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Three Franklin County Businesses Transition to Next Generation of Entrepreneurs

Franklin County Economic Development, CBIT provide financing solutions for new owners

Franklin County, N.Y. — An estimated 10,000 to 16,000 businesses in New York’s North Country region are expected to close or change hands in the next decade as their owners enter retirement. Bolstered by the commitment of young entrepreneurs and the support of local economic development organizations, three Franklin County businesses — **Little Town Lanes** and **Martin’s Handmade Pretzels** in Moira and **Happy Camping RV** in Vermontville — will remain active in their communities for years to come.

According to the North Country Center for Businesses in Transition (CBIT), a program of the Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA), younger entrepreneurs are often unable to access the capital they need to purchase an existing business. In response to this need, Franklin County Economic Development Corp. (FCEDC), a CBIT partner organization, worked closely with new owners of the three businesses to develop customized solutions that meet their business transition and financing needs.

“We are honored to support the next generation of business leaders in Franklin County,” said Russ Kinyon, director of economic development at FCEDC. “These entrepreneurs bring valuable experience and energy to our local businesses and the communities they serve. We’re excited to see how they shape and grow these businesses into the future.”

Over the last three years, Kinyon and Jeremy Evans, FCEDC’s chief executive officer, have been working with business owners to identify and address their financing needs. The agency has expanded its existing gap lending programs to offer more flexible terms and specialized services for entrepreneurs.

“In our work connecting retiring business owners with possible successors, we find again and again that access to capital is a major hurdle when purchasing an existing business, even when the interested buyer is an employee who is well positioned to take over,” said Danielle Delaini, ANCA’s entrepreneurial program director. “Russ and Jeremy’s work with these young entrepreneurs has been instrumental in making these transitions possible.”

Max and Veronica Nason had been working at Happy Camping RV in Vermontville for six years when they learned of the opportunity to purchase the business. “Going through the usual avenues to secure funding to buy was a huge challenge. We are younger, and no banks wanted to take us on with a reasonable offer that would put us in a good position,” said Max Nason. “Russ and Jeremy were extremely knowledgeable, and they were rooting for us throughout the entire process. They saw our vision to not only purchase the business, but also to build a new service garage and expand. They worked hard to help us secure the funding we needed.”

Jeremy Bonville spent countless hours bowling at the local alley in Moira as a child, and he eventually went on to join the venue’s staff. When his employers announced they were ready to retire two years ago, he began the process of purchasing and renovating Little Town Lanes.

“This has been a huge improvement for the business. The lanes had the same look for 20 years, so it was a major change,” said Bonville. He said the updates will allow the venue to support more special events and bowling competitions. “We hope to continue to grow the business and provide our community with a safe place to have fun with friends and family.”

Also in Moira, Martin’s Handmade Pretzels changed hands last year when Josiah Martin purchased his grandparents’ pretzel bakery with help from his father Justus. The family business has been in operation since 1935 and in 2019 relocated from Theresa, N.Y. to this rural community in western Franklin County. When the bakery and country store sustained heavy damage from a 2020 fire, Martin’s completed a major renovation and reopened in December 2021. The business aims to employ at least 12 staff who will make hundreds of thousands of pretzels every year to be sold locally and at established markets in New York City and across the country.

FCEDC partners assisted Martin throughout the transition process through referrals to regional resources, connections to stakeholders and support promoting the new business.

“For me and my family, the ability to do what we love and share it with others is a legacy we all want to be part of,” Martin said. “Personally, it is very fulfilling to be back in operation and continue the family tradition for another generation.”

“These success stories demonstrate how individualized services like customized financing makes a real difference for business owners who are just starting out,” said Evans. “We look forward to helping more aspiring entrepreneurs achieve their goals through flexible lending options and other resources.”

Other CBIT organizations that offer flexible loan services for transitioning businesses include the Adirondack Economic Development Corporation, Essex County Industrial Development Corporation, Hamilton County Economic Development, and Lewis County Economic Development.

Upcoming CBIT programs for transitioning businesses include a networking event in February 2022 and the Center’s second *Small Communities. Big Opportunities.* conference in February 2023. Both events

will provide business owners and potential buyers opportunities to connect with each other and learn from experts and business owners who have been through the transition process.

In 2022, CBIT will continue its *Plan for the Future* workshop series and *Sellers Working Group* and offer a new *Train-the-Trainer Program* that provides staff from economic development organizations, chambers of commerce and nonprofits with skills to support owners who are preparing for succession. Training participants will begin the nine-month program on January 27 with the goal of leading business transition working groups in their own communities in August.

The Center recently announced its 2022 community liaisons and partners:

- **Carol Calabrese**, Essex County Industrial Development Agency
- **Matthew Courtright and Erin Mullen**, Ticonderoga Area Chamber of Commerce
- **Ben Dixon and Laura Pearson**, St. Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce
- **Rachel Karp**, Saranac Lake Area Chamber of Commerce
- **Russ Kinyon**, Franklin County Economic Development Corp.
- **Jenna Kraeger**, Lewis County Economic Development
- **Rachelle Martz and Christy Wilt**, Hamilton County Economic Development
- **Jessica Spiegel**, Adirondack Economic Development Corporation
- Greater Watertown-North Country Chamber of Commerce
- SUNY Canton Small Business Development Center

CBIT was established by ANCA in 2018 with grant funding from the Northern Regional Border Commission and is currently partially funded by a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture's Rural Community Development Initiative.

For more information about CBIT and its programs, visit ownanorthcountrybusiness.com or contact transitions@adirondack.org.

Attached: one (1) PDF document and two (2) photos

Photo 1: Josiah Martin (left) and his father Justus, both holding scissors, celebrate the reopening of Martin's Handmade Pretzels in Moira, N.Y. with family, including Josiah's grandfather Lloyd (behind Josiah) and community leaders in December 2021. The bakery and country store reopened after a fire damaged the building in December 2020. Jeremy Evans and Russ Kinyon, pictured left to right at far right, of Franklin County Economic Development Corp. attended the ribbon cutting ceremony.

Photo 2: Max Nason, pictured, and his wife Veronica are the new owners of Happy Camping RV in Vermontville, N.Y.

The North Country Center for Businesses in Transition (CBIT) partnership includes the following organizations:

[ANCA](#) is an independent nonprofit organization growing the New Economy in northern New York. Using an integrated approach to sustainable economic development and prosperity where economic health, community vitality and ecological stewardship are equally important outcomes, ANCA focuses on creating opportunity for people with diverse backgrounds, experience and education levels.

The [Adirondack Economic Development Corporation Inc. \(AEDC\)](#) is a not-for-profit economic development corporation. AEDC was formed in 1976 as a cooperative effort of community leaders from towns in the northern Adirondacks to reduce traditionally higher than average levels of unemployment and to expand employment opportunities for the residents of the region. The AEDC's mission is to foster the growth of North Country communities through support for existing and new small businesses.

The [Essex County Industrial Development Agency's \(ECIDA\)](#) mission is to create a viable business environment that will attract compatible and diverse sustainable economic development opportunities focusing on major assets, retention/expansion and attraction projects for public benefit to encourage business development and advance job opportunities, health, general prosperity and economic conditions to improve the standard of living and quality of life. They can provide assistance to eligible projects; financing, economic incentives, assistance with local regulatory agencies and building and site location assistance.

[Franklin County Economic Development Corp.](#) exists to improve the quality of life in the Franklin County region by supporting economic growth, employment and community development. FCEDC offers a broad range of services to help local businesses expand and succeed. From loans and tax incentives, to technical assistance, to buildings and business parks, we're here to help grow local business.

The [Greater Watertown-North Country Chamber of Commerce \(GWNC\)](#) is a membership organization with over 100 years of experience working to strengthen business and enhance the community in the Greater Watertown – North Country region. Since its establishment in 1903, the chamber has grown to become the largest business association in the North Country. They represent businesses of varying sizes and industries, helping them to drive growth and make meaningful connections.

[Hamilton County Department of Economic Development and Tourism](#) and the [Hamilton County Industrial Development Agency \(HCIDA\)](#): HCIDA assists with the general prosperity and economic welfare of the citizens of Hamilton County. The primary objective of the agency is to encourage and foster entrepreneurial activity, business expansion and job creation. The Economic Development and Tourism Department advocates, promotes and helps to improve the quality of life in our communities both for our residents and our visitors. We help to foster the development of healthy businesses and institutions through marketing, networking, promotion, business assistance and outreach.

[Lewis County Economic Development and IDA](#), as a one-stop-shop, work together as the central office to provide business assistance and new business development in Lewis County, NY. The agency works locally and regionally to enhance business opportunities, help create jobs and maintain economic stability within Lewis County. Through the Naturally Lewis brand, we promote Lewis County as the 'natural choice' to live, work and do business.

The [St. Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce, Inc.](#) plays a pivotal role in strengthening and maintaining the economic health of St. Lawrence County. The mission of the St. Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce is to cultivate, develop and support Chamber members and other businesses by creating a vibrant business climate that encourages growth and enhances the unique quality of life in St. Lawrence County.

The [Saranac Lake Area Chamber of Commerce](#) (SLACC) acts as a catalyst for business and community development in the Greater Saranac Lake Area. SLACC provides services for its membership and generates economic development with promotional and marketing strategies.

The [Ticonderoga Area Chamber of Commerce](#) (TACC) is a non-profit organization that serves, markets and promotes the Ticonderoga Area including Ticonderoga, Crown Point, Hague, Moriah and Putnam, NY. TACC serves as the area's Business and Visitor Center. TACC's Mission is to initiate and provide programs, services and leadership which will enhance a cooperative business community and create a vibrant economy, making the Ticonderoga Area an exceptional place to live, work and visit. TACC's Vision is to be the leading advocate for business, serving as a driving force in the economic vitality of the greater Ticonderoga Area, uniting communities and maximizing resources. TACC's key areas of focus include: membership, business, tourism, communication, leadership and organization.

The [SUNY Canton Small Business Development Center](#) (SBDC) at Clinton Community College is part of a statewide network of business assistance centers supported by the State University of New York and the Small Business Administration. The New York State SBDC (NY SBDC) is accredited by America's Small Business Development Centers (ASBDC). The SBDC is charged with assisting North Country entrepreneurs, small business, and industry through advising, training, and research. Additionally, the SBDC provides needed services to manufacturers, women, veterans, minority, and physically challenged individuals, or on businesses impacting distressed and targeted areas. Counseling services are free and confidential.

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