, not just selling oil. I learned that when oil prices are low, people are less interested in efficiency than I thought they would be," Singer says.

For Singer, it all comes back to relationships. He prides himself on the people aspect of the business, not just as a nice add-on to what he does but rather as a fundamental foundation of his business.

"Think about it: With oil, you need it delivered; you need an annual checkup; and you need to invite someone into your home. Over the years," Singer says, "that serviceperson sees your children grow up and sees families grow. That's important."

Like Singer, former New York State Senator Nick Spano also grew up in the oil business with his dad and his grandfather. Their oil company was acquired by Singer, and Spano worked for Robison before being elected to

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▲ *L to R*: Daniel Singer, Co-president; company mascot RobiDog; and Robison Oil CEO David Singer

PHOTO BY MIKE DISCUILLO

NEW SECTION!



Hoping for 'No Vacancy' Signs

Hotels are still in a brutal battle with COVID-19-related losses but hope to hang on for a strong recovery.

By David Levine

▲ The Tarrytown House Estate has shifted its focus from business travel to being a "transient leisure destination" to attract more visitors.

Asked to describe what it's been like running a hotel the past 10 months or so, Sean Meade doesn't pull any punches, saying the environment has been brutal. "Our hotels are in desparate need of capital to continue to operate," says Meade, general manager of Cambria Hotels White Plains Downtown and president of the Westchester Hotel Association.

Of course, this should surprise exactly no one. Since the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, everything that keeps hotels operating and in the black vanished. No corporate travel. No meetings. No weddings or bar mitzvahs. No romantic weekend getaways. Nothing.

The numbers tell the sad story: Since March 1, 2020, New York State travel spending has declined 73% (down $38.1 billion), according to the New York State Department of Labor. And as of November 2020, the overall hotel occupancy in Rockland and Westchester was down 30.8% year to date, Meade says. The average daily room rate was down 18%. "The important number is revenue, and that's down 43.2 percent year to date," he reports. "Our hotel, which usually runs at an 85 percent occupancy, ran eight percent in April and May."

That led to massive layoffs and furloughs across the board. "We went down to a handful of people working in our hotels," Meade says. The crisis hit fast and furiously, and hotels struggled to survive. Some didn't. "The Westchester Hilton [in Rye Brook], a staple in this area, has closed," he says. Five hotels decided to suspend operations, including the Ritz-Carlton in White Plains, which is undergoing renovations as it transitions to a Marriott-brand hotel, The Opus. "It was a good time for the Ritz-Carlton to renovate their hotel, as business levels are extremely low throughout the county," Meade says.

For instance, DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel in Tarrytown is fighting battles on several fronts. For one, the parent Hilton company demanded $595,000 in profits and royalties by November 18,

2020, according to published reports, and threatened to suspend DoubleTree from its reservations system and terminate the franchise agreement. Under the current agreement, the hotel owes Hilton 4% a month on gross room revenues and 3% to 5% in royalties.

In response, DoubleTree sued Hilton on November 20 in Westchester Supreme Court, claiming that the pandemic has resulted in historically low occupancy rates and substantial financial losses. However, DoubleTree withdrew the lawsuit on November 25, "with no indication of where the dispute stands," according to reports. The hotel is fighting a mortgage foreclosure in court, as well.

The hoary proverb claims that "Necessity is the mother of invention," and the pandemic may be the mother of all mothers. Creative hotel-management teams put together new business models, which, if not enough to keep staff fully employed, at least brought in enough revenue to keep the lights on. And because this region was the first true hotspot in the nation, "being at ground zero put us on the forefront of how to keep guests and staff safe," Meade says. At first, the Cambria and other hotels donated empty rooms to medical facilities, including WMCHealth and White Plains Hospital, for first responders who couldn't or didn't want to go home while they worked ungodly hours.

Getting creative is also helping Hyatt House in White Plains, which is largely a business hotel but has shifted toward a leisure audience, with a few weddings already booked for 2021, says Christine Zipparo, the hotel's director of sales. "The advantage we have is, we are an extended-stay hotel. We are lucky to have these guests keeping us afloat," explains Zipparo, who notes that the hotel is "running a very tight ship, doing things to control expenses, because [lost] revenue changes so much." The pandemic, she says, "is shifting how we are operating. We are trying to shift our strategy to capture any business that's out there. It's a matter of survival, keeping ourselves relevant in the market."

After suspending operations for about three months, the Tarrytown House Estate, in Tarrytown, reopened in July as what general manager Chris Costabile calls a "transient leisure destination." Its prepandemic business was dependent mainly on meetings, conferences, and special events. "COVID-19 affected that business greatly. But sitting on 26 acres that offer lots of opportunity for outdoor recreation, the hotel marketed itself as a quick, safe, nearby getaway for COVID-weary city dwellers.

"[Having] a resort setting worked to our advantage," he says. Family-friendly amenities, like the pool, gardens, firepits, picnic areas, tennis, bocce, basketball, and more, appealed to "people who had been cooped up in the house for months. We had packages for work-from-home people who wanted to get away. And we had tremendous success, believe it or not." Every weekend was sold out from July through September, he says. The hotel even hosted about 10 weddings over the summer and fall, all with 50 people or fewer. "One had just 10 people. They said, 'We're gonna get married no matter what,'" Costabile notes.

Better weather in the spring and summer also helped The Abbey Inn & Spa, in Peekskill, a large, new facility that had the misfortune of opening in mid-March, right as the pandemic shut everything down. "Being new in the market made it even more difficult," explains general manager Gilbert Baeriswil. A preopening article in *The New York Times* generated early interest, but "that didn't kick in until mid-May," he says. "Until then, we were hosting first responders and local clients who wanted to see what [the hotel] was all about."

> "We are definitely not where we would like to be, but we are fortunate to have the support of the community."
>
> —**Gilbert Baeriswil,** General Manager, The Abbey Inn & Spa



▲ Though it opened in Peekskill right as the pandemic hit, The Abbey Inn & Spa has seen bookings exceed expectations.

Since then, however, bookings "far exceeded our expectations, with many sellout nights," Baeriswil says. As of early December, "that has not tapered yet, thank God." Still, the restaurant is operating at 50% capacity, per state guidelines, "so volume is not as great as it would be," he adds. Considering that normally, peak restaurant events, like Easter and Mother's Day, were strictly to-go, and the restaurant only opened for seating in June, he's pretty content with where they stand for now. "We are definitely not where we would like to be, but we are fortunate to have the support of the community," he says.

Winter will be challenging, no doubt, for all area hotels. Baeriswil believes that "at current capacities, we will be okay, but if there are

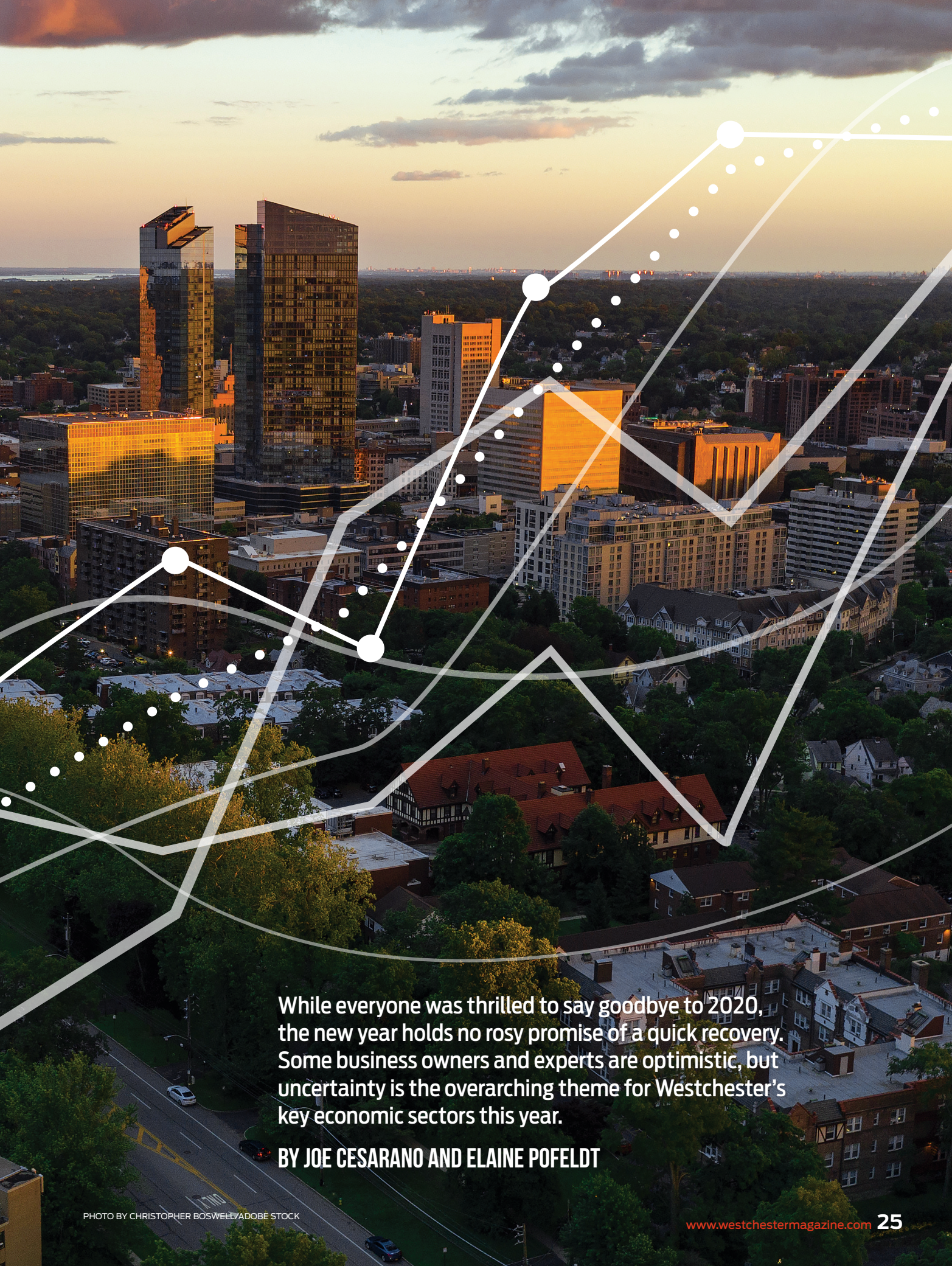
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PHOTOS COURTESY OF TARRYTOWN HOUSE ESTATE (*LEFT*), THE ABBEY INN & SPA

ECONOMIC FORECAST 2021

expect More unexpected





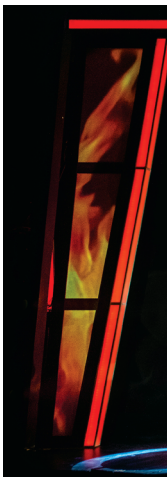
While everyone was thrilled to say goodbye to 2020, the new year holds no rosy promise of a quick recovery. Some business owners and experts are optimistic, but uncertainty is the overarching theme for Westchester's key economic sectors this year.

BY JOE CESARANO AND ELAINE POFELDT

PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER BOSWELL/ADOBE STOCK



can the show go on?



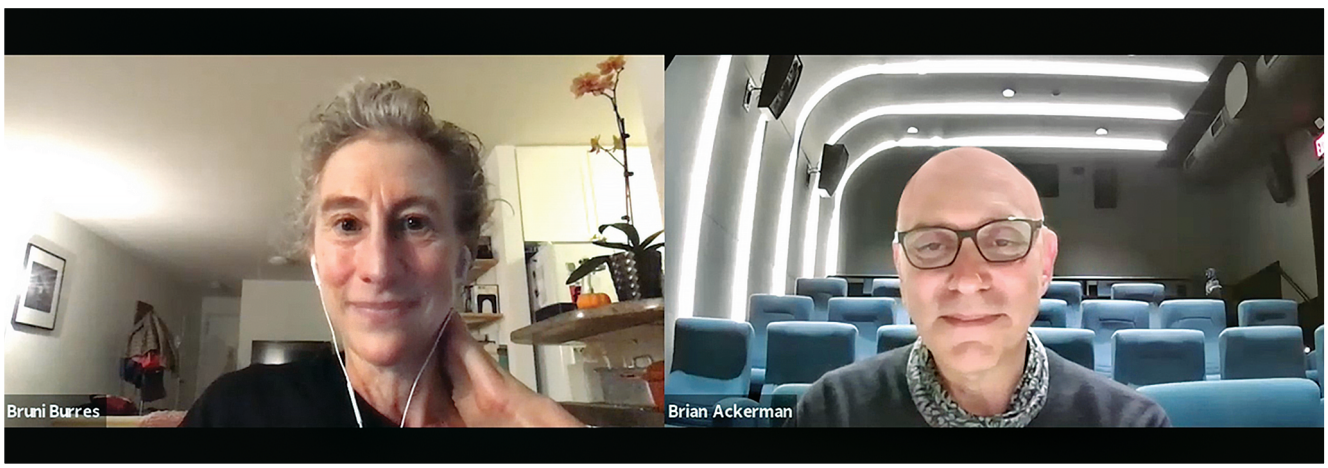
Arts institutions and businesses across the county (like most of their counterparts nationwide) suffered greatly in 2020 due to the pandemic. State-mandated directives shuttered theaters across the county and even caused one venerated local arts business, the Westchester Broadway Theatre, to permanently close its doors in Elmsford after 46 years.

"COVID has really taken a toll on the arts community," notes Janet Langsam, longtime CEO of ArtsWestchester, in White Plains. "Roughly 87 percent of our organizations are financially struggling."

Langsam estimates that roughly half of her member organizations in Westchester were able to receive government assistance through the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) — but smaller groups were not eligible to receive those funds. There is optimism, however, about growing and expanding audiences among some arts groups through extended digital programming, she notes.

Seth Soloway, director of the Performing Arts Center at Purchase College, notes that he was "very lucky" to be part of the college during the pandemic. He was able to keep stagehands employed by fanning them out across campus, to assist in safety efforts of school facilities. As for 2021, Soloway says it is hard to predict when the Center might feature live performances again — but the first step will be to ramp up online programs to ensure that future seasons are pandemic-proof. "We've built something robust in terms of our online presence and need to keep building," says Soloway. "We're trying to see if we can build to a place where even if we can't do a live show, we can have art being made on campus again."

The Jacob Burns Film Center (*top*) held its Westchester Jewish Film Festival — featuring series curator Bruni Burres (*below left*) and JBFC founding director of film programming Brian Ackerman (*below right*) — virtually in 2020. The JBFC hopes its investment in virtual progamming will pay off in 2021.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JACOB BURNS FILM CENTER

Pleasantville's Jacob Burns Film Center closed in mid-March, and the cancellation of their film programming placed a great strain on the organization's finances. According to Margo Amgott, the JBFC's interim executive director, the center implemented furloughs and layoffs but took the opportunity to invest deeply in virtual programming, including hosting a virtual Westchester Jewish Film Festival and launching a new virtual curriculum for its Classroom to Screening Room program.

For 2021, the JBFC was chosen as a partner of the 2021 Sundance Film Festival and will be the only satellite screening site that will screen festival films in the New York area. But the emphasis for next year will be on the safety of film buffs first. "When we reopen, we will continue to offer virtual programming, in the interest of providing our patrons with safe and enjoyable moviegoing experiences, whether in our theaters or the comfort of your own home," explains Amgott.

As one of just two equity stages left in Westchester, the White Plains Performing Arts Center (WPPAC) faced an uncertain future entering the final month of 2020. "We're devastated," says its general manager, Kathleen Davisson. "We're shut down, with no open date in sight. We have done everything we possibly can to reopen, but due to the governor's orders, we're just not being given the opportunity." John Ioris, chair of the WPPAC Board of Trustees, notes that the theater cannot possibly plan to reopen in 2021 without a more concrete idea of timing, since planning productions can take months. "I'm an optimist by nature, but I'm not terribly optimistic," says Ioris, adding that continuing to pay WPPAC staff was unsustainable due to the closure. "The staff was being paid throughout the pandemic, but at some point we will run out of money."

▼ The White Plains Peforming Arts Center (*below*) faces an uncertain future; (*right*) The ArtsWestchester building in White Plains.



"We're devastated. We're shut down, with no open date in sight."

—**KATHLEEN DAVISSON,** GENERAL MANAGER, WHITE PLAINS PERFORMING ARTS CENTER





PHOTOS: (*ABOVE*) COURTESY OF WHITE PLAINS PERFORMING ARTS CENTER; (*RIGHT*) BY MARY ALICE FRANKLIN

COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

A suburban advantage

Despite numerous challenges in the market due to the pandemic, commercial real estate remained stable throughout Westchester County in 2020 — and there are positive signs early in 2021. According to a Newmark Frank report, building occupancies in Westchester remained below 20% in Q3, with most companies continuing to have employees work remotely. New leasing activity hit 315,000 square feet, up 4.8% from Q2 but below the 10-year Q3 average of 450,000 square feet. The eastern I-287 corridor lost more than 677,000 square feet, while White Plains Central Business District saw a 215,890-square-foot loss. (Many of these losses were due to previously planned office vacancies, not the virus.)

According to Paul Adler, Esq., chief strategy officer at Rand Commercial, the need for large-scale space in Class A office buildings declined, as companies elected to keep their employees working remotely. But smaller, older office buildings — such as converted Victorians or medical-arts buildings — became more popular. "They were out of vogue, but COVID put them back in vogue," Adler says. "Companies wanted a place with parking but with no elevator and no lobby, and they didn't want a five- to 10-story building with shared HVAC."



"Connectivity and access to the internet is going to be the new transit-oriented development."

—PAUL ADLER, ESQ.
CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER, RAND COMMERCIAL



Adler anticipates that companies will eventually have employees return to larger office buildings but noted that some of the changes caused by the pandemic will continue to be seen in 2021 and beyond. "I don't think if we could wave a magic wand tomorrow, we're all going to want to go back to the office," he says. "It's just not happening."

While proximity to mass transit was previously driving commercial development, the "new normal" has created other priorities. "Your connectivity and access to the internet is going to be the new transit-oriented development," Adler notes. "If you're up in North Salem, in a nice boutique building, and you have slow internet, you can't compete with a more connected space in White Plains or Yonkers."

Given the emphasis on at-home deliveries during the pandemic, the need for warehouse spaces — where small trucks can access the suburbs from a short distance — is also booming. "There's an opportunity for the Westchester market to capitalize on that, as there's a push to go north for bigger and bigger warehouse spaces and logistics centers," says Thomas LaPerch, director of the commercial group for Houlihan Lawrence in Rye Brook.

Rachel Greenspan, senior director at GHP Office Realty in White Plains, pointed to the old real estate maxim of location playing an important role. "Commercial real estate performed really well in the suburbs, as we believe tenants are more comfortable commuting to suburban spaces than urban spaces," says Greenspan. "That's a huge benefit to being in Westchester as opposed to somewhere in Manhattan." Greenspan adds that she believes this trend will continue in 2021 and that Westchester will see more Manhattan-based tenants relocating north as their long-term leases expire in the city.

In the retail market, RM Friedland reported that the overall asking price for retail leases remained flat from Q2 to Q3. But the end of a statewide eviction ban is anticipated to result in many more retail properties being placed on the market in 2021. "Brick-and-mortar retail continues to be challenging," notes Sarah Jones-Maturo, president of RM Friedland. "Restaurants continue to struggle, and boutique fitness has been pretty decimated by the pandemic. But, I would consider grocer-anchored shopping centers significant winners." As long as the state doesn't mandate the shutdown of more types of businesses due to the pandemic in 2021, Jones-Maturo believes retail stores in these centers will continue to benefit from grocery-related foot traffic.

◀ ▼ An increased need for warehouse space is driving interest in industrial buildings like these, in White Plains (*left*) and Yorktown (*below*).



PROPERTY IMAGES COURTESY OF THOMPSON & BENDER; (*TOP*) PHOTO COURTESY OF PAUL ADLER



▲ The hot pandemic-driven home market in Westchester is expected to continue this year.

RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE

continued strong demand

When Mary Stetson, broker/founder of Stetson Real Estate, in Mamaroneck, listed a home on Johnson Place in Rye prior to the pandemic, the sellers priced it at $2 million. As the coronavirus escalated locally and demand grew along with it, they decided to increase the price. "We ended up getting $2.1 million, a five percent increase, due to pandemic demand," says Stetson.

That hasn't been unusual in Westchester, with many Manhattanites snapping up properties in the suburbs once COVID-19 struck and buyers able to afford more because of lower interest rates. In the third quarter of 2020, 2,167 single-family homes were sold in Westchester County, up from 1,940 in Q3 2019, and the average sale price hit $1,027,010, up from $906,876 the same time the year before, according to a report from Houlihan Lawrence. Stetson found that many gravitated toward Northern Westchester during the early pandemic because prices tend to be lower. But as the year came to a close, interest in towns closer to Manhattan was building. "I think in this next year we're going to see people gravitate back to Lower Westchester," she says. "They know jobs are tied to New York City. Even if they don't have to go in all the time, they have to be within striking distance of it."

One outgrowth of the coronavirus is that properties offering more social distancing are in greater demand. "Whether it's a townhouse or a single-family house, [people are] looking for their own front doors," Stetson says. And, at a time when many are working remotely and children are going to school at the dining-room table, home offices are now a strong selling point. "They want someplace they can shut a door," she says.

Denise Friend, associate broker and regional manager of Westchester's Howard Hanna Rand Realty offices, says one challenge in 2020 was low inventory. If the coronavirus vaccines get distributed effectively, however, and people feel more comfortable showing their homes, she anticipates that will change for 2021. "We're hoping in the early spring we'll see more sellers comfortable putting properties on the market," she notes. At press time, she anticipated a large number of closings in January. "That will kick off 2021. Fourth-quarter sales increasing will lead to more closings in January," says Friend.

"Whether it's a townhouse or a single-family house, [people are] looking for their own front doors."
— **MARY STETSON,** BROKER/FOUNDER, **STETSON REAL ESTATE**



Meanwhile, greater adoption of technology is likely to transform the experience of buying a home in Westchester in 2021, say local brokers. Many who had been reluctant tech adopters embraced tools like virtual tours and walk-throughs in 2020. "Finding the property is easy these days," says Emilce Cacace, a broker at Scarsdale's Portico Realty Group. What will make the difference going forward, she says, is "How do we hold people's virtual hands through the whole process, fulfill their expectations, and get them what they need?"

PHOTOS COURTESY OF: (*TOP*) HOULIHAN LAWRENCE; (*BOTTOM*) MARY STETSON

A sea change in student life

College campuses in Westchester adjusted to pandemic-related challenges relatively well over the course of 2020, with some embracing innovations in learning and student life that will likely last for many years to come.

In October, *College Magazine* touted Pleasantville-based Pace University as having the fourth-best response to COVID-19 among higher educational institutions in the nation. The magazine praised the university's impressive response plan, prorated housing and meal refunds, pass-fail grading, and random testing linked to the college's "Pace Safe" security app. The university also launched the New York Recovery internship program, which placed and funded 65 students at 24 different nonprofit organizations conducting pandemic relief work in the region. "We helped organizations that were struggling — and some students have even secured jobs out of this, as well," notes Pace University president Marvin Krislov. "We've also learned that we can do a lot remotely."

Krislov adds that for 2021, the spring semester will likely look very similar to the fall. "It's an uncertain situation," he adds, with shifts that occur based on infection rates and the status of the pandemic. "But we are hoping to have more in-person activities and hoping to have athletics up and running."

Westchester Community College benefited from its work on a five-year strategic plan that included the introduction of virtual class options. "When the pandemic struck, we moved from consideration [of virtual learning] to 100 percent deployment in just a few short weeks," explains WCC president Belinda Miles. "We graduated more than 1,600 students last spring, exceeded our summer enrollment goals, and enrolled thousands of new students for the fall semester. While it is still early, we are seeing an increase in applications for fall 2021 admissions. We are continuing to see an increase in the number of adults who are enrolling for credit and noncredit programs."

A surprise benefit arose at Fordham's School of Professional and Continuing Studies: "Our summer enrollment really skyrocketed when we turned all of the courses to an online format," says Andrea Marais, associate dean of strategic marketing and enrollment for the school. "Previously, we were not able to offer many online courses, and there were restrictions regarding the types of classes students were permitted to take in that format, but students liked the convenience of learning online during the summer. Even if things are back to 'normal' next summer, I expect we will have a lot more online offerings than we've had in years past."



Milagros Peña, who was installed as the new president of Purchase College in October, says that a conservative perspective to the pandemic on campus has made all the difference. "Our task force took the leadership position of being very conservative in our approach," notes Peña. "When we've had minimal exposures, we have instantly paused programs — and we have 100 rooms ready for quarantine and isolation. As a result, we did not have the kind of incidents like we saw across the country."

Peña notes that a lot of the planning for this year at Purchase depended on the successful deployment of COVID-19 vaccines. "Around May 2021, it looks like a good number of people will have been vaccinated," she says. "At that point, we may be talking about a following fall that will be close to normal."

Faculty at Manhattanville College in Purchase created a free, online summer course designed for



▲ County higher-ed institutions, like WCC (*above*), Pace University (*top right*), and Mercy College (*right*) are staying strong through strategic adaptation.







"Virtually every single classroom on any of our campuses can serve students in multiple locations."

—**TIM HALL,** PRESIDENT, **MERCY COLLEGE**

incoming first-year students. The two-credit course, which was taken by nearly 100 incoming students, covered the impact of COVID-19 on many different academic disciplines. "The course received national attention and accolades, as the approach was unique to Manhattanville," notes Michael Geisler, Manhattanville's president. "We plan to use this course as a model for creating similar interdisciplinary courses focusing on major topics of current interest.

"We expect that the spring semester will look similar to the fall in terms of safety precautions and protocols, and small and virtual classes and events," he adds. "We are confident that, with [widespread distribution of] a vaccine on the horizon, we will be able to return to a more normal academic year, with the kind of personal, student-faculty interaction that is the hallmark of a small liberal-arts college in academic year 2021-2022."

Mercy College in Dobbs Ferry welcomed its largest freshman class in many years in fall 2020, despite seeing fewer students wanting to live in dormitory housing. Mercy president Tim Hall, who has been advocating the increased use of distance-learning technology since assuming his post in 2014, was heartened to see the college fully implement the capacity for virtual classes. "Ever since I got here, I've been pushing to help us use distance technology so that we could do a better job of offering more of what we offer at our different campuses," says Hall. "Now virtually every single classroom on any of our campuses can serve students in multiple locations."

Hall adds that the effective adoption of COVID vaccine in 2021 would likely see the college resume operations to a "much more traditional way." But he notes that the advent of online classes — which every student embraced out of necessity this year — would be a benefit for the future. "Students will see it as a reasonable supplement to their general class schedule," he says.



PHOTOS COURTESY WCC, PACE, AND MERCY COLLEGE; HALL HEADSHOT BY LESLIE KAHAN PHOTOGRAPHY



A rush of PPP loans kept The Westchester Bank busy in 2020.

BANKING

More in-demand than ever



"Many of our clients have adapted very well, and some have repositioned their businesses."

—JOHN MANGINELLI, MARKET PRESIDENT, HUDSON VALLEY/METRO NEW YORK KEYBANK

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act kept Westchester banks very busy in 2020. After Congress passed the massive stimulus bill in March 2020, local banks fielded a rush of applications from the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), which provided small businesses with forgivable loans to cover payroll, and Economic Injury Disaster Loans to those hurt by the pandemic.

Community banks were on the front lines of helping small businesses make it through. The Westchester Bank, headquartered in White Plains, facilitated $85 million in PPP loans during the crisis, helping to save 7,500 jobs, notes John Tolomer, the bank's president and CEO. "We were very involved with our customers," Tolomer explains. "Our branch personnel continue to reach out."

KeyBank, too, did considerable lending to small businesses, with its bankers processing 40,000 SBA and PPP loans for small businesses around the country, including Westchester. "Many of our clients have adapted very well, and some have repositioned their businesses," says John Manginelli, market president for the Hudson Valley/Metro New York market.

At press time, KeyBank and others were helping clients prepare for forgiveness of the PPP loans. Meanwhile, bankers were keeping a close eye on the progress of the vaccines and following the potential of ongoing aid from Congress.

"What really is going to drive the whole economy is going to be the pandemic and how we fare over the next few months," Tolomer said in late November.

Sectors that are likely to see growth in the county in 2021, say bankers, are healthcare, warehouse development for last-mile ecommerce distribution, and the grocery segment. "We envision them doing well in 2021," says Manginelli, whose bank has been working with clients in those sectors on financing growth plans.

To spur things along, Westchester County Executive George Latimer has put into motion the Westchester County Economic Development Strategy, Recovery and Implementation Plan. The initiative, which began to take shape in August 2020, is built around marketing the area as "Destination Westchester," as well as providing programs to close the digital divide, promoting industries such as advanced manufacturing and biosciences, and spurring workforce development. "It will have a real impact on the county in a positive way, to position ourselves to be competitive," says Bridget Gibbons, director of economic development for the county.

In the meantime, bankers will continue to work with sectors that are particularly impacted by the pandemic, like the restaurant, retail, and travel-and-leisure sectors. Some landlords were turning to banks in 2020 to seek deferrals as small-business tenants fell behind on the rent and malls were looking at adaptive re-use strategies for vacancies. "We are trying to work with many of those clients," Manginelli says.

Another trend that is picking up is retail clients refinancing their homes. "In this low-interest-rate environment, many clients are finding it beneficial to refinance their existing mortgage debts at lower rates," Manginelli explains.

Of course, the year 2020 also ushered in a greater acceptance of things like mobile banking, remote work, and other socially distanced ways of doing business, which bankers believe will continue because of the efficiencies these new approaches bring. "We're very tech-focused and have made significant investments in technology in the past few years," says Manginelli.

TOP PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WESTCHESTER BANK; HEADSHOT COURTESY OF JOHN J. MANGINELLI

RETAIL

in it for the long haul

Matthew Wilson and his brother Mike, who run Scarsdale's Wilson & Son Jewelers, take the long view when it comes to the business their great-grandfather launched in Washington Heights in 1905. "Our business has seen epidemics, pandemics, the Depression, and two world wars," says Matthew. In coping with COVID-19, he adds, "we draw on that."

That spirit of resilience has helped them through the pandemic. Even after the business had to close to its employees and the public, the brothers came in every day to work on whatever they could. Fortunately, customers were willing to order online to pick up purchases for curbside delivery, sometimes using contactless payments. "A lot of business owners panicked," adds Matthew. "I like to think our actions helped the business move forward."

The brothers are moving the store into a bigger space in the Harwood building this year, where the store used to be located when it first opened. "Mike and I believe in the village," says Matthew about Scarsdale. "We believe in the economy of the town, New York State, and the U.S."

They weren't alone in feeling upbeat about retail in 2021. "The hope of [widespread distribution of] the [vaccines] makes me optimistic about 2021," says Bridget Gibbons, director of economic development for Westchester County. "I do believe it's going to be a very tough winter, with the positivity rates escalating exponentially…, but I am very optimistic about Westchester County. Our unemployment numbers have been steadily declining, which is good news."



▲ Independent retailers like Scarsdale jeweler Wilson & Son are counting on resilience to keep them viable during a tough retail climate.



> "Grocer-anchored shopping centers are the significant winners of the pandemic."
>
> —**SARAH JONES-MATURO**, PRESIDENT, RM FRIEDLAND

Giuseppe Colosimo — a vice president of the design firm Calliston RTKL, which has an office in New York City — has expertise in shopping and entertainment centers and has done work in Westchester. He believes that one big trend that could benefit retail in the county is the recent flight from big cities. "There are more people [now] in the suburbs," he says. "Residential demand is increasing, and so is everything else that goes with it."

To some extent, the outlook depends on the industry. "Grocer-anchored shopping centers are the significant winners of the pandemic," says Sarah Jones-Maturo, president of commercial real estate brokerage firm RM Friedland. In Larchmont, DeCicco & Sons performed "incredibly well," she adds. "The cotenants in the center have benefited from grocery foot traffic."

As for larger retailers in Westchester, Patrick Tormey, adjunct professor of marketing and international business at New Rochelle's Iona College, says megastores, like Target and Walmart, have fared well during the pandemic. He believes that midsize department retailers, like Macy's (which recently announced the upcoming closure of its White Plains store) and Bloomingdale's, will see challenges in getting customers into stores. "You have to worry about their differentiation," he says.

HEADSHOT BY TOSHI TASAKI; WILSON & SON PHOTO COURTESY OF WILSON & SON

A surprising bright spot



"I feel pretty optimistic heading into 2021. People have become used to a new normal."

— **DON VIBBERT,** CEO, IMAGEWORKS

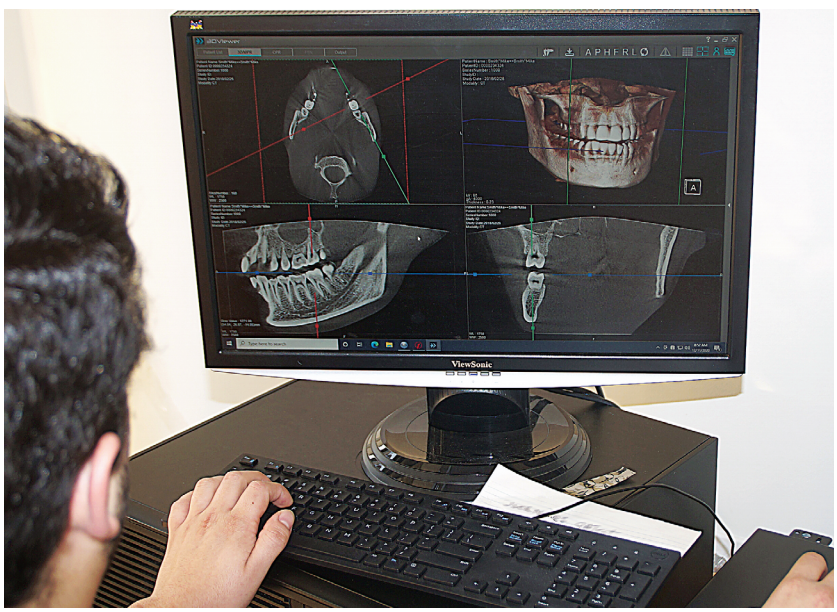
Manufacturing firms in Westchester did not fare as poorly in 2020 as their counterparts in other industries did. While these firms represent only 3.9% of the county workforce, local manufacturers successfully weathered pandemic-related challenges — and even started new ventures in some cases.

As COVID-19 was peaking in New York this past spring, Westchester County Association (WCA) president and CEO Michael Romita called Bill Taubner, president of Ball Chain Manufacturing in Mount Vernon, to see if the company would be interested in shifting its production to help address a chronic mask shortage in local hospitals. Taubner, whose family company shifted its production during World War II to aid in construction of military airplane parts, contacted partners overseas and soon created a division of the company to start importing masks for use by local hospitals. The division eventually grew into a corporation of its own, and Bona Fide Masks is now the authorized distributor for the FDA-authorized Powecom KN95 respirator masks in North America.

"We were asked by local leaders to get involved," explains Taubner. "We were hesitant at first but quickly realized the importance of helping in the right way." The WCA recognized the contributions of Ball Chain, which is the world's leading manufacturer of ball-chain products, with a leadership award in October.

Jennifer Monachino Lapey, general counsel at Ball Chain, explains that while its traditional business experienced a "tremendous downturn" due to the pandemic, the shift toward mask manufacturing helped, and the company expects the business to fully recover. "I can fairly say that we remain hopeful and optimistic for the coming year," she adds.

Oliver Stauffer, CEO of Hawthorne-based PTI Inspection Systems, said the pandemic forced the company to rethink the way it works. The company — which conducts leak testing for the packaging of food, pharmaceutical products, and medical devices — created a virtual demo center for clients to replace its normal presence at trade

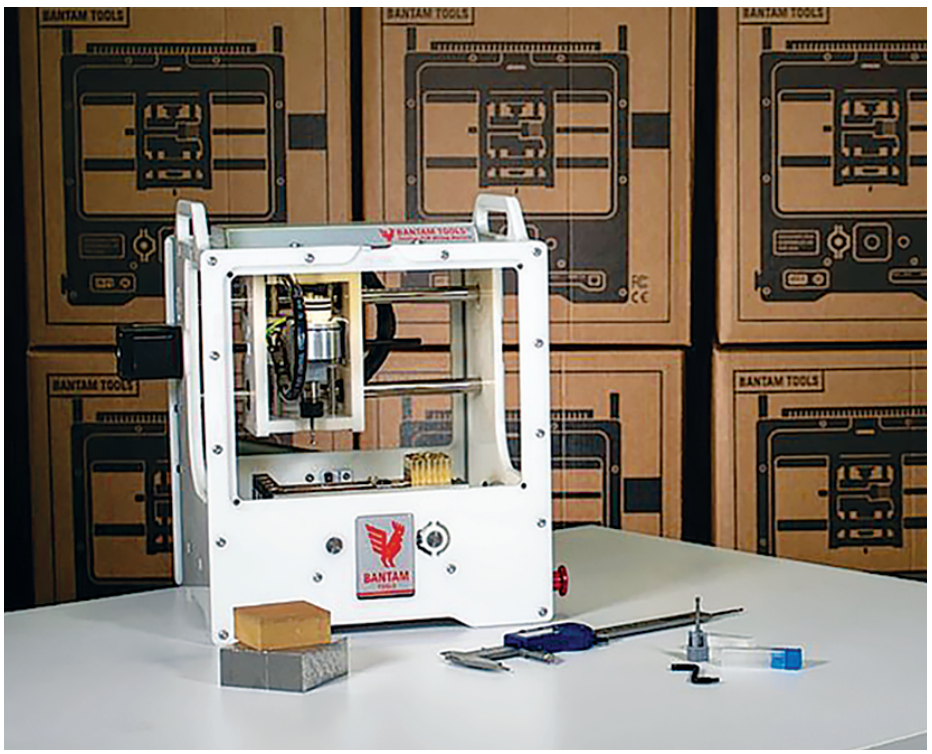


▶ Local manufacturers, including ImageWorks (*right*), are surprisingly well positioned for 2021.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF IMAGEWORKS







▲ (*Top*) Ball-chain spools from Ball Chain Manufacturing; demo room at PTI Inspection Systems (*middle*); and a machine from Bantam Tools (*bottom*)

shows. "Having a strong virtual presence, and the ability to interact with clients so that we will be able to replace the trade-show experience, is key," notes Stauffer.

Communication was essential for Don Vibbert, CEO of ImageWorks, in Elmsford, after the virus slowed down his business. "We were constantly making adjustments and communicating with partners and suppliers," says Vibbert, whose company provides imaging systems for medical and dental offices. "We were trying to be smart so that we had product each month. Things progressively got better. But I feel pretty optimistic heading into 2021. People have become used to a new normal."

Bantam Tools, which moved last year into its new headquarters in Peekskill, is actually looking to expand its workforce to meet demand for its products, which help designers and engineers make aluminum parts quickly and easily. "With so many engineers and designers working from home, we've seen an uptick in the demand for our machines," says CEO Bre Pettis. "In response to the pandemic, we moved our software team to work remotely, which gives us more space for our manufacturing team to spread out."

(*FROM TOP*) PHOTOS COURTESY BALL CHAIN MANUFACTURING; PTI INSPECTION SYSTEMS; BANTAM TOOLS

complexity — and telehealth — will continue



Since Westchester emerged as an early epicenter of the coronavirus, the healthcare industry has been on the move. Now, as officials work through the rollout of vaccines, many are braced for a very busy year.

"The COVID-19 pandemic reminded us all of the importance of having quality healthcare close to home," says Susan Fox, president and CEO of White Plains Hospital. "Our community has relied on us more than ever to keep them safe, and in 2021, our most pressing challenge will be the distribution of the approved COVID-19 vaccine."

The complexities of treating COVID-19 patients are putting financial pressures on hospitals, as well, notes Josh Ratner, senior vice president for network strategy for the Westchester Medical Center Health Network. "High-acuity cases [those whose severity or complexity require more intensive care and monitoring] are complex to deal with, which often leads to higher expenses," he says.

> "The COVID-19 pandemic reminded us all of the importance of having quality healthcare close to home."
>
> —**SUSAN FOX,** PRESIDENT AND CEO, **WHITE PLAINS HOSPITAL**

Many hospitals pivoted their treatment models in the pandemic and will continue to do so. NewYork-Presbyterian, for instance, embraced telehealth, investing heavily in the necessary technology, as did other healthcare organizations. "More and more of our patients are having telehealth visits with their doctors," notes Michael Fosina, president of NewYork-Presbyterian Lawrence Hospital, one of the first hospitals to treat a COVID-19 patient. "You don't have crowded waiting rooms. We are doing much more paperwork online."

The hospital, which has rolled out more physicians' offices in Westchester in recent years, plans to continue that trend. "What the pandemic has done is, we are now seeing patients in Westchester who used to work in New York City and get their healthcare in New York City. They are now working from home. They've switched their care to local providers," Fosina explains.

Some healthcare organizations have planned expansions for 2021. White Plains Hospital plans to open its Center for Advanced Medicine & Surgery in June and will begin offering open-heart surgery. "Working closely with our partners at Montefiore, we will provide a comprehensive cardiac surgery program close to home for our patients in the second half of 2021," Fox says.

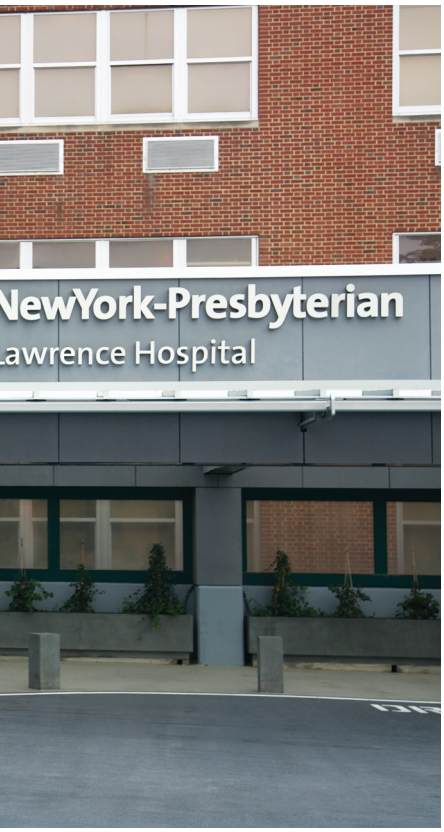




Westchester Medical Center opened its Ambulatory Care Pavilion in 2019 and recently opened its Post-COVID-19 Recovery Program, aimed at helping "long-haulers" with lingering problems from COVID-19 infections. "As we look into 2021 and see COVID cases continue to rise, we believe we're adequately prepared for it," Ratner says.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WHITE PLAINS HOSPITAL (*HEADSHOT AND BOTTOM RIGHT*); WMC (*TOP*); NEWYORK-PRESBYTERIAN LAWRENCE HOSPITAL (*BOTTOM LEFT*)





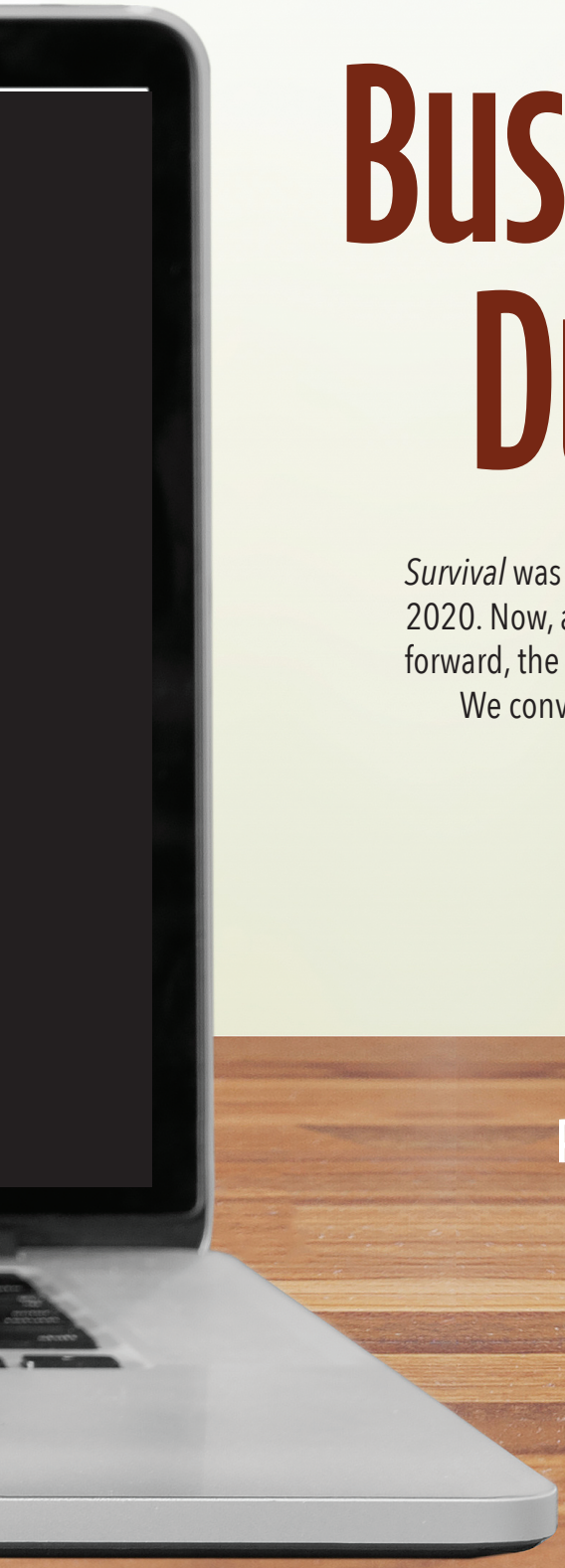


▲ Area hospitals are again expecting to be inundated with COVID-19 patients in 2021.

In an interesting development on the dental front, ProHEALTH Dental opened its first WestDental office in White Plains about a year ago through a clinical affiliation with Westmed Medical Group. ProHEALTH Dental opened another WestDental practice in 2021, at the Ridge Hill shopping complex, in Yonkers. "We are actively looking at a third location, where we will operate under our affiliation with Westmed," says CEO Norton L. Travis. Meanwhile, ProHealth Dental has signed a similar agreement with CareMount Medical. "Our mission is to break down the barrier between medicine and dentistry," Travis says.

Freelance writers Joe Cesarano and Elaine Pofeldt are frequent contributors to 914INC.


MARKETING
LAW
IT
INSURANCE
BANKING



VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLE:

Business Success During COVID

Survival was the keyword for local businesses as the pandemic raged in 2020. Now, as companies start to feel a little more confident in moving forward, the focus is shifting toward thriving despite the ongoing crisis. We convened a panel of experts to tell us just how that's done.

EDITED BY AMY R. PARTRIDGE

PANELISTS:

MODERATOR:
WILEY HARRISON
Owner
Business of Your Business

STACEY COHEN
President & CEO
Co-Communications

SUSAN CORCORAN
Principal
Jackson Lewis P.C.

JAMES KUDLA
President
Tarrytech Computer Consultants

JOANNE MURRAY
Owner
Allan Block Insurance Agency

JOHN TOLOMER
President
The Westchester Bank

To listen to the full broadcast of this roundtable discussion, which took place on Dec 4, 2020, log on to www.westchestermagazine.com/914INCroundtable



"People don't realize... how easy it is [for bad actors] to gain access to your systems and information."

JAMES KUDLA
President
Tarrytech Computer Consultants

WILEY HARRISON: Like myself, I'm sure there are many Westchester business owners who have questions about how to operate our companies successfully going forward. To that end, we've brought together local experts in five fields — IT, marketing, banking, insurance, and law — to help us out. We will begin with John Tolomer, president of The Westchester Bank. John, what has the bank done to help support small businesses during this crisis?

JOHN TOLOMER: I think one of the things COVID did for us is really give us a banking [experience] made personal. Although we couldn't do banking in-person because of the pandemic, it didn't deter us. Unlike a big bank, which would be calling to ask, "Are you going to make a payment?" we were [reaching out to customers and] asking, "How can we help you get through this?" So it was really a manifestation of our slogan, "Banking made personal." Our customers really responded to it. As the pandemic got worse, we were able to tell our customers about how to do their banking remotely without having to come in, and that created a great relief, so, whether it was scanning deposits or using a mobile app or going to the ATM, we had remedies for them to continue to have their banking made personal. That's really what sets a community bank apart from a larger bank, which just isn't built to do those things. So, to this day, we contact our customers to see how we can help them both on the depository side and the lending side.

WH: What about the Paycheck Protection Program loans? What was the impact there?

JT: PPP came along in early April, and that was really a challenge because we had so many customers who wanted to avail themselves of the program. We were fortunate: We did upwards of $85 million in PPP loans and saved about 7,000 to 7,500 jobs. We were able to help both for-profits and nonprofits, and that continues to be our focus, making the first move in contacting our customers to see how we can help them. [This approach is] how our assets went from $23 million to $1.2 billion in the 12-year span [since the bank was founded], so we know what works. We try to be an important part of the fabric of this community.

WH: James, how can small businesses be more cyber-resilient in the COVID-19 world, especially remembering that funds are tight right now for everyone?

JAMES KUDLA: Cybersecurity is a big, big deal today. Cybercrime and cyber threats are up significantly since the beginning of the pandemic. Sometimes [your company may be] a passing target, and [cyber criminals] are just looking for systems and networks that are open — they set up millions of threats to find open "doors" that are out there. These bad actors know that millions of people have transitioned from working in the office to working from home, and [they know that companies] weren't prepared to do that overnight, so there's obviously some threats and exposure out there.

The most important thing a business can do is to have a cybersecurity plan. It doesn't have to be extensive, but it needs to start with the decision-makers and the leaders in the company addressing these cybersecurity threats around people working remotely. You need to have conversations about things like: What are acceptable measures [for remote access]? Is it going to be [through employees'] PCs? Is it going to be LogMeIn or a VPN with remote desktop? Companies also have to address what messaging programs to use and figure out how to handle sharing files: Is it okay to send sensitive information via email? Can we use personal Dropbox accounts and be able to share files? Or, are we going to require people to save all information on the company file server and access this information over a VPN? Are you going to require two-factor authentication into your computers to access your email, your files? You also need to discuss your plans for voice over IP phone systems.

What happens [is], people create workarounds to help them be efficient [in order] to get their jobs done, but [by doing that], they are actually opening up the company to cybersecurity threats. People don't realize how easily they can be compromised and how easy it is [for bad actors] to gain access to your systems and information. So, companies have to start with a policy and then start to implement controls to close some of these loopholes to shut down the cyber threats.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TARRYTECH

WH: Susan, what are some of the legal challenges small businesses are facing when it comes to the workforce these days? What are the vulnerabilities that companies need to hedge against?

SUSAN CORCORAN: What we're faced with is changing times, and a lot of small businesses don't have the benefit of strong communication. Some companies have relied upon strong relationships over the years with their employees but maybe do not have strong written policies, do not have strong communications about how people have performed in their jobs. What has happened is, because people had to work remotely, we've had changed expectations in how we've had to do things, or maybe a particular business is an essential business and people have returned to that workplace sooner than other businesses. The other thing is that smaller businesses have been hit harder than larger businesses, and making that tough decision of who may have to be laid off or furloughed [is a challenge] that I've seen.

WH: Are companies vulnerable to employees or customers getting COVID? How do we protect our businesses against that kind of risk from a legal point of view?

SC: Every workplace is different, but everyone has been required to follow the governor's plan and put safety [protocols] in place, so they can have individuals return [to the workplace].

There is a lot of information for employers on the governor's website, New York Forward [*forward.ny.gov*], but it all starts with putting a very stringent [safety] plan in place so that when employees come back to work, they feel safe. The number-one thing that employers have to remember is that they have to be a lot more flexible with individuals who may not want to return to [the workplace] for a particular reason.

WH: JoAnne, what insurance policies should businesses be considering today — things like business interruption, communicable-and-infectious-disease coverage? What do businesses need going forward?

JOANNE MURRAY: The most important thing a small business can have right now is cyber insurance. Since March, there's been an increase of 300% in [cybercrime] claims, which are coming in with more people working remotely. As James said earlier, [many companies] may not have the security. Hackers are having a great time hacking into the small businesses, and it's easy to do because they're more vulnerable. So cyber insurance is really the one thing small businesses are lacking.

A lot of companies never purchased [cyber insurance] because they felt they were too small to be hit, or they couldn't afford it, or they have an IT team [handling threats], or they had [backups] that you can use af-

"A common theme we're all talking about is creating a preventive strategy."

SUSAN CORCORAN
Principal
Jackson Lewis P.C.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUSAN CORCORAN

"The new competitive advantage is about innovation and change."

STACEY COHEN
President & CEO
Co-Communications





"If you don't have to spend money, try not to, [in order to] weather the storm."

JOHN TOLOMER
President
The Westchester Bank

ter you're hacked. But you need to have the cyber-liability coverage in place to protect yourself when [a cybercrime] happens. Unfortunately, it's more likely *when* a cybercrime will happen and not *if* it will happen, because it is definitely becoming a huge issue for small businesses.

So, what will the cyber liability [coerage] do for you? Cyber liability will help when you are legally obligated to notify your customers that your system was breached. Cyber liability products can also provide credit monitoring and repair, [help with] investigating how the bad actors infiltrated your system, and [help provide for] loss of business revenue. The last thing you want to do is pay the ransomware [malicious software that infects your computer] yourself, because now you've just given the bad actor access to your personal information, so you need to have insurance to protect you. Cyber liability covers first and third party cyber attacks. The insured, or policyholder, is the first party; third party is your clients who are impacted by the data breach. This is just something we can't stress enough to our customers, the importance of adding this to your portfolio.

WH: Can you talk about the cost? Is this expensive? A lot of small businesses, like mine, are dealing with reduced revenue these days.

JM: For small businesses, it is not expensive. I urge everyone to talk to their insurance agent about the cost. You can buy what you need; it's not a cookie-cutter agreement that says, "You have to have all of these coverages." If you don't need certain coverages, you don't have to buy them. You can customize it to what you need and make it affordable. And when you get that customization from your agent, you can look at it and just pick out the most vulnerable situations for your business.

WH: This question is for Stacey: Knowing that in-person human interaction is not really possible these days, what can companies do to meet new prospects? We still need to market and sell our services; we always need new clients to sustain our businesses. Help us out.

STACEY COHEN: We are in an environment now where if we keep doing the same thing, we're going to get stuck in reverse. In marketing, we talk about competitive advantage — truly the new competitive advantage now is about innovation and change. And when we look at the pandemic, it has created dizzying shifts in consumer behavior. Both small and large businesses really need to understand the changing needs of their clients and their customers and then adapt their communication strategies accordingly.

Another thing we all need to pay close attention to is that for the last decade, it's been all about the Millennials. Now, there is a Gen-Z takeover: Gen Z is the cohort [born] between 1995 and 2010, and this makes up about 20% of the U.S. population, so we're going to have to pay attention to these folks. They are the true digital natives, and they are the [most] racially and ethnically diverse cohort, so we have to really know how to market to them. Also, businesses need to reconsider their product or service offerings to better serve their target audiences, because the bottom line is about staying relevant.

The other thing is, we're all craving this

TOP PHOTO COURTESY OF STACY COHEN; BOTTOM PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WESTCHESTER BANK

human-to-human connection, this networking, and, as businesses, [we need to figure out] how we can deliver more personalized experiences. An example is this Westchester-based law firm. I've been working with them for about 10 years; one of their main focuses was speaking engagements. Of course, [their planned speaking engagements] and marketing plans [for 2020] went out the window, so we quickly changed our strategy to virtual-education programs — a Facebook weekly livestream — and the results have been phenomenal. The great thing about these webinars is that they are all recorded, and to date, we have about 15,000 views.

Last but not least, we will see an increased focus on strategic partnerships and collaborations in 2021 rather than transactional relationships. All of us get that term I call "co-op-etition," and it's really a collaboration among business competitors, so they're basically combining expertise, resources, et cetera, to really amplify their brands' reach.

WH: One of the biggest reasons small businesses these days are closing is because of the shortage of cash coming into their businesses. What should small businesses do right now to best position themselves for success?

JT: As a general statement to the market, I would say: If you don't have to spend money, try not to, [in order to] weather the storm. Secondly, [businesses seeking loans] have to be able to articulate what their plans are to generate some revenue, so they will be able to pay back any loans. So it's really about examining your business [and figuring out] how [you will] reinvent your business now. Look at what restaurant[s] have done: In-house dining was prohibited, so they continued to do [takeout], and that became so important. Today, driving revenue is important, and while [new ideas] may be low margin, they can still be profitable.

And when you go to the bank [for a loan], explain the plan in detail. Banks make money when they give loans, not when they turn down loans, so there is a desire for banks to make loans and know they will be repaid. The businesses that say, "Hey, we're in a pandemic. I'm strapped; I need help; give me some money," that's not going to work. But, if [they can explain]: "I've cut these expenses; I have another business line; here's what I'm trying to do," I think they have a very good chance. Those are the businesses that get loans.

SUSAN CORCORAN: I think a common theme that we're all talking about is developing a preventive strategy. Whether it's [figuring out] your plan in the cyber-risk area or making sure you have the right insurance or dealing with remote workers and making sure that we have the right plan in place [for remote work] and then later bringing those remote workers back into the workplace. It's part of making sure that you're continuing to think preventive in nature and proactive in nature.

JM: I'm really encouraged by the fact that businesses are trying to work together as a team. It's no longer a "me" thing: You have to think outside the box; you have to look at your neighbors; and you have to come up with a team plan. Whether it's the restaurants putting flyers in with their takeout that encourage people to use the retail in town or the retailers encouraging people to use the restaurants, there are so many ways we can all work together and network together. That's an important message because if you try to operate [as though] it's just your business, you're not going to make it right now. We need each other, and I think that's the one thing we're all learning from this: to work better together.

"Cyber insurance is really the one thing small businesses are lacking."

JOANNE MURRAY
Owner
Allan Block Insurance Agency



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOANNE MURRAY

A New Approach to CONTINUING ED

In the COVID-19 era, continuing education is playing a larger role than ever for area companies that are trying to adapt quickly and come up with new ways of doing business.

By Bill Cary





ILLUSTRATION @ ADOBE STOCK

A New Approach to CONTINUING ED



In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, interest in continuing-education programs in Westchester has risen significantly as local colleges and universities grapple with the new workforce needs of the county's institutions and employers. Many unemployed and underemployed workers are eager to get the new skills, certifications, and degrees that will help get them back into the local economy.

"Continuing education will evolve to meet the needs of people who will need to change careers," says Dr. Marsha Gordon, president and CEO of the Business Council of Westchester. "Many of these employees, in areas like hospitality, will have to find new careers — there is no doubt about it. People will have to find new areas of opportunity." Local colleges and universities are poised to "develop programs so that people can learn new skills fairly quickly," and they are doing just that, she adds.

When the pandemic slammed into the county early last year, the Workforce Development Committee of the Westchester County Association (WCA) worked closely with local hospitals, colleges, and universities to identify critical positions that needed to be filled and get more front-line healthcare workers, as well as students and recent graduates, into those jobs.

Now, Jason Chapin, director of workforce development at the White Plains-based WCA, is working with the committee to prepare and train people for jobs as the economy looks to open up again. People who are hunting for jobs "should be getting the certificates and degrees that employers require now," he says. "We want people to be ready now, not when the first wave of hiring occurs."

Westchester boasts 15 colleges and universities, with a total of about 70,000 students, Chapin says, adding, "That's a huge talent pool." With about 29,000 students, Valhalla-based Westchester Community College (WCC) is what he calls the "biggest player in town."

"One-third to 40 percent" of these college students in the county are first-generation immigrants, he says, noting, "that's a huge part of our talent pool."

But a lot of people who are seeking training for new jobs "are struggling with support issues, such as childcare, housing, and transportation," Chapin adds, so he and the committee are working with such groups as Nonprofit Westchester, the Child Care Council of Westchester, United Way, and the Housing Action Council to help meet those needs.

Healthcare is the largest sector in our region, but it's not just nursing and other patient-care jobs that people should be thinking about. Non-medical jobs within the healthcare sector will also be in demand, including those in information technology, food service, security, analytics, sustainability, and human resources, adds Chapin.

For healthcare companies involved in patient care, "they're just trying to do the basics that are really important — they are so overwhelmed," says Kerry Flynn Barrett, a human resources consultant and former vice president of human resources at Northern Westchester Hospital, in Mount Kisco. "It's all about infection control, infection control, infection control."



"Continuing education will evolve to meet the needs of people who will need to change careers. Many of these employees, in areas like hospitality, will have to find new careers – there is no doubt about it."

— Dr. Marsha Gordon
President & CEO,
Business Council of Westchester



PHOTO COURTESY OF BCW



◀ At Manhattanville College (*left and below*), student demand is high for professional certifications in areas like project management and cybersecurity. Overall graduate program enrollment has also grown during the pandemic.



"[Employees who have been laid off or who did not finish college] are not necessarily going back for a four-year degree. They may be thinking: *What can I do in three months, in six months?* Updating their technical skills, short- and long-term, seems to be a high priority for students now."

— Dr. Laura Persky, Associate Dean, School of Professional Studies, Manhattanville College



PHOTOS BY SIRIN SAMMAN

A lot of that training and educational work is done internally, Barrett says. "[Healthcare institutions] have fully approved policies and procedures that are very specific," she explains.

Hospitals are also moving employees around internally, to keep them on payroll and on the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis, she says, citing the example of an administrative assistant for a newly idle elective-surgery physician who may now be working at a nursing station to help handle the barrage of phone calls from anxious families of COVID-19 patients.

Barrett also has clients who are in areas related to healthcare, such as insurance. These companies want to know "how they can provide continuing education to help employees do their best work while working remotely. That type of training and education is really important to them," she explains. This may involve training on how to maintain appropriate work habits while working remotely, including Zoom etiquette, she says. (No, it's not okay to take a Zoom call in bed in your boxer shorts.)

"We're seeing a need for professional certifications within a degree," says Dr. Laura Persky, associate dean of Manhattanville College, in Harrison, and head of its School of Professional Studies. For example, students may want to get certified as being fluent in the project-management framework known as Agile, or they may want to earn certification in a cybersecurity program.

"[Employees who have been laid off or who did not finish college] are not necessarily going back for a four-year degree," she says. "They may be thinking: *What can I do in three months, in six months?* Updating their technical skills, short- and long-term, seems to be a high priority for students now."



As for what specific skills are in currently demand, Persky says companies are looking for workers who have "the ability to be tech-savvy, to adapt," as well as proficiency in "change-management and innovation."

Although short-term education may be the priority, Manhattanville's overall graduate program enrollment has also grown. "We were all pleasantly surprised that graduate enrollment was up in the fall," Persky says. "People have been willing to continue or even start new with online classes." Classes are mostly synchronous, which means live, online in real time, she says. "People are interacting with each other; it's as close to an actual classroom as possible."

At Mercy College in Dobbs Ferry, "we saw applications slow to a crawl for a couple of weeks," when the pandemic first hit full-on, in March, says Adam Castro, vice president of admissions. It began to bounce back in April, "and now we have a really successful freshman class, and our new student graduate program enrollment is significantly larger."

In the fall of 2018, Mercy had 906 freshmen and 989





"There is an increased demand for certifications in industry-specific skills, such as construction management, graphic and web design, and paralegal studies."

— Susan Donahue, Executive Director, Talent Development and Continuing Education, Pace University

◀ Local firms have reached out to Pace Unviersity to collaborate on professional-development curriculums for employees.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PACE UNIVERSITY



▲ Mercy College saw a spike in enrollment for its incoming freshman class, and graduate student numbers are also up.

in the fall of 2019, followed by a spike to 1,021 for fall 2020. On the graduate level, the numbers are 622 for 2018, 710 for 2019, and 786 for last year.

"We were pleasantly surprised," Castro says. "We were worried that the COVID-19-influenced application slowdown would persist even longer and lead to lower enrollment."

Similarly, New Rochelle's Iona College saw a 15% spike in year-over-year new student enrollment in the fall of 2020, says Diana Costello, director of communications. Iona has also launched a new Bachelor of Science degree program in nursing to help meet the growing demand for registered nurses.

At Mercy, adult learners have been most affected by COVID-19, "perhaps because of work and family challenges related to the pandemic," Castro notes, adding that it's also interesting to see how the pandemic, as well as social justice issues, like the Black Lives Matter movement, has affected the classes students are choosing. "On the grad side," he says, "we doubled enrollment in mental health counseling. That says a lot about the pandemic and what people are seeing and experiencing in quarantine."

Similarly, the number of Mercy graduate students seeking psychology coursework has tripled, he says. There has also been a notable new interest in the fields of school counseling, marriage-and-family counseling, and human resource management. Among undergrads, "interest in criminal justice, psychology, and business entrepreneurship really grew," says Castro.

Another field of study having a potential resurgence is real estate. Andrea Marais, associate dean of strategic marketing and enrollment at Fordham's School of Professional and Continuing Studies, notes, "Our applications for our graduate programs in real estate have significantly increased. We have seen a 46% increase in applications for the spring semester, which is not surprising, as this often happens in a down market. People decide to use their time to expand their skillsets and increase their marketability."

Marais also notes an increase in applications for the school's post-baccalaureate pre-med and pre-health programs. "The big unknown is whether their applications will turn into actual students," she says. So many factors are at play — the economy, the physical health of the country, the unemployment rate. But education is always a



"On the grad side, we doubled enrollment in mental health counseling. That says a lot about the pandemic and what people are seeing and experiencing in quarantine."

—Adam Castro
Vice President of Admissions, Mercy College

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MERCY COLLEGE

good investment, and we think that 2021 will be a good year for graduate and adult education."

Westchester Community College, which is part of the State University of New York system, "is always monitoring and analyzing labor-market data to ensure alignment with workforce needs," says Teresita Wisell, vice president for workforce development. Like community colleges nationwide, WCC has seen a dip in enrollment in the wake of COVID-19. "But we're seeing more adult students," who are defined as ages 25 to 64, Wisell says. In fact, the proportion of adult students shot up 28% in the fall of 2020 compared with the previous fall.

"We have pivoted to fully remote, short-term, workforce-training programming, which reaches a broader audience of learners," she says.

Students are particularly interested in degree programs that can lead to in-demand jobs, Wisell adds. After she lost her job at Lord & Taylor in Eastchester in March, for example, Iliana Camilo was able to secure a state Department of Labor scholarship that allowed her to enroll in the Clinical Medical Assistant program at WCC. "I got a full scholarship," says Camilo, 33, who lives in Yonkers. "I will graduate in May and then be eligible to take the state exam."

Other in-demand programs include cybersecurity, health-information technology, X-ray technology, and respiratory care. There is also growing interest in short-term certification programs in healthcare and IT, including "Python, Data Science, CompTIA, and data visualization, as well as programs in short-term skills training in Microsoft Office," explains Wisell.



"We have pivoted to fully remote, short-term, workforce-training programming, which reaches a broader audience of learners."

—Teresita Wisell, Vice President for Workforce Development, Westchester Community College



COURTESY OF WCC

WCC is also seeing a rise in interest in entrepreneurship, Wisell notes. Attendance at the college's annual Grow Your Business Conference for entrepreneurs, in November, was up more than 50%, and the event was expanded from one day to three. Additionally, the college is reaching out to form partnerships with local businesses. For example, WCC has a new certification program in medical coding and billing that it runs in partnership with Westchester Medical Center.

At Pace University's Talent Development and Continuing Education department, "there is an increased demand for certifications in industry-specific skills, such as construction management, graphic and web design, and paralegal studies," says Susan Donahue, executive director, talent development and continuing education. In addition, corporate partners have reached out to Pace for "dedicated professional development curriculums on building fundamental business skills for their employees, such as negotiation skills, financial analysis, and contract management."

"A lot of local government agencies and corporations and hospitals are good about sending employees for continuing education," says the BCW's Gordon. "Here, at the BCW, for online conferences and other professional development, we are very open to employees doing that from home."

In many fields, ongoing continuing education is a given. Twice a year, Grant Schneider, a management consultant and



▲ Accounting firm Marks Paneth transformed its in-person continuing-ed program (*above*) into a virtual one during the pandemic.

president of Armonk-based Performance Development Strategies, LLC, teaches a human resources course at Fordham University in the Bronx that helps HR professionals prepare to take an exam for certification from the Society for Human Resources Management. It is nearly always paid for by their companies, he says.

In the field of accounting, "you're required to take a certain amount of continuing ed," says Christopher Cacace, partner-in-charge of accounting firm Marks Paneth LLP's Westchester office, in Purchase. "Most of that is done in-house, and all of it is now done remotely. We have a training room at our office in the city, and we now have the ability to broadcast it to all of our offices."

"For us as a tech-and-IT service provider, it's always important to keep our tech staff continuously educated," adds Robert Cioffi, COO and cofounder of Yonkers-based Progressive Computing, which has about 30 employees who provide outsourced information-technology services for small and midsize organizations. "Even pre-COVID, we believed in continuous education for all."

Once the pandemic hit, Cioffi adds, "We said that we may have more time on our hands, so let's strengthen our muscles so that when business does return, we'll be ready for it."

That mindset seems to be the prevailing one when it comes to continuing education in Westchester today.

Freelance writer Bill Cary is a frequent contributor to 914INC. *and* Westchester Magazine.



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—Christopher Cacace
Partner-in-Charge,
Westchester Office,
Marks Paneth LLP

COURTESY OF MARKS PANETH, LLP

Helping MAKERS Make It

Makers Central, an "incubator beast" in Tarrytown, is helping small artisan businesses overcome barriers to growth.

By Joel Eliach

PHOTOS: (*TOP LEFT AND MIDDLE*) BY CLARENCE MORLEY III; (*TOP RIGHT*) BY MATTHEW MANCUSO (*BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT*) BY CLARENCE MORLEY III; COURTESY OF ARBOR & FLORA; BY STETSON HUDGEN









Ceramicist Connor McGinn started Makers Central in 2018 with his business partner, Stetson Hundgen, to fill a need they saw in the market for a shared workspace where artisans and craftspeople could set up shop in order to grow their businesses.

Set in a commodious 7,500 sq. ft. space on Central Avenue in Tarrytown, makers pay a membership fee for a six-month commitment (McGinn and Hundgen don't want to lock new members into long leases) in a flexible space intended to fit the needs of their respective operations, along with the use of common areas. Says McGinn: "If the businesses reach the point where they outgrow the space, we encourage and kind of look forward to that."

McGinn reports that inquiries for space in the cooperative have been robust of late. Those who do join specialize in crafts with application to the food-and-hospitality industry. They include everyone from makers of dishes and stationery to woodwork and outdoor dining experiences. What follows is an eye-friendly gallery typifying the creative output emanating from this interesting space.





Connor McGinn Studios

Having taken ceramics classes in college, McGinn began making plates for Armonk's Restaurant North as he continued working as a cook. In 2018, he went full-time into the ceramics business, creating dishes and flatware sets for restaurants and (increasingly so in the wake of the pandemic) households. McGinn originally worked out of small studios before starting Makers Central. In addition to the benefits of shared ideas and customers, McGinn says, "Being able to come in here on a day when you're exhausted and defeated and don't want to do anything — you kind of want to give up — you walk in here, and there's four, five, six other people who are just cranking away on work. It's inspiring for sure."



Arbor & Flora

Philadelphia natives Hannah Maakestad and Matthew Lundstrom are using their floristry and horticulture backgrounds (like many of the makers in the space, they have both worked at Westchester's world-class restaurant Blue Hill at Stone Barns) to address the "fixation" on only using certain kinds of flowers and "show

PHOTOS: (*TOP*) BY STETSON HUNDGEN; (LEFT) BY CLARENCE MORLEY III; (BOTTOM RIGHT) COURTESY OF ARBOR & FLORA







that all of this stuff in your backyard that you might not see as beautiful truly is beautiful," Lundstrom says. After decorating for an event at Makers Central, the duo set up shop in the space to crank out their seasonal, floral-based creations. Lundstrom says the founders of the space "know what it's like to be a starting-slash-starving artist" and so provide flexibility to give new businesses the "best start possible."

PHOTOS: (*LEFT*) COURTESY OF ARBOR & FLORA; (RIGHT TOP AND BOTTOM) BY MATTHEW MANCUSO

Wood Fire Food

After 16 years in the restaurant industry, Chef Daniel Sabia needed a change, so he started Wood Fire Food in 2018, aiming to bring together open-fire cooking, interior design, and woodworking (which he does in Makers Central) to create memorable events and products. He describes starting the business as a "classic fake-it-'til-you-make-it situation," bringing in just enough money to fund the next event. He says business has been booming since the pandemic, with people looking for outdoor dining experiences in their backyards. That's allowed him to invest in infrastructure for the business, which includes things like accountants and lawyers, along with a truck and trailer.







Bat Flower Press

Natalia Woodward launched her printing-and-stationery business at Makers Central in early 2019 as a way to reconnect to her Colombian roots that emphasize handicrafts and "find that balance of artistry and functionality." With a 1,000-plus-pound printing press built in 1903, Woodward cleared the "huge hurdle" of finding affordable space in the county and has been working on B2B2C growth (by working with other businesses and, ultimately, those businesses' customers directly on a retail level), partnering with graphic designers to print wedding invitations and collecting business waste, like coffee cups, wood shavings, and garlic skins to make paper. She says being able to expand her space in the "incubator beast" has been key.



C-los Carpentry

Partners Carlos Chimborazo and Elena Krougliak started their woodworking company in 2018 out of a communal workshop where people shared tools and space, a challenging situation for woodworkers. Chimborazo, who began woodworking as an apprentice in Colombia at age 12, and Krougliak, with a background in interior design, moved into Makers Central in 2019. "It really gives a backbone to our entire business," Krougliak says of the space. With a business address and a place to host clients (originally, many high-end restaurants, but the pandemic forced a focus-shift to residential furniture), "It really just changed so much in terms of how we feel about the validity of our business," notes Krougliak.











Yazel Knives

Matt Yazel began bladesmithing at the Massachusetts College of Arts under a tough septuagenarian teacher who he says "was not there to blow smoke up anyone's ass." When Yazel crafted an advanced knife style outside of the curriculum, his mentor simply responded, "you're talented." That inspired Yazel as he transitioned from restaurant work to knifemaking, originally in the college's metal shop and his own garage. His wife's career brought him to New York, and he set up in Makers Central to churn out his handmade knives for custom orders. He is now expanding to make small sets of the same design and credits Makers Central for helping "legitimize" his business and bringing exposure to his work. He says of the community: "Rising tides raise all boats."



PHOTOS ON THIS SPREAD: (*TOP LEFT*) BY STEFANIE HURTADO; (*TOP MIDDLE AND RIGHT*) BY STETSON HUNDGEN; (*BOTTOM L TO R*) COURTESY OF C-LOS CARPENTRY; (TWO MIDDLE) BY CLARENCE MORLEY III; BY MATT YAZEL





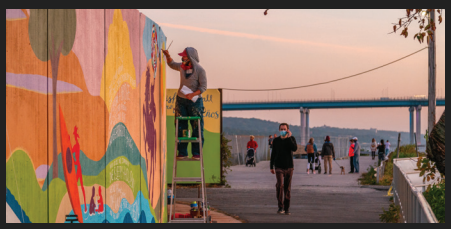
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Thompson & Bender is the unrivaled leader in delivering strategic PR, advertising, social media, event marketing, messaging, and integrated communications that help their clients succeed. They utilize the latest media platforms for digital campaigns, with lead generation, search engine optimization, ad words, content creation, and deep-dive analytics to maximize clients' ROI. The acclaimed agency's continued recognition includes the Business Hall of Fame Award, the 2017 Small Business Award, and in 2020, voted Best Advertising & PR, Best Graphic Design, and Best Social Media Marketing Agency by the readers of *914INC* magazine. For 30+ years, the full-service agency's talented team has created strategic marketing plans and award-winning work for the "who's who" of regional Fortune 500 corporations, healthcare, higher education, real estate, retail, hospitality, media, government, and not-for-profit organizations. *914INC.* magazine summed it up best: "T&B is the power player of public relations and marketing firms in Westchester."

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1192 Pleasantville Road • Briarcliff Manor • 914.762.1900 • www.thompson-bender.com

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Led by Irene Amato, its founder and CEO, A.S.A.P. Mortgage Corp. is a brokerage firm licensed in New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Florida, Rhode Island, and Pennsylvania. The company has seven offices throughout New York City and the Hudson Valley region with a new office set to open in Orange County later this month. The highly successful firm has flourished even during the most challenging times in the real estate market by focusing on offering a personalized "boutique" home buying experience instead of a mere transaction to each and every client — an approach that yields qualifiable results and distinguishes the firm. The firm remains committed to its belief that the mortgage and real estate transaction is unique to each consumer, who deserves a personalized experience with options customized for their individual situation. Visit www.AsapMortgageInc.com, to meet the team, explore the full array of options they have to offer, and understand how they are guided by the motto "Your Home, Our Heart."

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FACES OF WESTCHESTER BUSINESS 2021

THE FACE OF "COMMUNITY LENDING. HERE TO HELP YOU"

The lending team at The Westchester Bank, the leading community bank in the county, is always here for YOU! That's especially true during challenging times like those we face today. Our primary goal remains to meet the ever-changing needs of each customer in a respectful, professional, and always friendly manner.

When the pandemic hit, the first thing our lending team did was pick up the phone to call every single customer. Just two questions were posed: "How are you doing?" and "What can we do to help?" The Bank continues to deliver with both speed and flexibility by adjusting loans to best meet customers' current circumstances. At the same time, The Westchester Bank has already helped save over 7,000 jobs around Westchester through access to the PPP program. This is The Westchester Bank difference, best summed up by our guiding principle: "Banking Made Personal."

Please say "Hi" to our Community Lending Team — Orlando, Lisa, Bill, Jay, John, Ryan, and Frank. Call us at 914.368.9919 to see how we can help you moving forward!



THE WESTCHESTER BANK

Headquarters: 12 Water Street • White Plains • 914.368.9919 • www.TheWestchesterBank.com
Branches in Mamaroneck, Mount Kisco, Ossining, Rye Brook, Thornwood, White Plains, Yonkers

The Westchester Bank Lending Team, from left to right: Orlando Gonzalez, VP, Commercial Lender; Lisa Conner, VP, Commercial Lender; Bill Merz, VP, Commercial Lender; Jay Serniak, VP, Commercial Lender; John Tolomer, President & CEO; Ryan Muller, VP, Commercial Lender; and Frank Pastirchak, VP, Commercial Lender.

FACES OF WESTCHESTER BUSINESS 2021



THE FACE OF WESTCHESTER BUSINESS BANKING

To have impact, serve the community, and grow the regional economy, Orange Bank & Trust is committed to providing an unmatched client experience through old-fashioned service and cutting-edge technology delivered by the brightest bankers. Building those relationships means Orange Bank & Trust's Westchester bankers learn the details of clients' businesses and industries. Most importantly, they learn about the client — their goals, their plans, their challenges. And, they're always available with creative solutions individually targeted for Westchester's vibrant business community. Orange Bank & Trust believes that client success through a great relationship is the best statement a bank can make.

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FACES OF WESTCHESTER BUSINESS 2021

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From left: Richard and Sal D'Errico

FACES OF WESTCHESTER BUSINESS 2021



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As it starts its 100th year in business, Robison has earned the reputation of being Westchester and Putnam counties' premier full-service home comfort company. Robison, a family-run company, has stayed committed to evolving in order to meet the changing needs of their customers and times by embracing the latest technology and becoming a "one-stop shop" for all energy needs. As an A+ rated BBB, Energy Services Company (ESCO), Robison supplies natural gas and 100% green electricity at budget-friendly rates. It also delivers competitively priced home heating oil and clean-burning biofuel. Robison services and installs all types of heating and air conditioning systems, provides trustworthy plumbing services 24/7, and works to solve indoor air quality issues, like mold, humidity, duct and carpet cleaning, and more. Now more than ever, *You've Got A Friend In Robison!*

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From left: David Singer, co-president; RobiDog, mascot; and Daniel Singer, co-president, photographed at InterCounty Supply

FACES OF WESTCHESTER BUSINESS 2021

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The Colangelo Group is a collaborative business that knows how to listen. We are founded on the commitment of offering solutions that will ensure continued financial well-being and protection. We offer insurance, financial strategies, and employer cost containment products specializing in Employee Benefit Plans. Implementing creative funding vehicles alongside employee benefits, such as employer funded HRAs, HSAs, Flexible Spending Accounts, Professional Employer Organizations, and Group Medicare to help reign in the rising cost of healthcare. Our final result is providing a strategy that enables employers to offer health insurance with the best possible benefits to their employees while reducing overall spending.

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Pictured, from left to right: Judy Merturi, AVP Branch Manager; Emily Newcamp, VP Retail Bank Manager; Frank J. Gaudio, President and CEO; Pamela Cotroneo, Assistant Branch Manager; Evan Corsello, EVP Chief Lending Officer; and Kevin O'Connell, VP Commercial Lending

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D.P. Wolff designs, installs, and maintains commercial HVAC, plumbing, and mechanical systems in Westchester, Rockland, New York City, Connecticut, and throughout the Hudson Valley. Serving this area for more than 25 years, they provide comprehensive mechanical contracting design and service to an extensive array of corporate and non-profit organizations, including hospitals, laboratories, data centers, educational facilities, sporting/recreational clubs, religious institutions, industrial companies, manufacturing plants, and more.

As in any service industry, customer trust and confidence are built by continuously providing outstanding and reliable service. Since inception, what keeps D.P. Wolff's clients coming back is their commitment to safety, decades of industry experience, and an acknowledged reputation for integrity, reliability, and professionalism. Their investment in continuous field training ensures their customers receive the best service possible based on current industry knowledge of equipment, testing, and techniques. Their team of skilled technicians and service professionals work together to provide the expert support you need from conception through completion of any sized project. D.P. Wolff offers a single source solution for your commercial HVAC, plumbing, and mechanical construction needs.

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From left: Scott Geider, Director of Technical Services; Kelly Kraus, Director of Service Operations; and Gary Fioretti, Project Executive

FACES OF WESTCHESTER BUSINESS 2021



THE FACE OF TECHNOLOGY, CYBER SECURITY, & COMPLIANCE

For over 25 years, Better Technology Systems (BTS) has provided technology service and innovation to organizations across all types of industries, with a focus on integrating technology into their business. As the technology landscape changes, BTS continues to evolve and offers complete cyber security and compliance solutions.

In today's turbulent environment, organizations need a forward-thinking partner that will provide a full range of technology solutions. Whether your staff is working from the office or home, Better Technology Systems will deliver the technology solutions needed to ensure your organization's continued focus on meeting its objectives.

BETTER TECHNOLOGY SYSTEMS

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Pictured, from left to right: Diane, Usha, Adam, Georgio, John, Geoff, Alfredo, Joe, Harry, and Tobyn

FACES OF WESTCHESTER BUSINESS 2021

THE FACE OF AFFORDABLE CARE

Led by Gina Cappelli, Founder/President and Maria Trusa, CEO, Formé believes that everyone is entitled to affordable, dignified, and high-quality healthcare regardless of their culture and economic background. It is their mission to improve the health and well-being of the community by offering high-quality and compassionate healthcare in its new state-of-the-art medical facility. Insured or not, Formé has you covered through their Medical Membership Program.

The team at Formé was instrumental in bringing more than 25,000 COVID-19 tests to their community and continues to bring quicker results for businesses, travelers, individuals, and their families.

At Formé: Our Mission, Your Health!

FORMÉ MEDICAL CENTER AND URGENT CARE

7-11 S Broadway • White Plains, NY • 914.723.4900 • www.formemedicalcenter.com

From left: Gina Cappelli, Founder/President, and Maria Trusa, CEO



FACES OF WESTCHESTER BUSINESS 2021



Pictured: The team at Lawley

THE FACE OF INSURANCE & EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

The team at Lawley excels at leveraging their carrier relationships to help businesses and individuals in Westchester County and beyond protect what matters most.

Employee benefits, business and personal insurance, and risk management consulting have been Lawley's focus for 65+ years. Clients receive the personalized service of a small agency and critical business resources of a large firm.

We believe in partnering with clients, listening to their unique needs, and developing customized employee benefits and protection packages. Lawley has local offices in Mahopac, Purchase, and Plainview, NY, and Darien, CT, with headquarters in Buffalo, NY.

LAWLEY

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21 Clark Place, Suite 1A • Mahopac, NY • 845.621.4500
255 Executive Drive, Suite 104 • Plainview, NY • 516.597.3900
22 Thorndal Circle,Third Floor • Darien, CT • 203.656.0332

lawleywestchester@lawleyinsurance.com
www.lawleyinsurance.com



2021 BMW M440i xDRIVE
BMW, White Plains, Mamaroneck; MSRP: $58,500
Those driving afficionados who love to make a statement would do well to consider this eye-catching 4-series coupe. Sporting sleek yet muscular lines, you'll get plenty of attention around town with that polarizing, intumescent vertical kidney grille (you'll love it or hate it; we kinda dig its I-don't-give-a-fig-what-you-think arrogance), which trumpets intelligent all-wheel drive and a 3.0-liter, TwinPower Turbo inline-6 whose 382 horses require just 4.0 seconds to rocket from zero to 60.

Driving Force

Sweet rides for hitting the road, whether you're on the daily commute, a road trip, a Sunday leisure cruise — or just admiring it in your driveway.

Plus:
Impress on Zoom with trendy statement tops
PAGE 80

PHOTO COURTESY OF BMW NORTH AMERICA

Cars

Sweet Chariots!

A new generation of head-turning 2021 automobiles has arrived, boasting both cutting-edge features and impressive design. **By Paul Adler**



2021 Mercedes S-Class Cabriolet

Pepe Auto Group, White Plains
MSRP: $140,000

This year marks your last chance to let the wind run through your hair on I-287 in this coveted convertible, as M-B has announced it will no longer offer an S-class cabriolet or coupe as of 2022. Nevertheless, this stunning specimen of German engineering is accentuated with 64-color LED ambient lighting and dual 17.3" widescreen displays, not to mention the 463 twin-turbocharged horses under the hood to get you where you're going with time to spare.

2021 Audi e-tron Sportback Premium Plus Quattro

Pepe Auto Group, White Plains
MSRP: $80,495

Audi steps firmly into the next generation of all-electric SUVs with this iteration, boasting a 355-HP, two-motor, all-wheel-drive powerplant that can squeeze out 402 ponies for short bursts (in Sport mode). Zero-to-60 times hover around 5.5 seconds, with EPA estimates of 78 MPGe combined city/highway, all wrapped in a sleek exterior with whisper-quiet cabin.





2021 Genesis G80 V6 AWD

BMW, White Plains, Mamaroneck
MSRP: $62,250

Say hello to a major new contender in the ranks of futuristic luxury sedans with this stunner from Hyundai's Genesis division which, along with its vivid grill and sleek headlights, sports a twin-turbocharged, 3.5-liter, gas-powered V-6 engine and an automatic 8-speed transmission.

Polestar 2

Polestar Manhattan, New York City
MSRP: $59,900

Volvo's response to the Tesla, this futuristic, all-electric, low-slung SUV/sedan mélange features a rear hatch and 78kWh battery capable of delivering an EPA-estimated 233 miles (with combined MPGe of 92) on a single charge and a 300kW Long Range Dual Motor able to reach 60 mph from zero in an uber-quick 4.1 seconds.



PHOTOS TOP TO BOTTOM COURTESY OF MERCEDES; COURESTY OF AUDI; COURTESY OF GENESIS; COURTESY OF POLESTAR

Happy Hour

Sake to Me

Since a trip to Japan might not be on your short-term itinerary, why not get a taste of the Land of the Rising Sun with these truly exceptional bottles of sake available in the county.



Number 14 — Junmai Ginzo

Zachy's Wine & Liquor, Scarsdale
www.zachys.com
$31.99

Best served chilled, this aromatic liquor is acclaimed area company Brooklyn Kura's classic sake. It boasts an extremely crisp and light taste courtesy of Calrose and Yamada Nishiki rice.

Hakutsuru Junmai Ginjo Superior Sake

Executive Wine & Spirits, Yonkers
www.ewineandspirits.com
$18.99

This popular sake from the Hyogo region of Japan is brewed with local spring water in a traditional method, resulting in flowery undertones and a well-balanced smoothness.

Bunraku Nihonjin No Wasuremono

Westchester Wine Warehouse, White Plains
www.westchesterwine.com
$12.99

Native yeasts and a host of natural microorganisms imbue this dry, crystal-clear sake with notes of apple, pear, melon, and flowers.

Hakutsuru Sayuri Junmai Nigori

Executive Wine & Spirits, Yonkers
www.ewineandspirits.com
$9.99

Brewed with spring water from Japan's Mount Rokko, this bright and bold sake, also known as "Little Lilly," has a slightly sweet finish.

HR Advice

A Back-to-the-Office Road Map



A local human resources and business expert offers tips on how employees can navigate a return to the workplace.

Despite a pandemic continuing to rage in the background, some companies are bringing employees back into the office as the economy reawakens and vaccine distribution ramps up. We asked Ivette Molina, director of operations at the Business Council of Westchester, for some advice on using your company's human resources department to navigate a potential return to the worksite.

Should you approach your human resources representative if you feel uncomfortable about returning to work? As an employee, you have the right to reach out to [human resources] and let them know you have concerns about returning to work. Whether you feel most comfortable reaching out through email, a phone call, or virtually, through Zoom, communication with your HR rep is very important.

What options or rights do you have as an employee to ensure your company is providing a COVID-safe environment? The employer is required to make sure that the workplace is safe so that you are able to return without contracting the virus. Employers are also required to provide training to workers on health and safety guidelines, as well as on anti-retaliation protections available to them. Make sure your employer informs you in detail of all the steps being taken to ensure your health is their priority. Keep in consistent communication with HR.

Can a company mandate that you take a vaccine? Employers can mandate employees to take the vaccine. However, there are a few exceptions, such as a vaccine exemption on medical grounds or religious beliefs and/or asking for alternative accommodations, such as PPE or [the ability to continue] working from home.

How do you feel HR in general can serve as a resource for legitimately nervous individuals returning to the workplace? To help counter [resistance to returning to the office], HR should offer free mental health and wellness services. Another way to support employees returning to work is by enforcing staggered shifts, which ensure fewer people are at the office at a time. Additionally, assisting employees with a flexible work schedule and child care assistance. —*PA*



SAKE PHOTO BY BROOKLYN KURA; RIGHT PHOTO BY ADOBESTOCK/USER SEVENTYFOUR; IVETTE MOLINA HEADSHOT BY JOHN VECCHIOLA

Dressed4Success

Make a Statement

No matter what the future brings, videoconferencing is likely here to stay. Stand out from the virtual crowd with these statement tops ideal for Zoom.



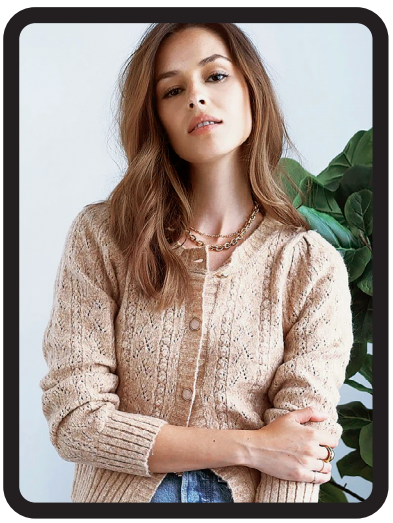
Meadow Print Silk Crepe De Chine Pussy-Bow Blouse
$910
BURBERRY
White Plains
www.us.burberry.com
This outstanding printed blouse is handpainted in Burberry's London studio and made of Italian woven silk crepe de chine with mother-of-pearl buttons.



Fair Isle Sweater
$398
TORY BURCH
White Plains
www.toryburch.com
Inspired by a hip wallpaper motif with a 1970s folk-art aesthetic, this eye-catching sweater is knit in extra-fine Merino wool and features faux-horn buttons and a relaxed boat neck.

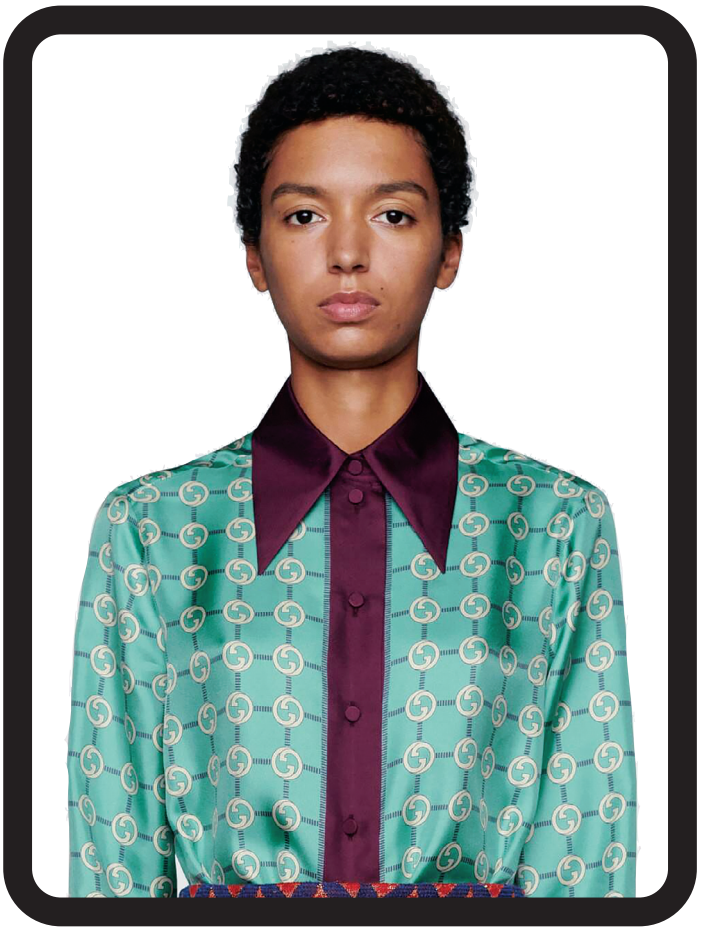


Striped Wool Cashmere Sweater
$910
BURBERRY
White Plains
www.us.burberry.com
Both clean and eye-catching, this relaxed-fit sweater is knitted in super-soft wool cashmere and boasts bold, graphic stripes.



Tia Cardi
$99
LOLA NEW YORK
White Plains, Tuckahoe
www.lolany.com
Sometimes an understated knit top is all you need to turn heads. Exhibit A: This mélange yarn cardigan with a cropped, boxy cut and braided cable detailing.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LISTED COMPANIES



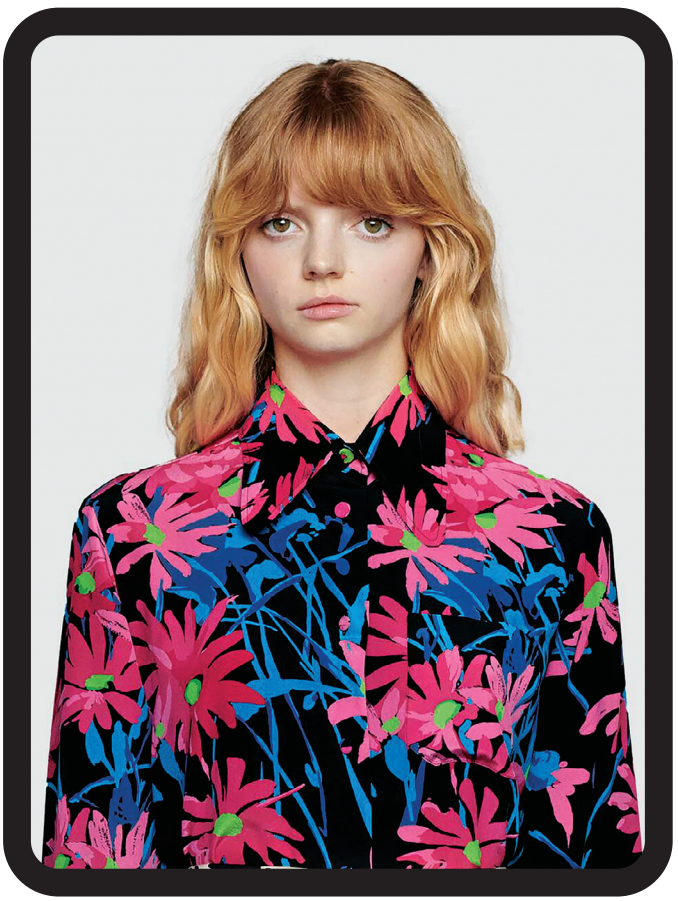
Interlocking G Print Silk Shirt *$1,500;*
GUCCI, *White Plains; www.gucci.com*
Perfect for layering, this silk shirt with an unlikely point collar and Bordeaux interlocking G print pays stylish tribute to Gucci's 1970s styles.



Heartloom Maxine Top *$79*
FADO, *Katonah; www.shopfado.com*
Ideal for a high-pressure meeting or a virtual company happy hour, this breezy, animal print top made of printed satin features a relaxed fit, front snap, and stylish cuffs.



Alexander McQueen Intarsia Knit Wool-Cashmere Sweater
$1,090
NEIMAN MARCUS, *White Plains*
www.neimanmarcus.com
Cats are all the rage on social media and they will be on your daily Zoom call, too, with this Alexander McQueen geometric intarsia knit sweater made in Italy.



Ken Scott Print Silk Shirt
$1,500
GUCCI,
White Plains
www.gucci.com
Light up the videoconference with this silk shirt's oversized botanical prints and rainbow stripes, courtesy of the archives of fashion icon Ken Scott.

Wellness

Reducing Workplace Anxiety

The founder of Port Chester's Prana Yoga & Meditation shares tips on how to find a little calm while at the office.



For Dee Yergo, a certified meditation coach, yoga teacher, prenatal yoga expert, and founder of Prana Yoga & Meditation in Port Chester, keeping calm at work is all about balance. "Local culture can have us believing that we live to work instead of work to live," explains Yergo. "Setting the intention of having a healthy life/work balance is the first step in improving your well-being. Recurring 15-minute appointments on your calendar to either stretch, breathe, or meditate in the middle of the work day can be a nice tool to remind you."

Before even stepping into the workplace, Yergo says, there are things people can do to minimize potential stressors. "A good night's sleep can go a very long way in managing stress during the workday," says Yergo, adding that screen time can be extremely detrimental to maintaining a beneficial sleep cycle. "It's important to set reasonable limits for ourselves," she adds. "One idea is to leave your smartphone out of the bedroom altogether and set a curfew time for electronics about two hours before you plan to go to sleep."

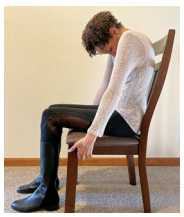


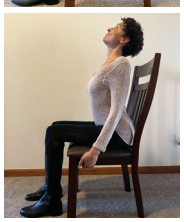
Yergo finds that meditation is yet another great way to enhance workday calm. "I'm a big believer in morning meditation. Even 10 minutes of meditation before getting ready for work can go a long way in maintaining focus and equilibrium during the workday," she explains.

Yergo's go-to meditation for the workplace can be accomplished with simply a quiet room and a few spare moments: "While sitting comfortably with the back long and the feet flat on the floor, close the eyes. Bring the mind's attention to the way the breath feels as it comes in and out of the nose," instructs Yergo. "Focus as best as you can on the sensation as the air passes across the nostrils. Count 10 slow inhales and 10 slow exhales." —*PA*

Yergo's Calming Chair Yoga

Yoga pro Dee Yergo offers two perfect-for-the-workplace poses that can be performed with only your office chair.





Cat/Cow in a Chair

"Sit tall, with the feet flat on the ground and placed just below the knees. Hands will hold the chair, adjacent to the legs. Breathe in, lift the heart and chin toward the sky. Breathing out, round the spine into a 'C' shape and drop the chin down toward the chest. Repeat for 10 rounds."



Spinal Twist in a Chair

"Sit tall, with the feet flat on the ground and placed under the knees. Bring the right hand to hold the top of the chair on the left side. Then turn the head to look over the left shoulder as you press gently into the right hip. Then [turn to] the other side, bringing your left hand to hold the right top of the right side of the chair and turn the head to look over the right shoulder as you press gently into the left hip."

TOP PHOTO BY ADOBESTOCK/USER PIXEL-SHOT; HEADSHOT BY TIFFANY BROWN; POSES COURTESY OF DEE YERGO

Focus on YONKERS

Yonkers breaks new ground for future growth



Yonkers Mayor Mike Spano (left) and Martin Ginsburg, founder and principal of Ginsburg Development Companies, at RiverTides groundbreaking.



Clockwise from top: Mayor Mike Spano at recent waterfront groundbreaking; rendering of Lionsgate Studios' new state-of-the-art movie studio; Yonkers' iconic waterfront.

Yonkers Renaissance Continues Making Major Strides

The nearly decade-long economic renaissance under way during the administration of Yonkers Mayor Mike Spano continues to break new ground with nearly $4 billion in private investment and more than 9,100 multifamily units planned, completed, under construction, and approved for development.

"Despite the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, Yonkers is moving forward, and the results speak for themselves. We are not only 'back to business' but growing stronger and better than before," Mayor Mike Spano explains. "Yonkers is heading in the right direction and we are well positioned for another year of steady economic growth."

Coming soon: Hollywood on Hudson!

"We're particularly excited by Lionsgate Studios' plan to create a state-of-the-art movie studio along our waterfront," says Mayor Spano. "Not only will it generate new jobs and business opportunities for our great city, it will also put Yonkers on the map as the New York's Hollywood on the Hudson."

The arrival of Lionsgate will provide a big boost to the city's already stellar reputation as a popular film location. Since the Spano administration took office in 2012, the city's streamlined and film-friendly office has brought in more than $2.5 million in revenue. In addition, the city recorded nearly 2,000 film days, competing with the likes of New York City and Long Island City as a premier film production location.

City attracting national and regional developers

Yonkers is also attracting major national and regional developers such as Avalon, RXR, Extell, and AMS Acquisitions. AMS recently announced a massive plan that would bring more than 3,500 apartments, almost 4,000 parking spaces, and more than 4.5 million square feet of new construction to three sites in Yonkers — Chicken Island, North Broadway, and Teutonia Hall near the Metro-North train station. Ginsburg Development Companies, one of the early pioneers to develop multifamily projects in Yonkers, has plans for two major mixed-use residential developments in the city's Ludlow section. The projects — Ludlow Point and 70 Pier Street — represent a total private investment of $214 million.

There are many reasons why Yonkers has

Saint Joseph's Medical Center

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Jose Taveras, MD, FACC; Stuart Moser, MD FACC, Ricard Greif, MD, FACC and Richard Feldman, MD, FACC

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To learn more, visit saintjosephs.org

enjoyed such success in recent years. The city's central location offers unmatched access to all major highways and is less than a 20-minute commute to Grand Central via Metro-North and only 40 minutes to every major airport in the tri-state region. Yonkers also has an abundance of commercial development sites from office and retail to manufacturing and warehouse space. And, of course, there are those breathtaking views of the Hudson River and Palisades that have attracted so much residential development in Yonkers. Another key to the city's success is the business-friendly climate that has been a hallmark of the Spano administration.

Another busy year for the Yonkers IDA

In addition to the business-friendly climate, Yonkers is also benefiting from the work of the Yonkers IDA, which offers financial incentives for commercial and residential development projects. Over the past two years, the Yonkers IDA has provided financial incentives to development projects representing a total private investment of approximately $1.1 billion. The developments are projected to create approximately 2,700 new residential units, 234,400 square feet of commercial and industrial space, and approximately 3,450 in construction, permanent, and part-time jobs. Adding the $1.1 billion in new private investments to the nearly $4 billion in existing private investments shows how much the city's economy has grown during Mayor Spano's administration.

Among the projects receiving financial incentives from the Yonkers IDA in 2020 was the $100 million motion picture studio to be built for Lionsgate Studios at the iPark complex on the Yonkers waterfront. The 109,000-square-foot entertainment complex is expected to create up to 420 full-time jobs and 400 construction jobs.

Other projects receiving Yonkers IDA incentives in 2020 included Conifer Realty's $72 million Point & Ravine Apartments on the waterfront with 120 affordable units and 26 affordable townhome units; the rehabilitation and renovation of the 181-unit Jackson Terrace Apartments by Hudson Valley Property Group; and the $32.6 million development of 126 rental units at 56 Prospect Street. In addition, work began on a $9.4 million mixed-use development at 9-11 Riverdale Avenue featuring 29 rental apartments and 2,150 square feet of ground-level commercial space. On the eastside of Yonkers, the Stagg Group opened The Marquee, a $30.5 million 160-unit luxury apartment building at 697 Bronx River Road. In order to create a diversity of housing in Yonkers, residential development projects are required by the city to set aside ten percent of all new units for affordable housing.





(top photo) Ludlow Point
(bottom photo) 57 Alexander Street

Moving forward on affordable housing

While the luxury rental market boomed, the city's ongoing commitment to creating affordable housing continued to make steady gains thanks to the Municipal Housing Authority of the City of Yonkers (MHACY), which reported a total of 1,336 units of affordable housing renovated and 425 under construction and slated for completion in 2021.

Among the many highlights of the year was the start of construction of 178 Warburton at The Ridgeway, a new $56 million mixed-income residential complex of 81 apartment homes being developed by MHACY in partnership with The Community Builders. 178 Warburton is the fifth phase of a multi-year, six-phase master plan to redevelop Cottage Place Gardens, a 256-unit distressed public housing complex built in 1945, into the mixed affordable and market-rate development called The Ridgeway.

MHACY's main focus for the past several years has been the Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) Program, which involves the conversion of its entire public housing portfolio. The $500 million plan, launched in 2017, will include the renovation of more than 1,700 units across the city. All but two properties – Calcagno Homes and Loehr Court – are completed and expected to be finished by 2021.

The development of more senior housing is on tap for 2021. MHACY is planning to create senior housing on the site of the former Longfellow Middle School, which will be known as La Mora, a senior affordable housing project at 23 Mulberry Street, which will have 60 units. MHACY is also looking to work with several developers proposing affordable housing in Yonkers. "A trend in demographics in Westchester County, and in Yonkers itself, is a huge spike in seniors and also what they call the 'frail elderly,' which is 85-plus. So, we are really focused on building more senior housing," notes MHACY President and CEO Wilson Kimball.

City's retail rebound is right on "Target"

The Yonkers retail sector got a big boost in 2020 with the announcement by Marx Realty that Target, one of the nation's most successful retailers, will be opening a new store at the Cross County Center.

"Yonkers has hit the mark with Target's plan for a new store at Cross County Center, their first ever in Yonkers," says Mayor Spano. "Target's decision to invest in our city is a testament to the retailer's confidence in our thriving economy and our business-friendly environment. We are excited to get Yonkers back to business."

Getting "Back to Business" was the theme of a new marketing campaign launched in 2020 to celebrate the city's reemergence from the economic downturn caused by the pandemic. The campaign, which featured testimonials from prominent business leaders, is the next iteration of the highly successful Generation Yonkers campaign. Now in its seventh year, the Generation Yonkers campaign, created by marketing and advertising agency Thompson & Bender, is credited with helping to showcase Yonkers as a great place to live, work, and play.

For more information on doing business in Yonkers, visit www.generationyonkers.com

RESOURCES

City of Yonkers
40 S Broadway
Yonkers
914.377.6300
www.cityofyonkers.com

Cross County Center
8000 Mall Walk
Yonkers
914.968.9570
www.crosscountycenter.com

Saint Joseph's Medical Center
127 S Broadway
Yonkers
914.378.7000
www.saintjosephs.org

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Saint Joseph's Medical Center Launches Yonkers' Only Cardiac Rehabilitation Program

When it comes to cardiac care, Saint Joseph's Medical Center in Yonkers is on the forefront of specialty care with its board-certified physician-supervised outpatient Cardiac Rehabilitation Program (914.308.7350), the only program of its kind in the City of Yonkers. Located at its Cardiovascular Center at 530 Yonkers Avenue, the Cardiac Rehabilitation Program helps patients with heart disease and cardiac conditions recover faster and regain optimal productive lifestyles.

Saint Joseph's also offers a regular rehabilitation program for musculoskeletal and orthopedic cases. The program provides an individualized and personalized treatment plan, including evaluation and instruction on physical activity, nutrition, stress management, and other health-related areas.

"Saint Joseph's Cardiac Rehabilitation Program is yet another example of our continuing commitment to providing the highest quality and compassionate healthcare to the communities we serve," says Michael Spicer, President and CEO of Saint Joseph's Medical Center. "All of our cardiologists are board-certified and work together with patients to evaluate their needs and create a personalized treatment plan that is coordinated with other healthcare providers."



Saint Joseph's Cardiovascular Center provides comprehensive services for the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of cardiovascular disease. The Center offers the following diagnostic imaging services on-site: echocardiography; vascular ultrasound; nuclear cardiology; stress testing; and EKGs. All imaging procedures are performed by certified imaging technologists using the latest equipment. Nuclear imaging and nuclear stress tests are performed under the direction of board-certified cardiologists.

Saint Joseph's Medical Center is one of a select group of hospitals in Westchester County providing Cardiac CT, a new and exciting non-invasive way to image the coronary arteries without the risk and inconvenience of a traditional cardiac catheterization.

Saint Joseph's is also bringing the high quality and compassionate healthcare of its board-certified physicians closer to home with the opening of the new Saint Joseph's Medical Practice for Primary and Specialty Care at 909 Midland Avenue (914.623.7600). The new medical office offers cardiology, primary care, gastroenterology, family medicine and gynecology. In addition, Saint Joseph's also opened a new Medical Practice, headed by Mark Sandigursky, MD, at 875 Yonkers Avenue (914.237.0959), which provides patient care related to all aspects of internal medicine.

For more information, visit www.saintjosephs.org

First Yonkers Target to Open at Cross County Center

Exciting things are happening at Cross County Center in Yonkers. In late 2020, Target signed a 40-year lease to occupy over 130,000 square feet of retail space at what was once home to the most successful Sears store in the nation. Additionally, H&M signed a 10-year renewal to occupy 28,000 square feet where the retailer will incorporate its upscale SOHO concept through a renovation. The news comes shortly after Marx Realty took over leasing and management of the historic shopping center earlier in 2020. The firm has owned the center in partnership with Benenson Capital Partners for 66 years. Cross County is the nation's first open-air shopping center, which has benefited the center given its focus on health and wellness.

This latest leasing activity is the first step in a multi-phase plan for Cross County Center. Focused on expanding the center's uses, future phases will bring impactful changes to the iconic open-air center in the heart of Westchester, just 12 miles from New York City. As retailers here continued to thrive after emerging from the pandemic, Marx Realty launched a forward-looking plan for growth, continuing to build on the heavy foot traffic from New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut as visitors increasingly flock to Yonkers for the Cross County Center experience with its many landscaped gardens and green outdoor, open spaces.



CROSS COUNTY CENTER

"Residents of Westchester County and the surrounding towns are over the moon to have Target coming to their backyard," says Craig Deitelzweig, President and CEO of Marx Realty. "As the retail sector emerges from the COVID-19 crisis, we have seen extraordinary foot traffic at the center showing pent-up demand to experience the diverse retail, dining, and entertainment offerings."

A re-branding effort is also underway, at Cross County Center, which was recently changed from Cross County Shopping Center, to reflect how the facility offers more than just shopping. With seasonal events and activities that draw tens of thousands of visitors as well as mixed-use retail elements, there are ample reasons to spend quality time at the center. For more information about events and happenings, new stores, dining options, and other amenities, please visit www.crosscounty-center.com and follow us on social media sites, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.



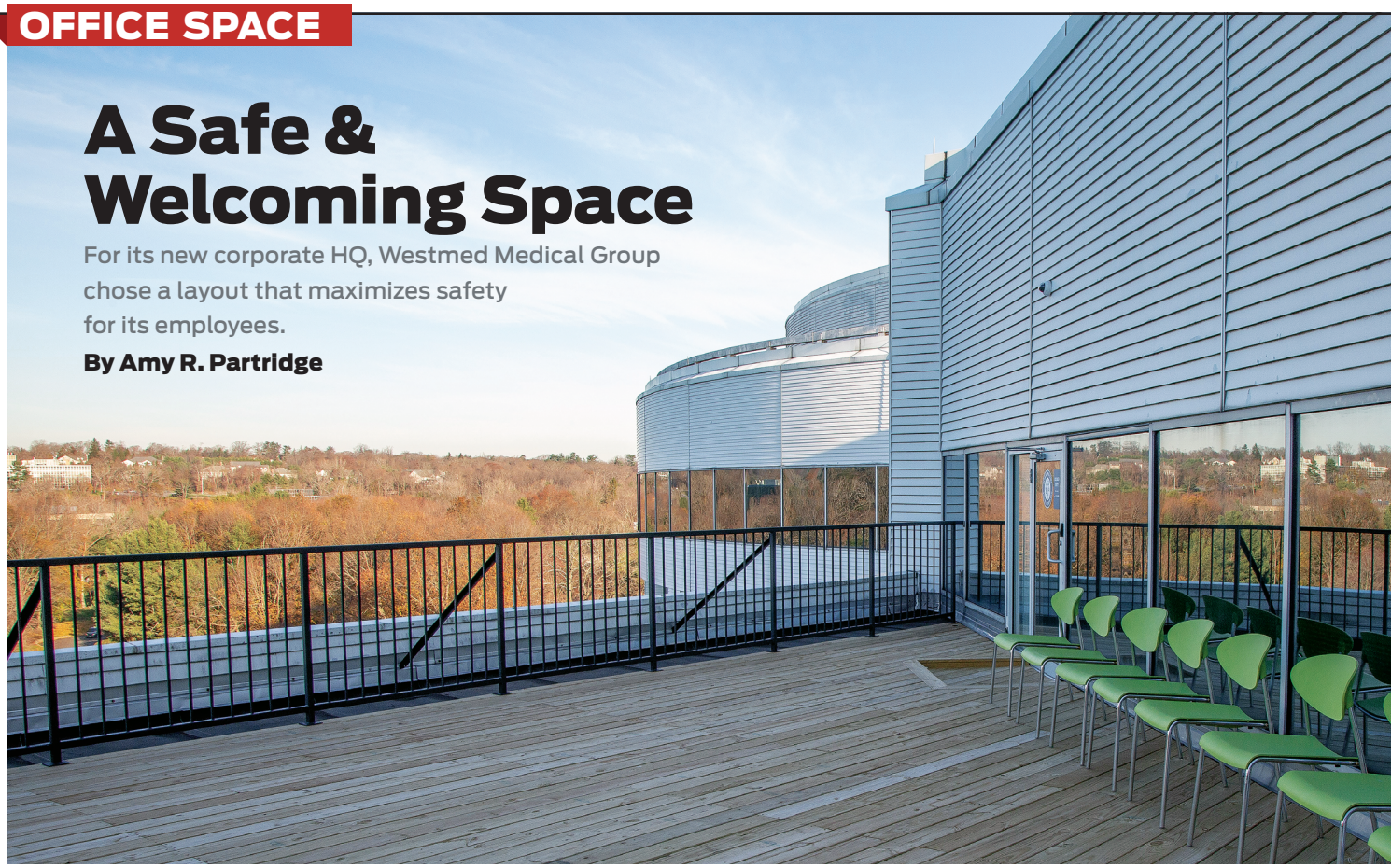
CROSS COUNTY CENTER

GOOD STYLE IS ALWAYS IN FASHION. FREE YEAR-ROUND PARKING.

A Safe & Welcoming Space

For its new corporate HQ, Westmed Medical Group chose a layout that maximizes safety for its employees.

By Amy R. Partridge



While working from home has been the dominant "office space" for many of Westmed Medical Group's corporate employees during the pandemic, the company's new headquarters on the top floor of 800 Westchester Ave. in Rye Brook will welcome them all back eventually. The 23,524 sq. ft. space will house 85 employees in the medical group's administrative, HR, operations, marketing, finance, and other departments, while the executive suite includes offices for, among others, the CEO, COO, CFO, and medical director. The open-concept layout was "custom-designed to create an engaging work environment that enhances collaboration," while Westmed's HR and infectious-disease leaders "ensured that the renovated space allowed for appropriate social distancing and proper safety protocols," notes COO Karen Dolman, who oversaw the development of the new office.





▲ **Conference rooms** are equipped with videoconferencing tech, smart boards, and projectors.

◀ **An on-site gym, bank, convenience store,** salon, dry cleaner, and shoe repair are just some of the building's perks.

PHOTOS COURTESY CHRIS FIGUEROA @ CHRIS FIG PRODUCTIONS; PROJECT ARCHITECT: ANDREW FREDMAN, ANDREW FREDMAN ARCHITECT LLC



▲ ***Above*: This private rooftop patio** can be used for employee get-togethers or as an *alfresco* lunch spot or casual place for a meeting. It has great views of the fountains in front of the building, as well as the surrounding green space.





▲ **A pop of color plus natural light** and access to the roof deck make this an inviting employee kitchen.

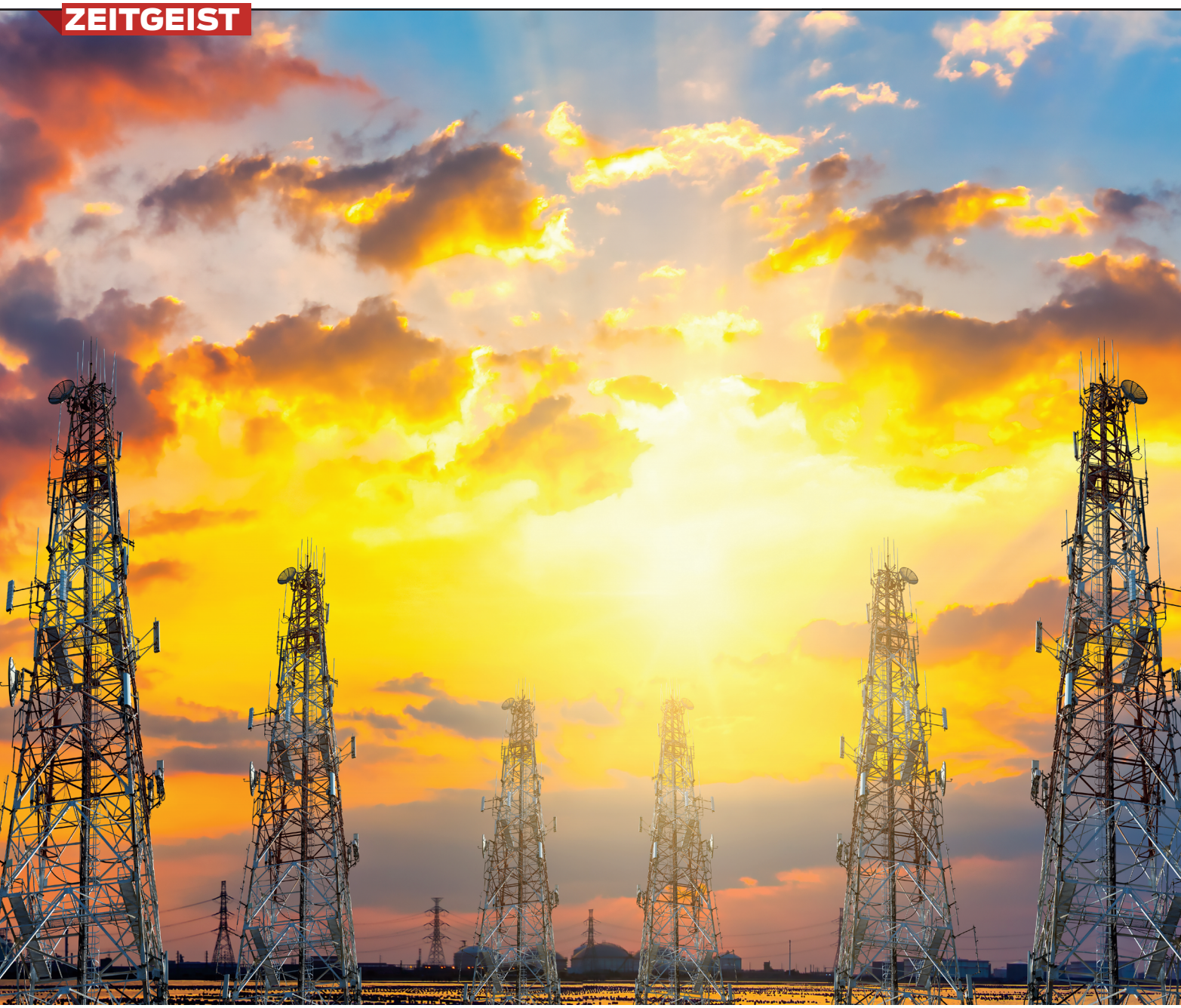
◀ **Skylights and tall ceilings help keep the airy feel throughout the office.** Overall, says Dolman, "I think the [new office] space helps set the tone for the culture we choose to inspire in our people and cultivate at Westmed."

▼ **The executive suites were designed to be modern and welcoming, while offering spaces for** "our cross-functional teams to come together to work toward our shared goals," Dolman says.





◀ **Crucial ergonomic and safety measures were incorporated into the design of all 56 workstations.** The company chose cubicles that have extended divider heights and are "larger than a typical workstation design, have a clear entrance, and easily allow for social distancing between desks," Dolman explains. Each workstation also includes an electronic, adjustable-height desk to allow for maximum employee comfort.



Does Westchester Need 5G?

Proponents of the lightning-fast cell technology say it's necessary for the continued advancement of the area economy, while naysayers point to potential health risks and infrastructure concerns. It remains unclear who will win out. **By Gale Ritterhoff**

Does Westchester need 5G? Talk about a loaded question. The answer depends on whom you ask (and we've asked a lot of people). Some will tell you that 5G wireless is the way of the future, a technology that will unleash levels of life-changing connectivity seen only in science fiction until now. Others will tell you it's an unnecessary and dangerous money grab from the telecom industry. Despite all of this hyper-awareness, there are many who aren't really sure what 5G is, although they have undoubtedly heard of it.

If you consume media at all, you've surely seen ads from Verizon, AT&T, and T-Mobile promoting the new cellular system. Many consumers will admit to not paying close attention, adopting the "5G? Sure, sounds great," attitude. Who doesn't want faster, more reliable internet? There is a level of acceptance around it as simply being the next wave of technology sure to become part of daily life.

PHOTO BY PAGEBACKGROUNDS/ADOBE STOCK

Let's start with the basics: What exactly is 5G? The "G" stands for generation, so 5G is simply the fifth generation of cellular technology. We've been using 4G for about a decade. What's different is that 5G can use new FCC licensed airwaves, enabling the faster transmission of much more data.

"What that means in practical terms is data speeds that will be up to 100 times faster than what we have today," explains Michael Romita, president and CEO of the Westchester County Association. "Latency [or lag] periods are being halved now, and in the future will be even faster, with connection density vastly increased, meaning more devices that can function in a given geography. These technological advances enable new opportunities economically and socially."

These improvements in technology have become vital in light of the strain the coronavirus has put on our economy, as well as our internet pathways, adds Business Council of Westchester executive VP/COO John Ravitz. The BCW has joined a statewide coalition known as New Yorkers for 5G, who believe that "a robust and high-speed wireless network is paramount to helping New York's economic recovery, while supporting and improving health, education, public safety, and so much more," according to the coalition's mission statement.

Citing recent (pre-COVID) studies, Ravitz says that 5G investment in New York State would generate almost 200,000 wireless jobs and boost the GDP by more than $28 billion. "We needed 5G before the pandemic," Ravitz says, "but [the pandemic] has exposed so many deficiencies in the network for people who have to work at home, kids who have had to attend school online — it's been a real challenge, in some places a disaster. Now more than ever, we need to focus on this."

"The world has been moving into a much more remote and mobile workforce," explains Robert Cioffi, COO and cofounder of Progressive Computing in Yonkers, adding that "COVID was an accelerant that took it out of second gear and slammed it into fourth, and I don't even think that we've hit full speed yet." He points out that many of us are "using services such as Zoom or Teams more frequently, putting files up in the cloud or collaborating with people remotely. The demand we are putting on our infrastructure is creating a lot of congestion. One way to relieve that is with faster internet; that's why 5G is really important."



"What [5G] means in practical terms is data speeds that will be up to 100 times faster than what we have today. Latency [or lag] periods are being halved now, and in the future will be even faster, with connection density vastly increased, meaning more devices that can function in a given area."

—Michael Romita
President and CEO,
Westchester County
Association

Romita adds that "the higher demand for remote learning, telecommuting, and telemedicine is just the beginning of the conversation." 5G's potential to almost instantaneously transmit large amounts of data will redefine what is possible for people and for business. "Think about healthcare, which is an incredibly important regional industry sector in Westchester," says Romita. "It's not just about a video chat with a doctor or nurse; think actual augmented reality applications," such as remote robotic surgery.

5G is also vital to building out the Internet of Things (IoT), he adds, which is the connectivity of physical devices to the internet — like, for example, the technology that allows smartphones to adjust your thermostats. Wireless IoT will lead to huge innovations, such as "smart buildings and smart cities, and enhancements in public safety," says Romita. While these applications of 5G are not all imminent, Romita believes a "more granular, sector by sector" discussion of the technology's potential is key to justifying investment and its establishment.

"We need to encourage private-sector innovation, which 5G can enable. Promoting smart fiscal and tax-incentive policies at the state and local levels are key, along with strong intellectual property protections," Romita says. Attracting investment in 5G in Westchester also requires "a receptive regulatory environment, as well as shifting the conversation and understanding at the local level," Romita adds, noting, "these factors are already shaping which communities in the county are enhancing digital technology the fastest, gaining real first-to-market advantages by aggressively courting companies to initiate capital infrastructure investment needed for 5G."

But it's exactly this infrastructure that the anti-5G groups are objecting to. And therein lies the rub with this new technology: 5G gains its additional bandwidth by transmitting data over higher frequencies than 4G. The waves in this underutilized part of the spectrum are excellent at transmitting data, but they don't travel as far as 4G signals. So, 5G transmission requires the installation of many small cells or antennas throughout a coverage area to keep the signal moving. These small cells are placed on streetlights, rooftops, and other structures "in the public way," according to Crown Castle, a company that builds wireless infrastructure in our county and throughout the U.S. (Note: The Town of Rye, led by

HEADSHOT COURTESY OF MICHAEL ROMITA



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> "The telecommunication business is a trillion-dollar industry. The industry line of safety is BS. People are getting sick. This is about money, huge amounts of money."
>
> — **Ruth Moss,** Director, 5GAlert Westchester

Mayor Josh Cohn, has been involved in a years-long legal battle with Crown Castle in efforts to keep the company from installing 5G cells.)

So, unlike the large cell towers we see on hilltops that facilitate 4G transmission, 5G antennas will be in our midst, sometimes freestanding near private property, emitting the microwave radiation that makes them work. (5G cells will also transmit 4G signals, to help smooth transition and as a backup.)

If you're wondering if radio-frequency wireless radiation poses a potential health risk, Ellen Weininger, director of educational outreach for science-based nonprofit Grassroots Environmental Education, says indeed it does. "We review the independent, non-industry, peer-reviewed studies, which demonstrate that exposure to radio-frequency microwave-radiation exposure increases the risk of cancer, neurological damage, and reproductive harm," Weininger says.

For example, a recent, federally funded, $30 million study by the National Toxicity Program, which is part of the National Institutes of Health, concluded that there is "clear evidence of carcinogenicity" associated with wireless radiation. (The study was conducted on male rats.) Grassroots has compiled an index of medical and scientific studies that examine such issues as increased incidence of head and neck tumors, effects on male fertility and fetal growth, behavioral changes, miscarriages, and much more.

Thus far, much of the research on such dangers has been questioned, if not dismissed, in publications like *Scientific American* and *The New York Times*. In addition, The American Cancer Society's website says that there is no conclusive evidence linking wireless radiation to health issues. But, as Ruth Moss, director of 5GAlert Westchester matter-of-factly points out: "The telecommunication business is a trillion-dollar industry. The industry line of safety is BS. People are getting sick. This is about money, huge amounts of money. In order to make 5G work, powerful cell antennas must be installed up and down neighborhood streets, sometimes right on front lawns. The FCC standards for emission are outdated and put residents at risk."

Moss, like many 5G opponents, insists that she is not anti-technology — she just wants it to be implemented safely. Weininger agrees it should be used in a safer manner, adding that existing cell signal service is adequate, and she says, "access to internet service can be achieved without wireless technology by completing the installation of fiber-optic cable to and through the premises to every home, office, and school already paid for by consumers and promised by the telecom industry. Fiber-optic cable is faster, more secure, more reliable, and less expensive than wireless."

She continues, "We don't need the deployment of 4G/5G wireless cell antennas, effectively mini cell towers, installed up and down our neighborhood blocks next to our homes and schools that involuntarily expose residents to radio-frequency radiation 24/7." In addition to health risks, this wireless infrastructure installed in residential neighborhoods threatens property values, she adds.

5GAlert Westchester is working to ensure that local towns establish more strict ordinances to legally limit what telecommunications companies can do. Grassroots "encouraged municipalities to establish codes that are as protective as possible regarding cell antenna installations," says Weininger. Moss, who is active in White Plains and all of Westchester, insists that pre-notification is just one example of many protective provisions that should be included in a town's ordinance: The town code includes language forcing the telecom companies to notify residents as to where they plan to install infrastructure.

While proponents of 5G believe in its limitless potential, naysayers insist it's a just a risky and expensive way to download movies faster and enhance computer games. Those who would like to dig deeper could simply try this: Plug "Do we need 5G?" into your search engine. Expect to get thousands of hits — just don't expect a definitive answer. ●

Gale Ritterhoff is a frequent contributor to Westchester Magazine *and* 914INC.

Continued from page 21

the senate. He described David Singer as being "smart as a whip and a truly honest businessperson."

"David's mom interviewed me for the job," says Spano, who, in his capacity as founder and president of the Albany-based lobbying firm Empire Strategic Planning, recently made the *City & State New York* "Westchester Power 100" list. "David and I had something in common: We both had oil running through our veins. Like the Spanos, they were all about service and people in the community," Spano says. "It is a whole lot more than hooking up a hose. The Singer family welcomed me into the business like I was part of the family."

> "David and I had something in common: We both had oil running through our veins. Like the Spanos, [the Singers] were all about service and people in the community."
>
> —**Nick Spano,** Former NYS Senator

Outside of the business, you won't be rubbing shoulders with Singer at the country club. He still plays competitive softball, basketball, and touch football. Sure, he's pushing 60, and the pros scouts aren't calling, but it doesn't stop him from getting out there. "After some games, I don't want to even get out of bed the next morning, I'm so sore, but I love it," he says. Singer also loves to ski; his wife of 24 years, Holly, introduced him to the sport. Skiing takes him out of town in the winter — something that is usually verboten in the home-oil world, but Singer has worked that out.

That part of Singer that draws him to the community isn't just something he does for business purposes. He's actively involved in philanthropy, supporting Muscular Dystrophy, March of Dimes, White Plains Hospital, and the Boys and Girls Clubs, to name just a few.

"My grandfather and father were always donating. That's how we were raised," Singer says. "You know, you can spend your money on a Porsche, or you can do other things with it. It's all what turns you on in life." ●

Freelance writer Tom Schreck has written profiles of CEOs, political leaders, and Hall of Fame athletes in addition to pieces on UFOs, dog therapists, and the problems with the green movement.

Continued from page 23

further restrictions, we will need to re-evaluate, like everybody else." Costabile says that they have weathered the viral storm so far by "re-evaluating" expenses. That means, in part, cutting services that aren't needed or appropriate at the moment, like grand-buffet breakfasts. But it also means having to furlough staff, as labor accounts for the greatest percentage of costs. "It's an unfortunate thing," he concedes, sadly.

Indeed, all hotels and furloughed staff need a helping hand. "It's imperative we get some support from the federal or state government. If not, we will struggle to stay open," Meade says. "The truth is, unless corporate travel comes back, hotels will continue to be in trouble." It comes down to how much cash the company has on hand to continue to pay the bills and taxes. "Everybody is just hanging on," he admits.

"Full-service hotels are also bearing the burden of thousands upon thousands of empty square feet of restaurant, banquet, and conference space, which we are basically unable to use because of restrictions, with no end in sight," adds Marie Palomba, general manager of the Radisson Hotel, New Rochelle. "We couldn't imagine anything with more devasting consequences to the entire industry as a whole," she says, though notes that her hotel has not had any layoffs thus far.

Palomba anticipates things beginning to ramp up for travel in Q3 2021, with recovery to "normal" around Q1 2022, if a vaccine is widely available by Q2 2021. "But this is a moving target, and it speaks nothing of what the new landscape will be for business travel," she says. "While there is certainly a need for face-to-face business, what will that new demand be? Is the age of the business conference over? With the advent of Zoom and remote work, how many companies will spend capital on business travel when they no longer have to? There are many unanswered questions. Only time will tell."

The industry's resiliency will be key for whatever that new landscape looks like, adds Meade. "The hospitality industry in New York and Westchester is resilient. We will bounce back; however, we need to compress the timeline to get back to normal business levels while keeping our employees and teams safe and healthy. We do see things coming back, and by 2023-24, we expect to be back to pre-COVID revenue levels," he says.

> "Because we have a resort setting, that worked to our advantage.... We had packages for work-from-home people who wanted to get away. And we had tremendous success, believe it or not."
>
> —**Chris Costabile,** General Manager, Tarrytown House Estate

Natasha Caputo, director, Westchester County Tourism & Film, adds that she expects a boost in 2021. "We anticipate there will be a steady wave of improvement for Westchester tourism as the vaccine becomes more widely available and traveler confidence returns," she notes, adding that the interest in close-to-home getaways could bode well for area hotels. "We continue to see road trips as king for 2021, with travelers opting to drive over fly. Many of Westchester's communities will benefit from the national interest in 'small-town' getaways."

Baeriswil, too, says he hopes to go back to some kind of normality by next spring. And Costabile is very bullish. "We already have over 70 weddings contracted for 2021, which we are optimistically looking forward to hosting. We see things getting better in the future, and, God willing, it should be a very successful year for us and others."

"We have seen more ebbs and flows in the Westchester market than most other markets. While we are in an ebb right now, the worst we could have fathomed, one day this will be just another ebb we all got through together," Palomba says. "But one thing is for sure: The landscape of our industry is forever changed." ●

Freelance writer David Levine is a frequent contributor to 914INC.



Legal Weapon

Powerhouse attorney Kevin O'Dell shares his dedication to self-defense system Krav Maga. **By Gina Valentino**

▲ Personal injury attorney Kevin O'Dell (*above*) at his White Plains law firm. (*Inset*) O'Dell practicing at Krav Maga New York in Somers.

On a typical day, Kevin O'Dell heads to his White Plains law firm, Raneri, Light & O'Dell, briefcase in hand, to prepare for legal battles that can range from automobile defects to product failure to dog bites. A personal injury lawyer for more than 30 years, his work includes litigation on a variety of subjects. "There's no case that is the same," he explains. The Pace Law grad has seen his fair share of difficult cases, but like any successful veteran attorney, he's not one to shy away from a challenge.

"I like to consider myself a formidable adversary. I practice with honesty and integrity," he says, adding that many of his opponents are his good friends. "I take cases that other people turn away. In one particular case, I shut down the lower level of the George Washington Bridge for almost six and a half hours to do an accident investigation and reconstruction. Nobody ever thought I could do it — and I did it."

O'Dell's tenacity and dedication to a good defense transcends his legal career: He has been practicing self-defense for decades. In his teens, he practiced karate, and as an adult, Filipino martial arts, before seeking to progress his practice with a more pragmatic approach. In 2013, he turned to Krav Maga: "I wanted something different, something that was a bit more practical and street-applicable, and I found Krav Maga. I never knew anything about it. I went [to Krav Maga New York in Somers] and took an introductory class. Not only did the facility provide the Krav Maga self-defense and martial arts training, it also incorporated CrossFit. It was great."

> "Unfortunately the world does contain bad people, and you need to be able to have that type of training in your memory bank, and in your arsenal."
>
> —Kevin O'Dell

The Mount Pleasant resident spends three evenings a week practicing the self-defense system developed by the Israeli Defense Forces, which stresses survival tactics with the intention of disarming an attacker and using the surrounding environment to the practitioner's advantage. (Think Denzel Washington in *The Equalizer*.) Incorporating deadly techniques, Krav Maga focuses on versatility and improvisation. Practitioners can partake in a class wearing street clothes and shoes (martial arts students are typically barefoot), or a suit and tie, to simulate a real-life scenario.

O'Dell has been trained on how to react during active-shooter situations and in scenarios in which multiple attackers approach from various vantage points. "It's not a discipline that goes looking for trouble. In fact, we try to do something so we can get away safely," he explains. He mentions it is beneficial to know the practice considering his profession as a personal injury lawyer: "Sometimes you make adversaries in the business that I am in," but he maintains that knowing the self-defense system is beneficial for everyone. "Krav [trains you to have] an explosive reaction that takes people off-guard, especially people who are trying to hurt others. You'll never know who is trained in this discipline or not. It can be used and learned by everyone, regardless of physical fitness." He continues, "Unfortunately the world does contain bad people, and you need to be able to have that type of training in your memory bank, and in your arsenal." ●

PHOTOS: (*TOP*) BY VICTORIA RON; (*INSET*) COURTESY OF TEAM KRAV MAGA NEW YORK



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