

Penn-Northwest **DIGEST**

Moving Mercer County, PA forward



From the Desk of Rod Wilt



On behalf of our team at Penn-Northwest Development Corporation, it is my pleasure to introduce our Fall edition of the Penn-Northwest Digest, a quarterly-produced digital publication dedicated to informing our region on how we are moving Mercer County forward! As the lead economic development organization for Mercer County, we are always looking for new ways to engage our membership, our government and community leaders, and our friends across the region. This publication offers insights into what makes Mercer County, PA a great place to live, learn, work and play, and will recap economic development activities going on across the entire County.

This issue we are focusing on the City of Hermitage where progress is being made on every front. There are new recreation amenities, a recent merger with the Borough of Wheatland, and a major expansion at Joy Cone. We are also sharing a recent article on Penn-Northwest member Hudson Companies that recently appeared in Capital Ideas magazine produced by Farmer's National Bank.

We hope you enjoy this third edition of the Penn-Northwest Digest. If you have an idea for a future article or feature, please reach out to us. There are so many great stories to tell about this place we call home!

Rod Wilt, Executive Director

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Penn-Northwest
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Affordable Solutions For Corporate Expansion

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About Penn-Northwest

We are the lead economic development organization that assists Mercer County's plans for growth. We envision an economically diverse, self-sustaining group of communities where business and employment opportunities exist, all types of education and recreational opportunities are present, and economic prosperity can be reached by all residents of Mercer County.

Hermitage Athletics Complex Welcomes Dek Hockey Rink

By Jane Goniea
Photography by Abby
Bonaquist and the City of
Hermitage

The City of Hermitage has had more than a few changes recently. The Wheatland Borough merger, the Hermitage Athletic Complex master plan, and the final days of the Shenango Valley Mall have all changed the outlook of the city, and officials are excited for more changes ahead.

The Hermitage Athletics Complex began as a Little League baseball field. Gary Gulla, Assistant City Manager for the City of Hermitage, calls the Complex a "grassroots effort" headed by student athletes, their coaches, and parents who brought it to the attention of the Commissioners that there were not adequate facilities for sports in Hermitage. The site blends seamlessly with the Little League fields, and has hosted playoffs and championships for multiple counties.

"I like to call the complex the hidden gem," says Mark Longietti, former State Representative and Director of Communi-



ty Development for the City of Hermitage. "I also like to think of it as a regional asset. It's a Hermitage complex, but it serves throughout the region. Everybody that we bring out there is like 'wow, I didn't realize we had this.'"

"If you talk to the parents of the local and away teams, they prefer to come here because of the quality of the fields," says Gulla. The pristine condition of the Complex is all thanks to Neil Hosick, the Facilities Coordinator for the City of Hermitage.

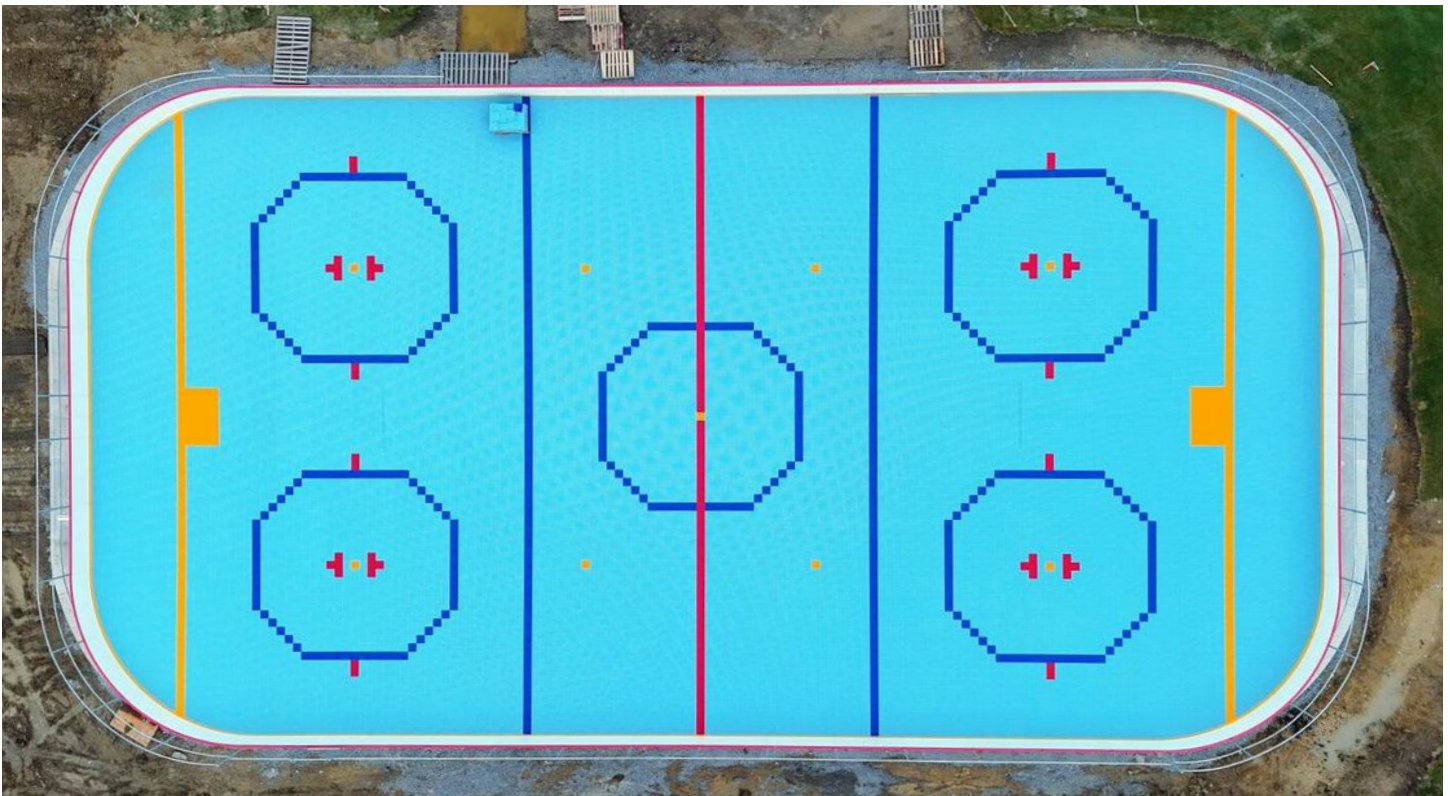
The multi-phase master plan began with a new dek hockey rink, with pickleball courts, new fields, extended parking, and bike trails all included in future plans. The dek hockey rink was borne of a petition with 600 signatures of many throughout the greater Northwest PA region. Many see it as a great opportunity to introduce hockey to younger kids. The rink itself is finished and slated to open by August or September.

"It's a great example of a local-state partnership. The initial site was established with 1.5 million dollars from

a bond issue. Now it's seven grants," says Gulla. "We believe that we're really good at delivering on plans. When we lay out a master site plan, we like to stay focused on it. It doesn't sit on a shelf – it gives us the tools we need to go to site developers."

As fall comes to the County, the athletics complex will be hosting softball, little league baseball, and other sports. Gulla and Longietti envision a future where all ages are included in the activities available at the complex.

Adapted from an interview with Gary Gulla and Mark Longietti of the City of Hermitage.



Mark Longietti and Gary Gulla discuss the Wheatland Merger

By Jane Goniea

The Borough of Wheatland officially merged with the City of Hermitage on January 1st, 2024, thanks to the hard work of staff and overwhelmingly positive votes of the residents. We interviewed Mark Longietti and Gary Gulla from the City of Hermitage about the merger process and what to expect next.

Longietti is the former State Representative for the 7th District and current Director of Business & Community Development for the City of Hermitage. Gulla is Hermitage's Assistant City Manager.

What was the reason for the merger?

Short answer: The City of Hermitage has the resources to help Wheatland grow. Hermitage has already been providing police and public services to Wheatland, which has built trust with the borough, and now the city staff can provide more support. For example, the merger gave the borough an 80% reduction in property tax.

"To the credit of the Wheatland borough officials, they recog-

nize that this will be a benefit for the entire community," said Longietti.

What was difficult about the merger?

"Stepping off the sidewalk and seeing how deep the water was. It's just an unknown. There haven't been many mergers so there's not a playbook," said Gulla.

Longietti added, "like Gary said, mergers are very rare across the state, across the country. There's not a road map for how they happen, and that meant certain legal gray areas had to be navigated."

What to expect in the future?

Hermitage will continue to help Wheatland with infrastructure needs, such as their sewer system, grants, and building and business opportunities.

"We are really looking to grow this community," said Longietti. Many parts of Wheatland will stay the same: the postal address, for example, would have to go before Congress to be changed to Hermitage. The school district is similarly separate from the merger.

"We try to be understanding of their history," said Gulla. "Things will still be Wheatland. The old municipal building parking lot was repaved, and the building will be used as a Wheatland Community Center. We don't look at it as a short-term win but a long-term opportunity."

"The merger has gone exceedingly well," said Longietti. "Twice now, the Borough Council President has come to our meetings, raised her hand and said, unsolicited, that the merger is going exceedingly well and she has only positive comments from residents."

Gulla added that Longietti was instrumental in making the merger happen. Longietti was the constituent for the 7th District, including areas such as Farrell, Clark, and Wheatland.

"We think we got it right and we think that we've gotten a lot of credibility with folks from Harrisburg," said Gulla. "Like, 'wow, how did you guys do this?' All the departments have their eyes on us."

Adapted from an interview with Gary Gulla and Mark Longietti of the City of Hermitage.

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Introduction to the LindenPointe Business Incubator and eCenter



By Abby Bonaquist
Photography by Abby
Bonaquist

Linden Pointe in Hermitage, PA opened in 2012 with the goal to foster economic development and growth for businesses within the region by creating new opportunities and investments and strengthening the pool of local businesses. It is a 115-acre campus setting that currently houses 14 local businesses with the goal to eventually create a full-sized technical park. Among its current businesses are the Pennsylvania Cybersecurity Center, IAG Consulting, CUPOD, eAcademy, and Penn-Northwest Develop-

ment Corporation. All of these, except the eAcademy, have their offices in the eCenter@LindenPointe.

The eCenter@LindenPointe is a startup business incubator located within Linden Pointe that is specifically equipped for businesses in development, management, and STEM-related fields. Like many of the facilities within Linden Pointe, the eCenter@LindenPointe is outfitted with plenty of eco-friendly technology, including high efficiency lighting and windows, geothermal HVAC system, reflective roofs, outside air-delivery monitors, and preferred parking for fuel efficient vehicles. It was also

constructed with sustainable lumber, over 35% recycled material, and low-emitting paint, flooring, casework, and adhesives/sealants. The eCenter@LindenPointe's goal is to create opportunities for entrepreneurial startups to gain the support they need by providing resources such as mentoring, guiding, and technical assistance.

Pennsylvania Cybersecurity Center (PCC) was started in 2022 by the Linden Pointe Development Corporation to diversify the local economy and to create more quality jobs by teaching cybersecurity and computer science to high schoolers, college students,

and adult learners. The past season saw 70 students in the program, with an expected increase in the coming season. So far, there have been 9 total graduates of the program.

IAG Consulting, LLC., headquartered in Hermitage, PA, was opened in 2021 by Ian A. Garfoli, P.E. It is a privately held, veteran-owned small business. They provide civil engineering and consulting services to government and municipal agencies, contractors, and private sectors in the Shenango and Mahoning Valleys, and specialize in development, design, and public work projects.

CUPOD LLC., created by Wayne Osterholm, is a device that enables chlorine dioxide to be delivered as an oxidizing agent in a clean, unharmed way. Its many benefits include being cost-friendly and efficient, simple and convenient, as opposed to other methods that include mixing, heating, and other more complicated techniques, and versatile, able to be attached to multiple dif-

ferent dispensing containers such as spray bottles, syringes, or nebulizers. CUPOD is currently focusing on the food industry but plans to expand its horizons in the future.

The eAcademy is an entrepreneurial launchpad for local high school seniors that allows them to gain entrepreneurship skills, build connections, and find career opportunities. It has been named one of the County's best economic development corporations and has a graduating class of over 20 students for the upcoming season of 2025.

While working in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, KAKE Development Corporation, the City of Hermitage, and Penn-Northwest Development Corporation, Linden Pointe continues to work toward achieving its goal of fostering economic development by creating a technical park within itself.

Adapted from material provided by Anna Kavulla, Linden Pointe, IAG Consulting, and CUPOD.

Joy Cone Plans New Expansion

By Abby Bonaquist

Joy Cone Company and Baking Group in Hermitage, PA, was started in 1918 and has since grown into the largest ice cream cone manufacturer in the US. Joy Cone is a 100% employee-owned company currently housing nearly 1,000 employees across their four locations: Flagstaff, AZ; Les Mars, IA; Mexico City, Mexico; and Hermitage, PA, which remains their corporate headquarters.

Joy Cone recently announced an \$80 million, 200,000 square foot expansion to their cookie plant in Hermitage that will create over 100 new jobs in the next two years and allow for over 850 employees within their Mercer County facilities. With this expansion, the company will also be moving into the retail cookie business with the ability to make and sell packaged cookies.

Sources: Joy Cone plant in Hermitage expanding; move will create create more jobs, www.ncnewsonline.com, and Joy Baking Group undergoing sweet expansion, WFMJ.com.



Hudson Companies Featured in Capital Ideas Magazine

By Abby Bonaquist
Photography by Farmers
National Bank

Hudson Companies was founded in 1977 by now-president and managing partner, John Hudson, as a construction business. It has since developed into a four-tier organization with lines of business in general construction, development, investment, and management. It is based in Western PA but has lines of work in Ohio, Florida, and Texas.

In a recent interview with the *Capital Ideas* magazine, Tyler Hudson, second-generation principal of Hudson Companies, says that the growth of the company can be attributed to the fact that they strictly stay in markets where they know there will be a high need for their services and to the brand that his father, John Hudson, built.

Hudson Companies started out on Commonwealth-leased properties, but Tyler Hudson redirected the business to focus on multi-family apartments in the mid-2010s. Now, their multifamily apartments outrank their government real estate.

Hudson Companies is a family-owned business that

takes pride in their long-term family involvement. Siblings Tyler, Jonathan, and Alex Hudson all hold principal titles and lead their own areas of the company. Tyler, being the oldest and most experienced at the company, has more of a senior role over his two siblings. He notes that this has been his passion ever since he was a little boy, and he attributes all his knowledge of the business to his father.

Hudson Companies is currently focused on higher education and similar projects in PA and

OH as well as continuing to develop commercial and multifamily properties. They also have several major projects underway in the Pittsburgh area, including some that will lead them into the luxury apartment market. As always, they plan to continue honoring the legacy of John Hudson by preserving and elevating Hudson Companies' brand.

Source: "Raising an Empire," from *Capital Ideas Magazine* 2024 Spring/Summer Issue.

