

The Current



An unseasonably warm start to the new year, while concerning, was enjoyed by all, including this member of the Oxbow Bend Dairy Farm in Gilbertsville — an organic, grass-fed, family operation that has been in the Sloan family for generations.

Numbers Don't Tell the Whole Story

The attractions of the Butternut Valley continue to encourage new residents and new businesses to take root here.

According to the 2020 Decennial Census, New York State and Otsego County population declined since the 2010 census and the Butternut Creek watershed was no exception. The population of the five towns that comprise most of the watershed collectively declined by six percent. Exeter, Laurens and Unadilla, which touch the watershed, also experienced declines in population, although Edmeston, which also borders on the watershed, bucked the trend and experienced a population increase.

But these census data don't tell the whole story. As is evident from the interviews in this issue of a sampling of new arrivals and new businesses, our community continues to be an attractive place to live, work and play. Good things are happening — too many to list them all but among them property sales and new residential construction are on the rise, bringing the promise of new residents to come, and tourism is increasing in Cooperstown and all around the county, bringing increased business to residents and sales-tax revenue to our towns and villages.

New businesses and attractions such as event venues, bed and breakfasts and vacation rentals entice visitors from within and outside the watershed. New breweries, a meadery and a new bakery have joined established dining venues. A hiking trail in Texas Schoolhouse State Forest and a soon-to-be hiking trail in General Jacob Morris State Forest add additional outdoor recreational opportunities.

Events like the County Fair, Morris Dancers in Gilbertsville, On the Trail of Art, openings and concerts at Dunderberg Gallery, firehouse-sponsored chicken barbecues and the newly named Butternut Valley Gravel Grinder are activities that draw visitors to our areas as well.

We at BVA are proud of our watershed and of the contributions we, as an organization, are making to our community.

Ed Lentz
Chairperson, BVA



February 2023

- Population Changes
- Why We Moved Here
- Open for Business
- Fun in the Valley

Mark Your Calendar

Earth Day
April 22

On the Trail of Art
June 10-11

Summer Harvest Festival
August 19

Butternut Creek Fun Float
September 17

Butternut Valley Gravel Grinder
October 7

Mill History Part 3
October 18

BUTTERNUT
VALLEY
ALLIANCE

Connecting and Sustaining
the Butternut Creek Watershed

By Peter Martin

The Allure of the Butternut Valley

New residents share what attracted them.

Jason and Coulter were looking to get out of New York City. They didn't just want to go to a nearby suburb, but they didn't want to go "full back-road rural." They wanted a house with some history — a bit of land and water close by. Their house in Morris provides those aspects and more.

For Mike and Lauren, the goal was to move somewhere calmer than where they were living in New Jersey. "We ended up in Morris by chance just because we really liked the house," said Lauren. "We had no idea Morris existed," Mike added.

Barbara and Keith came to Gilbertsville "entirely by accident" as well. After months of looking in Ulster, Dutchess, Columbia, Sullivan and Delaware counties, they expanded their search and found the house in Gilbertsville. It was "the best and most beautiful house we'd seen in all our searching," said Barbara, "and the realtor said, 'You'll be OK in Gilbertsville — lots of artists doing their thing up there'. We literally knew nothing about the Butternut Valley except that it was beautiful and we loved the house."

Matt and Maura settled in New Lisbon where they found the community open and accepting. They like that as well as a great place to raise kids, it's a half-hour from city life and they love having a house on a quiet and low-traffic country road.

After residing all over the globe, Matt and Michelle landed in Morris. They think it's cool they can ride their bikes to Weaver's Market and find fresh vegetables and healthy eats.

Five couples from varied backgrounds with different paths to the Valley and yet, once they arrived, their experiences were similar. The challenge of adapting to a different pace, whether it be the length of real estate transactions or the speed of internet connections, is a common observation of newcomers. For some, it was a completely new way of living.

"I cried for at least two weeks straight when we first got here," Lauren admits.

"I'd like to say 'then I adjusted perfectly', but that would be a lie. Every aspect of my life changed at once. The area is beautiful, but the house proved to be more overwhelming than I anticipated. We've never had a yard to maintain. I'm pleasantly surprised by how much I enjoy mowing the lawn and collecting an unreasonable amount of leaves. We'll see if I feel the same about snow!"

“Most people who've passed us outside have made it a point to welcome us. We've had neighbors that we've lived near for years that wouldn't even pick their heads up as you passed them on the sidewalk.”
—Lauren

Mike adds, "The beauty of the area is what I like most, even something as simple as a trip to Walmart is met with beautiful scenery. I didn't think it could get prettier than the Fall and then it snowed and everything started sparkling. It was something else."

Barbara and Keith echo the challenges of adapting to a more rural environment. "Of course a new place is always a bit of an adjustment and there is certainly a learning curve," says Barbara, "like running a wood-burning stove or driving a distance to go food shopping...but in general it has been an easy adjustment.

What's remarkable," she adds, "is the beauty of the area, the kindness of the people, making new friends quickly, being with many creative people in a small community, learning more about farming and getting re-connected to the land."

Also, there is a noticeable sense of community. Newcomers frequently mention the welcoming community in the Valley and many get to know the area by becoming involved in the wealth of activities available — Michelle and Matt attended the Summer Harvest Festival and discovered BVA and CNYC and Matt volunteered at a tree planting. Maura participated in the last blood drive.

From friendly neighbors and lots to do to beautiful Fall foliage, lush greens

of Spring and white Winter snows, the Butternut Valley seems to have it all. When driving down Route 51 or Route 23 at 55 mph per hour many of us don't notice what a wonderful area we live in. But if you slow down, you can take a hike at Gilbert Lake, ski on some of our cross-country trails, walk your dog at Texas School House State forest or even just pull off to the side of the road and snap a photo of one of our beautiful sunsets. It's completely clear why the Butternut Valley is an amazing place to live.

Additional reporting by Bob Thomas.



Guests await their tables at the Gilbertsville New Neighbors Picnic at The Major's Inn last year. The popular event will be held again in September 2023.

Photo by Kristina Strain

By Ed Lentz

New Businesses Bring Growth

Despite the pandemic, enthusiastic owners felt the time was right to open for business.

The face of business in the watershed is changing. Over the course of the past several decades, small family-run dairy farms that once dominated the landscape have largely, though not completely, gone away. Some have given way to other types of farming such as field corn and other crops, beef, lamb, and even goats. Others have gone vacant or have been subdivided and developed as the watershed increasingly serves as a bedroom community for Oneonta, Norwich, Cooperstown and elsewhere and has come to be seen as an attractive location for second homes, short-stay rentals and retirement havens.

Notwithstanding these changes, small business in the watershed is alive and well — and varied: auto repair, contracting, logging, hair salons, maple syrup, restaurants, gift shops, farm stores, jewelry, taxidermy, bakeries, butchers, general stores, campgrounds, landscaping, nurseries, daycare, furniture, sawmills, and even a dog “getaway”, a brewery and a goat dairy.

BVA volunteers spoke with several new business owners in the watershed to ask for their insights on starting and running a small business in the watershed.

All of the operators we spoke with have had mostly good experiences and are enthusiastic and optimistic. They all agree that among the good things about doing business in the watershed is that the people in our community are welcoming and supportive.

All also agree that doing something they enjoy and being able to do it close to home are key drivers of their desire to start and operate a business locally. For some, it's not having to commute far if at all and for others it's being close to their children's school. In some cases, purchasing an existing business was a viable way to leave the corporate life.

Another common theme is that land-use regulations, to the extent that there are any, have not been a barrier to starting or operating their businesses. They report no issues dealing with town,

village or planning boards. Most had no concerns with Otsego County Code Enforcement, but there were complaints about inconsistent application and enforcement of regulations and high permit fees. The state agencies that some have to deal with, Agriculture & Markets, the Department of Health and the Liquor Control Authority, have not been significant obstacles and in fact have been helpful (although obtaining a liquor license seems to take much longer than it should).

Another positive factor is our proximity to Oneonta and Cooperstown from which businesses can draw locals



Advice from local business owners:

- Do what you love.
- Plan realistically.
- Be prepared to struggle and have the resources to get through lean times.
- Do your homework.
- Know your customers.
- Don't sacrifice quality for cost.
- Be ready to work long, hard hours.



Special thanks to these businesses for their contributions to this article:

- 5 Kids Bakehouse
5 Commercial St, Gilbertsville
- Honeypot Farms Meadery
5789 St Hwy 51, Burlington Flats
- Longview Farm & Event Center
228 Longview Dr, Pittsfield
- Scotty's Pizzeria & Restaurant
136 Main Street, Morris
- Emerald Glen Getaway
217 Pegg Rd, Morris

and out of town visitors. The feeling of being in the mountains and yet close to other business and amenities is an attractive balance for many recent business owners. The natural beauty and charm of our watershed not only make this an attractive place to live and work but also help draw folks in from neighboring communities. Of course, as noted by several business owners, being in a beautiful place proximate to population centers and tourist attractions is not enough to ensure a successful business — the product needs to be high quality.

Only a few negative components were commonly cited. One of these is inextricably linked to the nature of our community: a small population. It is difficult to operate a business where there is a limited number of prospective clients, especially during the “low season,” making it all the more important to offer a quality product at good value. The cost and challenge of marketing to out-of-towners can be prohibitive as well. As can managing a steady income stream when the nature of the business is seasonal.

Another obstacle can be sourcing materials and finding quality resources such. Everything from flour for baked goods, quality meats for dinners or glass bottles for serving beverages or bottling products have been hard for local businesses to purchase. And for those whose business depends on out-of-town visitors, the lack of amenities such as speedy, internet service can be a negative.

But despite the challenges — and, more importantly, because of the benefits — small business in the watershed is more than just alive and well. It is thriving and gives reason to be optimistic about the sustainability of our community and the natural resources that make our watershed such a wonderful place to live, to work and to play.

Your support matters. Please patronize local businesses whenever possible.

Additional reporting by Flo Loomis.

Having Fun in the Watershed



Over 75 riders rode over hills and valleys during the New Lisbon Gravel Grinder, hosted by CNYC and Butternuts Beer and Ale brewery.



Students from Morris Central School and SUNY Oneonta joined local residents in planting and securing over 200 trees — mainly sycamore and tulip — to assist Upper Susquehanna Coalition in its ongoing creek-protection efforts.

Dangling toes wasn't the only way to enjoy the Butternut Creek during this year's Fun Float. Over 45 folks took to the water with BVA and the Otsego County Conservation Association.



Creek Float photos by Michele Farwell and Bob Thomas. Tree planting photos courtesy of CNYC. Gravel Grinder photos courtesy of CNYC.

Ensure the Future of the Butternut Valley Alliance

- Make a generous donation by check, online or with the QR code
- Become a member and invite your friends
- Join our Board of Directors and become an influencer
- Volunteer your time. Register at bva.exec@gmail.com



BVA is a 501(c)(3) serving communities within the watershed of the Butternut Creek.
www.butternutvalleyalliance.org ~ Box 43, Morris, NY 13808 ~ info@butternutvalleyalliance.org

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