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Young Professionals

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Congrats to our Gen Y

Welcome to our 11th Annual Young Professionals' special section. Since 2013, the **Sullivan County Democrat** has been featuring some of the best and brightest young talent in Sullivan County – welcoming them to our workforce and hopefully encouraging them to reach even greater heights.

Since that first edition, more than 110 features have been written. The first-year honor roll included Nick Vallone, John Theadore, Laura Stabbert, Matt Dorcas, Jeremy Guinan, Julie Kaufman, Chris Ketcham and Cathy Paty, to name a few.

Several of our Millennials have since moved away but the majority have stayed right here in Sullivan County, starting families of their own while helping our business community grow, too.

It is very inspirational to read the stories behind our eleven 2024 honorees. It gives a great insight to what our young professionals are

doing and how “Gen Y” is integrating into our workforce, either by taking care of our needs or possibly helping our young people find the right path.

As the first generation to grow up with the Internet, Millennials have also been described as the first global generation. The generation is generally marked by elevated usage of and familiarity with the Internet, mobile devices, and social media. The term “digital natives”, which is now also applied to successive generations, was originally coined to describe this generation.

Millennials have also been called the “Unluckiest Generation” because the average Millennial has experienced more uncertain economic times since entering the workforce than any other generation in U.S. history. The generation has also been weighed down by student debt and child-care costs.

But with all these headwinds, Millennials are our future. They will be our corporate ex-

ecutives and government leaders in years to come.

We realize how difficult it is to succeed in the world today. Many of the tasks which we did ten or fifteen years ago have changed dramatically. And as we look to the future we are sure that many tasks we do today are changing just as rapidly.

We would like to tell our Millennials that whether they realize it or not, you are the role models which our high school and college-aged students look up to. Your ability to inspire and educate our students who are following in your footsteps is needed now, more than ever.

Please consider becoming a mentor, or possibly attending a local school district to talk about what you do or even attending a high school or college job fair.

The inspiration you give our new “up and comers” just might change the world.

You should know – you did!

Congratulations
to all of the 2024
Young Professionals!



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Kassie Thelman

BY ALEX KIELAR

Rassie Thelman grew up in Bethel and graduated from Sullivan West in 2012 before attending SUNY Sullivan, where she was an honor student. At the community college, Thelman earned a Liberal Arts Degree in 2014 before attending Binghamton University where she earned a Bachelor's Degree in Environmental Studies in 2016.

Thelman said that going into college, she was undecided about what she wanted to do for a career. However, after taking her first environmental studies class at SUNY Sullivan, she realized her passion for the importance of protecting the environment.

"That path has worked out so far," she said.

After college, Thelman began working in Orange County for an advanced testing company where

she did construction inspection for six and a half years.

But Thelman wanted to move back to Sullivan County and be closer to her family, she moved to Monticello to start her current position as Sullivan County Recycling Coordinator in October of 2022.

"My biggest thing working for Sullivan County in this field was definitely to be close to family, and I didn't want to commute anymore," Thelman said. "That's really what brought me to the county, and I work very closely with my counterparts in Orange, Dutchess and Ulster Counties as part of New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Region 3. They are all incredibly knowledgeable about solid waste and recycling. I'm new to this field and they are a huge help."

Thelman also said she met with her predecessor, Bill Cutler, who has 30 years of industry knowledge under his belt. She said that Cutler



Kassie Thelman has been working as Sullivan County's Recycling Coordinator since October of 2022.

Congratulations, Kassie!

Kassie!



I am so proud of you!
Keep up the great work!
Love, Mike

121579

Congratulations, Kassie!



It is an honor to witness your growth and success!
We are proud to call you our sister!
Love, Katie & Kellee

121580



Congratulations to all the young professionals and thank you for your dedication to enhancing Sullivan County's business community

Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther

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and a lot of the other people in Region 3 who have been doing the job for a long time have been very helpful, supportive and an inspiration to her.

Thelman spoke about an exciting time happening just this past October when they launched their food scrap recycling program.

"It's probably my favorite thing that I've worked on so far and we, the county, have been working since 2017 or sooner to be able to collect food scraps at our transfer stations for composting," Thelman said. "It took a lot of permitting and paperwork to get through, but we finally got there and we were able to launch the program."

Thelman said that after collecting food scraps, they currently transport them to Ulster County, but it is their long-term goal to build a composting facility in Sullivan County.

She said that the hardest part of the job is convincing people that they really are recycling and that it matters.

"Convincing people that you

"...So convincing those people that it is happening and showing them the proof and the difference it's making in our solid waste stream is challenging."

should keep things that you can recycle out of the waste," Thelman said. "A lot of people in our community are very good about it and want to make a difference. But once in a while, there's a person who just doesn't think recycling matters or that it's actually happening. So convincing those people that it is happening and showing them the proof and the difference it's making in our solid waste stream is challenging."

Thelman also said that there are times in which recyclables can get

backed up sometimes, but they are required through their permit to keep things moving.

"Our recyclables have to move out of here and go the destination in Beacon or else we are in violation of our permit," she said. "Part of the reason my boss, Mark Witkowski, the Deputy Commissioner of Public Works hired me was because of my operational background. So he's been working on different ways we can prevent backups from happening."

Thelman said that this past year they started to haul their own recycling down to Beacon instead of having a vendor come in to take recycling for them all the time.

"The vendors still come in, but we also do it ourselves to prevent backups," she said.

Outside of working, Thelman said she enjoys skiing, hiking and kayaking. She also said that a lot of her free time has been spent at her new property in Cochetcon where she is in the process of building a house.

Congratulations

KASSIE THELMAN

Sullivan County is proud of the work you do!



121598

*Congratulations,
Kassie!*

I KNOW YOU DON'T EXPECT PRAISE FOR DOING THE JOB THAT YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO DO. I BELIEVE IN YOU AND KNOW THAT YOU WILL CONTINUE TO LEARN, GROW, AND CONQUER WHATEVER YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE.

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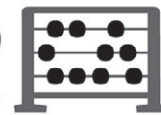
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Maura Kelly



BY DEREK KIRK

When you purchase tickets to see your favorite musical artist at Bethel Woods Center for the Arts, it takes a lot of behind-the-scenes work to ensure they get to you before showtime. From the moment of your purchase to the finding of your seats under the pavilion, 24-year-old Manager of Ticketing Maura Kelly is dedicated to ensuring the show goes on as planned. Working closely with the Box

Office Manager and Supervisor, Senior Director of Programming and accounting offices, Maura's duty is to make sure any tickets for the dozens of indoor and outdoor events at the historic venue go on sale correctly and on-time, in addition to providing attentive customer service.

Maura's job doesn't end at the sale of the tickets however. To see the job completed from start to finish, she oversees all ticket scanning for patrons to enter the venue on event days – a necessary step to ensure the magic and the music



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Maura Kelly is the Manager of Ticketing at Bethel Woods Center for the Arts.

BETHEL WOODS CENTER FOR THE ARTS



MAURA KELLY:

We're so grateful you're part of the team. Bethel Woods would not be the same without your infectious laugh, ticketing prowess, or enthusiasm for souvenir cups.

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at Bethel Woods are delivered promptly and professionally.

A graduate of Tri-Valley Central School District in 2017, the Neversink resident began her career at Bethel Woods as a ticket seller in August of 2021. After graduating with a Bachelor's Degree in Recreation and Leisure from SUNY Brockport in December of 2021, she joined the team as the Assistant Ticketing Manager and earned a promotion to her current position in late January of 2022.

"I enjoy working with computers and the technical side of ticketing, but I also love being able to be out on the grounds and with people," Maura said. "I love live events and concerts, and this position allows

me to be involved in those in such a unique way."

"Growing up in this area, there was not a lot going on here," Maura said. "So it is really special to have Bethel Woods in our backyard."

As she prepares for another exciting and star-studded concert season at Bethel Woods, Maura thanks her parents, Kate and Jim Kelly, for their support in her career, as well as Bethel Woods Senior Director of Programming Julie Kaufman, General Manager Paul Lloyd and Bethel Woods CEO Eric Frances.

"They put a lot of trust in me," Maura said, "and I am so appreciative for all of their guidance and support."

Monica Ponce-Agredano

STORY AND PHOTO
BY VINCENT KURZROCK

Monica Ponce Agredano, a driven individual, age of twenty-three, is currently fulfilling the important role of Agriculture and Food Systems Program Assistant at Cornell Cooperative Extension in Sullivan County (CCE).

Her expertise in the field combined with her dedication to promoting sustainable and efficient agricultural practices make her an invaluable asset to the organization. With her impressive credentials and passion for improving food systems, Monica plays a crucial role in CCE's mission to enhance community education and support local farmers.

In order to address the needs of Sullivan County in the areas of agriculture, nutrition, family, and environment, the CCE "share(s) research-based education, outreach, and opportunities."

This is the mission statement. Ponce-Agredano gives her work her all in every aspect.

Ponce-Agredano received her diploma in political science from the University of Rochester in 2022 after graduating from Liberty High

School in 2018.

She was looking for a job closer to home when she came across the position on Indeed.

Ponce-Agredano assists in Agriculture and Food Systems program events such as promotion for events. She finds great reassurance in how hands-on her job is as well.

"I enjoy the creativity it allows me to have," said Ponce-Agredano. "I also love being able to see the impact my job has as well."

She accredits her success to the great team she works with. Another aspect she credits is her ability to morph to their needs. She said that if her team needs something, she tries to be as accommodating as possible, noting her flexibility in the workplace.

In her free time, Ponce-Agredano likes to paint and do watercolor. She also spends her free time hiking and exploring around the local woods.

Ponce-Agredano stated that her family inspires her, especially her mother. She said that with her many successes, she's accomplishing all the things she [her mother] wanted to do.

"It's a mixture of seizing opportunities that sprout but also taking a leap of faith," said Ponce-Agredano.



Monica Ponce-Agredano is the Agriculture and Food Systems Program Assistant at Cornell Cooperative Extension in Sullivan County.



Thank you Monica!

Your intelligence, charisma, and dedication help CCE Sullivan's programs reach so many people in our community. Congratulations on this incredible achievement! We love seeing your work recognized in Sullivan County!

Nicole Blais



Nicole Blais is the Prevention Coordinator for Sullivan 180.

BY ANTHONY MORGANO

With an intentional focus on empowering a healthier generation, Sullivan 180 has been

working diligently throughout Sullivan County to make their mission a reality.

In one of their new initiatives, CATCH My Breath, the focus has shifted to youth vaping prevention through evidence-based program

ming.

Nicole Blais, the Prevention Coordinator, first heard of Sullivan 180 through the Healthiest Fire Department Challenge. Nicole is a volunteer firefighter for the Kauneonga Lake Fire Department, who came in 4th place last year.

Nicole graduated from Liberty High School before attending Binghamton University's School of Management and received a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with a concentration in Marketing. In college, Blais was a member of Women in Business as well as a mentor for two undergraduate students.

During her college breaks, Blais worked as a substitute teacher at Liberty Elementary School, returning to the district she graduated from for work. Now, she's back with Sullivan 180's CATCH My Breath anti-vaping programming.

"It teaches students about the ingredients in e-cigarettes, how e-cigarettes affect health, and the marketing tactics of Big Vape companies and how they target youth," Blais explained. "It also provides

resources for quitting e-cigarettes, stress relief and exit strategies/refusal skills for addressing peer pressure."

Blais added, "I have always enjoyed mentoring and working with students! I have been able to bring CATCH My Breath to such great groups of students who have made my first few times teaching this program a lot of fun. A lot of my time is spent researching current vaping and tobacco legislation, creating activities to bring to students, and just trying to learn as much as I can about the tobacco/vape industry and more ways to get resources to our youth!"

Along with the CATCH My Breath initiative, Blais works on other prevention projects including the Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service Youth Summit and the Warrior Teens Film Series.

"I have also been able to work with some of the wonderful Sullivan 180 volunteers on projects like Christmas present wrapping for the Federation for the Homeless and making CATCH classroom kits

PLEASE SEE BLAIS, PAGE 9Y

Congratulations Nicole!

Thank you for all that you do for our youth, schools and community.

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."
 – Benjamin Franklin



GRANITE ASSOCIATES

SULLIVAN 180

Bethel Woods CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Ayden Lowitz



Ayden Lowitz started his own logging business, Lowitz Logging, after graduating from Sullivan West in 2020.

STORY AND PHOTO
BY ALEX KIELAR

Logging was a business that Ayden Lowitz of Cocheton was born into, as his father, Kip, got him into it.

"[My dad] just roped me into it a little bit and showed how things go," Lowitz said. "It kind of grew on me. Once I started doing it, I actually really enjoyed doing it."

Lowitz said that his father sold out from the business and retired from logging when the young Lowitz was in school. But after years of working in the business, Lowitz said it was his dream to work as a logger as a career.

"I started back up on my own when I was a junior in high school," said Lowitz, a 2020 graduate of Sullivan West. "I worked for a couple of other guys after that and then did my own thing on the side because I wasn't busy right off the bat."

Lowitz said that now, within the

last few years, he has gotten really busy on his own once he started his own logging business, Lowitz Logging, after graduation.

"I have some long days and am busy all year," he said.

Lowitz said that he can work up to 16 hours some days but he likes staying busy. He said it can get overwhelming but he has learned to push through.

"Sometimes you can't do paperwork and stuff on a Saturday," Lowitz said. "So sometimes I'll work a 16-hour day and then I have to go home and do paperwork. Then I gotta get up and do it again the next day."

Lowitz also talked about some of his other inspirations for starting his own logging business: his great-grandfather, Otto Lowitz, who Ayden said owned his own company in Parksville, and his uncle, Robert Stephenson, who also worked in the industry.

When asked what some of his on-the-job memories are, Lowitz said that he enjoys working on side hills.

"You learn something new every-time you're on a side hill," he said. "You get quite the adrenaline rush from it. So it's always something."

Lowitz said that some of the toughest jobs are when your knee deep in mud and you have no choice.

"It's pretty hard doing that," he said, "but you grow into it and it just becomes a natural thing to do."

Advice that Lowitz said that he would give to someone looking to enter the logging field, is to start slow and not overthink it. Lowitz said that he does work from Sunday through Friday and handles all the accounting stuff on Saturdays.

When he isn't busy with work, Lowitz said that he enjoys fishing and riding snowmobiles in his free time.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Ayden Lowitz loves being in the woods, hard at work.

BLAIS: CONTINUED FROM 8Y

for our most recent facilitator training."

Joining the team at Sullivan 180 seems to be the perfect spot for Blais, who was keen on giving back to her community after graduating from college.

"After seeing the great work they were doing, I wanted to join the team at Sullivan 180 to help make a difference," Blais said.

"Growing up in Sullivan County, I have seen how the lack of access to resources, healthcare and overall help has affected Sullivan County residents. I am so happy to join Sullivan 180 and so many other organizations to play a part in the great changes that are occurring across our county."

Working for Sullivan 180 provides the unique opportunity to meet members of the

"After seeing the great work they were doing, I wanted to join the team at Sullivan 180 to help make a difference"

community, whether that is students, volunteers or career organization leaders.

Blais said, "I have also enjoyed working with different community partners on many boards and committees including PARFACT (Prevention and Risk/Protective Factor Committee) and the Hope and Prevention Pillar of the Sullivan County Substance Use Taskforce!"

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Bridget Hart



STORY AND PHOTO
BY DEREK KIRK



Bridget Hart is the Laboratory Director at AG Environmental.

Clean potable water, the quintessential ingredient for all human life, has been under assault from industrial pollution and unwillingness to recycle. Assuring that your water quality meets the standards set by the EPA's Safe Water Drinking Act is why Bridget Hart, the 24 year-old Laboratory Director at AG Environmental, spent so much time in her college science classes.

Bridget graduated from Sullivan West Central School District in 2017 and went on to earn her Bachelor's Degree in Environmental Geochemical Sciences from SUNY New Paltz in December of 2020. She then joined AG Environmental as a lab technician, and was soon promoted to Quality Assurance (QA) Officer for her attention to detail and accuracy.

After a year as Quality Assurance Officer she was elevated to Laboratory Director for demonstrating the technical capability to run over fifty dif-

ferent analytical tests in both Chemistry and Microbiology.

Her responsibilities includes verifying the analytical process of each test, triaging the order analysis to reduce turnaround time, and educating and training new technicians as the company grows. Bridget oversees the analysis of both potable water samples, wastewater samples from municipal wastewater treatment plants who are regulated by the EPA, and now, most recently, food samples from food producers that need to certify the safety of their products.

"My career at the lab has widened my scope of analytical chemistry from my college days and defined the true nature of every stage of the environmental laboratory sample-to-results process. Having worked at different levels of responsibility I have new insight into both the science of analysis and a new respect for the capabilities of the staff."

Her role is a mix of studying aquatic-based science and ensuring that testing

runs smoothly, as Bridget often utilizes state-of-the-art instrumentation for sample analysis. In addition, Bridget is responsible for applying and certifying the requirements of the NYS Dept of Health to maintain and expand the lab's accreditations.

"I love the sciences. When I was trying to decide on my major in college, I was about to go into electrical engineering, and at the last minute, I saw that SUNY New Paltz offered Environmental Geochemical Sciences and everything just clicked then and there," Bridget said. "The chemistry behind the environment, specifically the water. It was everything I was interested in."

Bridget noted that her love for what she does was fostered by her parents, Dan and Cathy Hart.

"I've always cared about the environment, it started from when I was younger and being outdoors," Bridget said. "I loved hiking and just enjoying every moment I spent outside as a child."

Melissa Jaycox



BY VINCENT KURZROCK

Melissa Jaycox, 32, is the Head Chef and owner of Milk and Honey Cookery LLC located in Hurleyville.

Jaycox, a native of Sullivan County and a Fallsburg Central School District alumna, first operated her business in Virginia Beach from 2018 to 2022 before moving back to her native county. She also received significant help from Fallsburg CSD in her efforts to re-establish herself. They helped her with everything and anything she tried. She also took orders from them to teach their young business owners how to purchase and resell for a profit in order to fund scholarships. She earned two degrees from SUNY Albany: one in Women's Studies and the other in Public Administration.

In October of last year, Jaycox relaunched Milk & Honey Cookery at its current location. She graciously acknowledged that the assistance of her local fire department had played a significant role in the opening.

After years of working in restaurants, Jaycox made the decision to start her own business. She had come to the realization that she needed to change her lifestyle and that she would have to do it on her own.

She continued to take on extra work to augment her income before the firm took off, working two jobs to ensure she could fund her venture.

"It took a lot of hard work but eventually paid off to be a sustainable business I am proud of," said Jaycox.

She takes care of all affairs related to her tasks alone.

This covers social networking, marketing, cuisine and other things. She does, however, proudly mention that her mother is an assiduous and committed order pick-up participant. This guarantees that everyone receives what they ordered.

Serving her neighborhood with

gorgeous, delectable meals is her favorite part of her profession. Be it cheese, ice cream, meats or anything else.

She made it clear that she enjoys seeing people's faces light up after just one bite. This is particularly true when they consume by first looking at what they're eating.

She also points out that a large portion of her current clientele consists of people she has met or knows.

"It means a lot to me to be home with the people I love and be able to give back to a community that has given so much to me," Jaycox remarks, humbled.

"I credit my success to a lot of hard work and love for the culinary field," said Jaycox. "I make everything with love, I agonize over ice cream flavors, getting them ~*just right*~, I test every product extensively before releasing it. Love is the secret to everything being delicious."

During her free time, Jaycox enjoys relaxing. She always loves spending time with her devoted dog, Chief, or reading a good book.

She finds a lot of inspiration in her parents. She aspires to be the kind of person who never gives up, who motivates others to work hard and who has influence and helps people in need. Traits like being industrious, actively participating in the community, planning events, managing food pantries and still finding time in their schedules to assist her.

"Looking at two people that have worked their entire lives to ensure I had everything I ever wanted or needed, two people that continue to work hard to ensure my success," said Jaycox. "They keep me going, whether they're helping me design my latest product, making a delivery for me, picking up things I forgot- they're willing to go the extra mile."

They encourage her to persevere despite her setbacks. They stop at nothing to support her when she faces difficulties. In order to assist her in case she needed any guidance, they have even spent several

hours FaceTime-ing with her while she was making pie dough.

Jaycox aspires to be the kind of person that never gives up, encourages others to work hard, and provides assistance to those in need. She makes it clear that her parents fall into such categories.

She also stresses that realizing your aspirations requires the support of a community. The Hurleyville Fire Department provided her with the necessary kitchen tools, her parents, FCSD, her devoted friends who have come long distances to attend little events, and Hurleyville as a whole comprise this "village."

"Hard work and your village are the key," Jaycox noted.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Melissa Jaycox is the Head Chef and Owner of Milk and Honey Cookery LLC.



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Michael Sutton



BY VINCENT KURZROCK

Thirty-seven-year-old Michael Sutton is Foreman Owner and Operator at Sutton Underground located in Woodbourne.

A graduate of Fallsburg High School, Sutton went on to graduate from the University of Colorado with a Bachelors Degree in Business Management and Human Resources.

A conscientious worker, Sutton has worked with his father who started the company nearly forty years ago since he was old enough to work.

The company is an underground utility company with two employees who Michael says are Chris V. and Jay B.

Recently his father, Chris Sutton, has been taking on a consulting role. Michael has been operating the company for almost 10 years, aided by the assistance of his sister, Stephanie Marsden.

Sutton makes sure they have the material and schedules installs, as well as management with daily operation.

Sutton operates machinery and does a lot of pipe install and shoveling.

"We all share those tasks," said Sutton. "I like to operate clean,

thorough and diligently when excavating. From the set up to break down of the job, making sure all i's are dotted and t's crossed throughout the process."

An aspect Sutton really enjoys about his work is being physically active and the ability to be outdoors during the day.

He credits his success to his father. Sutton describes his father as a smart business man with the moves he has made over the years. Sutton also emphasizes that he listens to his father wholeheartedly.

When not hard at work, Sutton likes to spend time with his loving family, which includes his wife, 3-year-old daughter, and two dogs. He also enjoys snowboarding, surfing, riding motorcycles or just relaxing on the couch with a good television show.

Sutton emphasizes that his father, Chris Sutton, is a fantastic inspiration to him. Always giving his all into whatever he does, Chris has always been the hardest worker and the kindest man his son has ever met. Michael aspires to be like him one day and carry on the strong legacy his father had started.

"I am second generation in this company," Sutton said, proudly, "And I hope, one day, my daughter or my sisters' sons will make it three generations."



Being a second-generation family member, Sutton hopes that, one day, his daughter would be one of the candidates willing to make it a three-generation. From left: Michael's wife Lauren Sutton, his daughter Emma, and Michael himself. They are joined by their two dogs Eevee (left) and Pugsley (right).

Young Professionals

'A salute to the future of our business community'

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Collin Ennis



STORY AND PHOTO
BY ALEX KIELAR

Collin Ennis grew up in Pleasant Mount, Pennsylvania and attended Forest City Regional School District before transferring to Scranton Preparatory School his sophomore year of high school. He then graduated from Scranton Prep in 2019 before attending the University of Scranton.

At the University of Scranton, Ennis was part of the Business Leadership Honors program and studied financing economics. He also said that he played golf in college after playing in four golf state championships in high school.

Ennis graduated from the University of Scranton in 2022 and then began working at Wayne Bank in Honesdale, Pennsylvania.

"I started as a Commercial Loan Associate and I am now a Commercial Loan Officer," the now-23-year-old said. "I could write my own loans and do business by myself."

Ennis said they do a lot of their business as a team concept and that they have three people who work all in Wayne and Pike Counties, as well as in New York.

"We work with people from Hancock, Deposit and Callicoon as well," he said. "We get phone calls from everybody. So it's very busy, but it's very good."

Ennis also said that they are busier now than his boss has ever been and that the banking world is crazy right now.

"Interest rates are very high," he said. "People aren't used to that but that doesn't mean business stops. People are gearing up to do a lot more."

Ennis said that his interest in college was more towards the investment banking side, such as wealth or asset management and that what he does now is on the commercial



Collin Ennis is a Commercial Loan Officer at Wayne Bank in Honesdale.

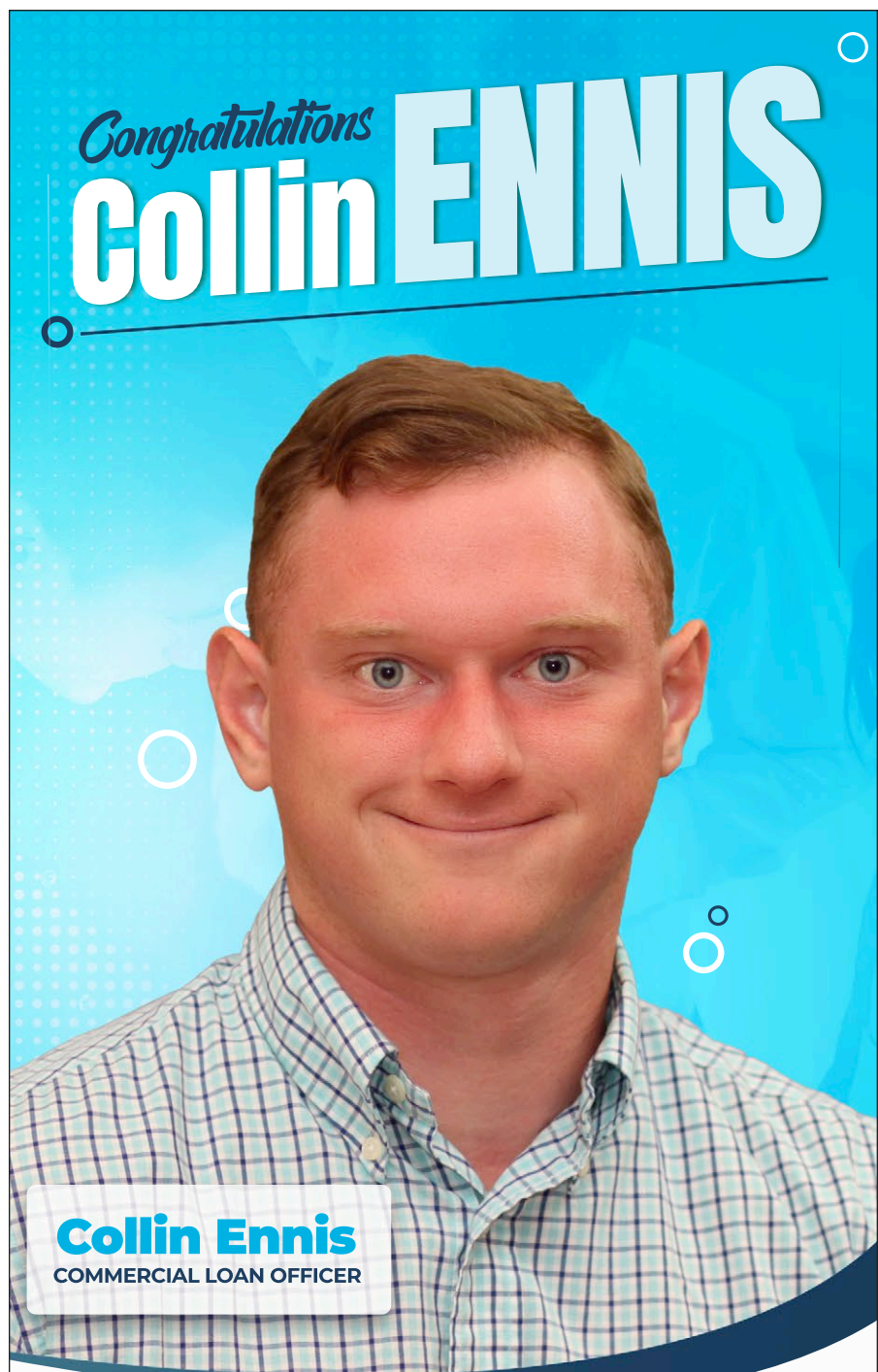
side. But he said that to be very successful in investment banking, you have to be on Wall Street or in New York City.

"That didn't appeal to me," he said. "So when you think about the business locally, local banks do a lot more for small businesses. We actually really help the communities, so that was a draw."

Ennis also said that he knew a few board members from Wayne Bank and interned there before graduating college. He said that they told him if he had any interest in staying on after graduation, they would love to have him.

"So far it's been quite the ride,"

PLEASE SEE ENNIS, PAGE 9Y



Collin Ennis
COMMERCIAL LOAN OFFICER

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Lee Karasik



Lee Karasik is the Training and Logistics Coordinator for The Center for Discovery.

STORY AND PHOTO
BY ANTHONY MORGANO

The Center for Discovery employs more than 1,700 staff across their various campuses, but many of the new hires start their journey with training by Lee Karasik, The Center's Training and Logistics Coordinator.

Lee, who grew up in Sullivan County, has remained in the area and is very involved in the community. He has been with The Center for Discovery for 18 years, and at 37 years old, he hopes to be there for many more.

"The Center has played a big part in shaping who I am, and I hope to be here until I retire," he said.

Lee's journey with The Center started long before his entry into the workforce after graduating from Monticello High School. Karasik has mild cerebral palsy and utilized The Center's outpatient services as a child.

"I'm proud of who I am. I'm thrilled to use my abilities to continue to make a difference in the

Sullivan County area. Disabilities are often viewed as a negative, but mine is a positive for me."

Lee works with local community organizations and businesses to help them understand the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and all things related to ADA compliance.

"My goal is to do whatever I can and be wherever I can to make the community more inclusive. I speak and advocate for individuals that might not be able to speak and afford themselves, and the goals of The Center align with that. They do a great job of advocating."

Before beginning his work at The Center for Discovery, Karasik began volunteering for the American Red Cross as a teenager. After 9/11, he knew he was able to start giving back. He was interested in emergency medicine and became a member of the Jeffersonville Volunteer First Aid Corps, in which he is now an EMT and Co-Captain.

"Ruth Ackermann, the Captain, was very welcoming. She told me that she'd support me in doing whatever I put my mind to. I initially became a New York State



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Certified First Responder and then in 2014 I became an EMT.”

After high school, Karasik needed to find a job. “I went to The Center, because this is the place where nobody ever says no, and the sky was the limit. I started as a receptionist 18 years ago, and the rest is history.”

That history included working in the Development Office, Information Technology, Recruitment and most recently Training and Educational Sustainability, where he’s spent the last thirteen years.

“This is where I belong, we do amazing things here every day.”

In his position as the Training and Logistics Coordinator, Lee helps to oversee the new staff orientation process. It has been re-vamped into a nine-day program to ensure an adequate level of training for the new recruits.

After orientation, the job doesn’t end for Lee, who regularly hosts CPR/AED and First Aid refreshers to the hundreds employed by The Center.

“My job is to teach them the fun-

damentals and get them ready for their work locations,” Lee said. “My training responsibilities don’t stop after orientation, though. We work every day to keep everyone trained and in compliance, so that there is never a lapse in care.”

Despite the main focus of Lee’s workday being Training and Logistics, you are likely to see him elsewhere, helping out where he can.

“I do whatever my colleagues ask, we all wear multiple hats and do many different things,” Lee said. “I do the best I can to ensure that the individuals we care for can have a good quality of life.”

According to Lee, “[The Center] is a very special place. When I’m here, it’s like I’m with my friends, doing important work. Every two weeks I get to meet a new group of people, and I look forward to changing their lives and perspective through the education and insight that I share.”

Lee is the father of three children, Reece (three), Lukas (two) and Lainey (five months), whom he shares with his fiancée, Shayna.

ENNIS: CONTINUED FROM 13Y

Ennis said. “It’s very busy, we do a lot of business and we really help people either start their businesses, help their businesses expand or anything. It goes from a business wants to buy a new truck to a business wants to buy a new warehouse. We see everything between \$15 million and \$5,000. No two companies, no two loans are the same. So it keeps you on your toes.”

Ennis said that some of his favorite memories in his current position so far are any instances in which the bank can save people money. He said that they also work closely with the Small Business Administration (SBA) which promotes economic development in the area.

“We just happen to be lucky to have very good SBA representatives here for us, and they offer better terms and conditions than any bank would ever do,” Ennis said. “So the more we can involve that, it saves the customer money and it’s better for everybody involved. The customers are able to expand their business when conventional bank

financing would say no.”

He said that the toughest part of the job is having difficult conversations on the phone and having to tell a business that they can’t offer them a loan.

“If the customer can’t afford what they have now, giving them more money is not the answer,” said Ennis. “Those are tough conversations to have and to tell them that their credit is not great right now and they can’t afford what they are trying to do. They have to prove that they could pay us back.”

Ennis also mentioned a specific program that Wayne Bank does for New York State businesses, called the Link Deposit Program. He said that they can offer a 2 percent interest rate reduction for qualifying businesses in New York.

“We did one where we saved the customer \$66,000 just by doing this New York State application,” he said. “That’s something that Wayne Bank offers and that we do especially for New York businesses which not a lot of other places do.”



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Michela Hillman



BY ANTHONY MORGANO

“Simply stated, Michela gets it,” read the Young Professionals nomination.

As the Marketing and Communications Coordinator for New Hope Community, Michela Hillman oversees the social media platforms.

“Her creativity in developing engaging content has had a strong positive impact on our social media presence,” explained the nomination.

Michela earned her B.A. in Public Relations with a minor in Marketing from SUNY Oswego and has been with New Hope for the past three years.

“I’m always thinking of how we can align and elevate ourselves as a leader in the community, as well as help shape the overall story of New Hope,” Hillman explained. “In other positions, I’ve always been responsible for helping shape the public perception of the client, organizing events and navigating media inquiries. With my background in PR, it makes me approach each project with a wide lens.”

Michela explained that “I come to work every day with an intention in my heart to help others.”

She goes to great lengths to learn about the people that New Hope supports and build connections with them.

“It has been the most meaningful work of my career,” Michela said. “They are so excited to see their photos on our Facebook, Instagram and TikTok @newhope1975 and it makes them feel empowered.”

Michela’s day-to-day work is ever-changing, and there’s always something new to do or see,

thanks to a “robust and fast-paced” Marketing Department.

“When I’m not strategizing social media plans or attending activities with the people we support, you can find me coordinating our next event,” Michela explained. “I’m responsible for planning events ranging from five people to 500 people. Our biggest events are our Staff Recognition BBQ in June for 250 staff, and the Family BBQ in September for over 500 guests. I work with our vendors, get budgets approved, ensure we’re properly staffed and run day-of logistics.”

With social media being a primary source for people to get information, being timely with posts and getting news out quickly is challenging, but important.

According to the nomination, “Michela often creates content ‘on the fly,’ which provides our followers with timely information. She works well with all programs to schedule time to capture content and integrates herself into their activities. She has increased our followers and engagement and does a great job of reporting statistics.” Michela explained that her life outside of work is “full of family, friends and travel. I’m recently married to Jake, the best husband in the world, and we’re getting a Chocolate English Lab puppy in April.”

She added that she’s happiest when baking her signature chocolate cake, relaxing on the dock in Maine or down the shore.

Coordinating marketing and communication can be a daunting task, but according to the nomination, “Michela takes on the challenges with excellent decision-making and judgement, resulting in exceptional experiences for our staff and attendees.”



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Michela Hillman is the Marketing and Communications Coordinator for New Hope Community.

