

Vision2025 Engages More People, Projects

More than 1,000 people took part in Vision2025 projects in 2017 through more than 30 Capture Teams, each focused on community improvements.

The volunteers developed projects focused on creation of new trails and greenspaces, social fabric, and economic development and entrepreneurship. The efforts produced several millions of dollars of cash and in-kind investment.

Lift Johnstown Coordinator Brad Clemenson says that Vision2025 has been the perfect complement to Lift's effort.

"People would say to me, 'You should do this' or 'You should do that.' I'd tell them, 'Why don't you do it? I'll support you and connect you to some people to help.' But none of them stepped up. Vision2025 got people together up front so they saw others with similar visions beside them ready to help."

The United Neighborhoods Capture Team, one of many, encourages collaboration between community-improvement and resource groups to make Johnstown a better place to live. The United Neighborhoods team focuses on neighborhood development, youth engagement, and pride and heritage. Leaders on



a Citizens' Forum answered questions and provided resources to address concerns and community development.

Another team, the Greenspace Capture Team, facilitated a Main Street Greenway plan, Adopt A Highway promotions, Lowe's Hometown Heroes

Project at the train station, PNG Park meadow restoration, pet friendliness stations, and trail overhauls using native plants at the Jim Mayer and the Urban Greenway Trails. They planted over 1,000 tulip, daffodil, and crocus bulbs in Central Park: look for the bright, vibrant blooms this spring!

The Trails Team focused on the Inclined Plane hillside, where it's building mountain-bike trails and restoring the James Wolfe Sculpture Park and Rolling Mill Mine historic trail.

The Rivers Capture Team strives to improve Johnstown's image and economy as the community begins to recognize the rivers as a vital asset. Our rivers need habitat improvements and access for boating, fishing and just simply playing, which will improve quality of life to attract businesses, entrepreneurs and a trained and educated workforce.



Central Park Christmas Village



Inclined Plane Trail Builders



Students Learn About Community Gardens



Lift Project Party Attracts 800 People

Efforts Promoted by Lift Johnstown in 2017



Volunteer Award Given to JUMP



Whitewater Park Lower Feature Fixed

Metalworking School and Creator Square Advance

The Blacksmith Shop, built in 1864, will soon find new life as a metal arts school. As Creator Square gets running in another year and this school ramps up, Johnstown can built its "makers" image.

Patrick J. Quinn runs the forging program at the Center for Metal Arts in Florida, NY, teaching resident blacksmithing classes and coordinating the visiting artist workshops. Quinn has taught blacksmithing, fabrication, and tool making at South-

ern Illinois University and elsewhere.

He expects more than 275 students this year with classes starting in the adjacent Pattern Shop and moving into the Blacksmith Shop after it's renovated.

Dan Neville joins Quinn as the jewelry and metalsmithing studio coordinator. Meanwhile, \$780,000 has been committed to renovating a historic building along Central Park in the Downtown as Creator Square, where three people

will have studio and display space while teaching their art at schools or other venues nearby.

The goal is to make Johnstown a hub for "makers" who create practical things with artsy characteristics.

Bottle Works Arts on Third Avenue in the adjacent Cambria City Historic District has eight, more traditional artists working in studios that are open to visitors at various times.

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"Mountain Town"

The idea of Johnstown as a "Mountain Town" was lifted in 2017 when a Blue Ridge Outdoors magazine article headlined "The Next Great Mountain Towns" featured our area and when the Economic Summit again focused on outdoor recreation as a catalyst for economic development.

"Engulfed by the Laurel Highlands to the west and the Allegheny Mountains to the east, Johnstown is undoubtedly a 'mountain' town," wrote Jess Daddio, the magazine's outdoors editor. "Look at any aerial image of the city and you'll see a vibrant downtown (recognized as a national historic district) fronted on all sides by lush green mountains and bisected by the Conemaugh River.

"History buff? You've come to the right place," she continued. "Take a quick ride along the Staple Bend Tunnel Trail to see the country's first railroad tunnel. Along the way you'll see remnants of the Allegheny Portage Railroad, central Pennsylvania's first mountain-traversing railroad.

Other recreation assets, local dining and other opportunities were noted.

Pete Eshelman, the Summit's keynote speaker who is director of outdoor branding for Roanoke Regional Partnership, said, "I think, just like in Roanoke, Virginia, Johnstown is set in this beautiful setting. You kind of have an urban core, but then you have the rural area around it, so you kind of have this mountain-metro mix opportunity.

"You have the rivers, the lakes, the trails, the mountain biking, the kayaking, the skiing. You have all these opportunities there."

2017 Highlights

- Metalworking and Makers can reshape our area.
- Quality of Life Promoted.
- Over 1,000 people improving community through Vision2025.
- Significant trail progress made.
- Volunteer recruitment and awards.

Business Card Highlights Area's Quality of Life

Did you know that Johnstown has 48 hiking trails, 41 mountain-biking trails, 14 breweries and 24 music venues within a 45-mile radius?

UPJ Marketing professors John McGrath and Skip Glenn are working to create a better image for Johnstown by educating locals and visitors about the amazing variety of things to do in our area.

They designed a business card, shown here, to be printed on both sides and folded in half to fit in a wallet or shirt pocket. The cards will be available at events and a variety of venues around the area.

McGrath and Glenn also developed a quality-of-life index comparing 15 small cities located in mountain areas all over the East.

They found, for the second year in a row, that our area ranked exactly in

the middle among the cities with roughly similar populations.

Johnstown ranked 7th, scoring above Wilkes-Barre/Scranton and Williamsport, PA; Winchester and Staunton, VA; Cumberland, MD; and Wheeling, WV. Our score of 112.28 was almost identical to Burlington, VT, up almost 3 points from last year and just behind Altoona at 114.98. Charlottesville, VA, had the top score with 124.40.

The index, presented to the Economic Summit, used objective data on affordability, health care and entertainment, not opinions.

Glenn said that, as we develop new recreation venues and as businesses such as Stone Bridge Brewing open in the community, our score should climb and, over time, our economy should improve.

Trail and Recreation Projects

Several trail and recreation projects moved ahead in 2017.

Whitewater Park Phase II was by far the biggest, costing \$400,000 to improve the lower playboat wave in the park in the Stonycreek River and develop restrooms in adjacent Greenhouse Park.

The Urban Connectivity Plan is assessing options for the best ways to connect the September 11th National Memorial Trail and Main Line Canal Greenway through the city, including downtown. These trails will attract visitors whose spending will improve the economy and encourage local residents to adopt healthier lifestyles by walking and bicycling. They will connect other assets, including the train station, which was partially renovated, and the Inclined Plane, where major renovations were in design in 2017.

A separate plan was nearing completion to identify the best route to bring the 9/11 Trail from Flight 93 National Memorial to Johnstown.

A small trail segment was built to start connecting the West End to Conemaugh Gap via a new park being created off Route 56. The trail is part of the Main Line Greenway.



Building toward Conemaugh Gap

Funding was in place and clearing done for an improved Path of the Flood Trail from East Conemaugh to Upper Woodvale on an old trolley line and a



quiet residential street instead of using Route 271/ Maple Avenue, which is industrial and has heavy truck traffic.

The Ghost Town Trail was extended and efforts were being made to develop the final part of this trail as the nation's first looping rail-trail. Paperwork was sent to railbank an abandoned railroad to extend the Ghost Town Trail from Ebensburg almost to Loretto.

Major progress was made on Quemahoning Lake Mountain Bike Trail, a 17-mile loop around this beautiful reservoir. About 10 miles of the trail were done and funds were being raised to complete the trail this year. The Que Trail is expected to become a multi-state destination for mountain bikers. The trails being built on the Inclined Plane Hillside will add to the cluster of these trails.

Lift Johnstown Supports Volunteers

Lift Johnstown continued its support for volunteerism by presenting a quarterly Volunteer Spotlight Award, organizing the annual Project Party and supporting the Get Connected on-line volunteer registry of United Way of the Laurel Highlands.

At the 2017 Project Party, more than 800 people "shopped" for volunteer opportunities at over 75 non-profit agencies based on their mission and needs. Seminars for non-profits added to the event's success.

Four Volunteer Spotlight Awards were presented over the year to recognize outstanding contributions to our community.

Walt Freidhoff, Dave Shoemaker and Malcolm Snyder received the 14th Spotlight Award. They were honored for years of volunteer service with the Johnstown United Methodist Parish (JUMP), building ramps for the handicapped and making minor home repairs for thirty to forty households per year, servicing elderly

people or others with health or mobility issues and low incomes.

The Lady Dirtbags Softball Team participates in several community service projects, including serving Christmas dinner at the Salvation Army, running a food drive, and packing food for the Cambria County Backpack Project, which provides weekend food to over 300 kids in five school districts.

The 16th recipient, Douglas Yonker, president of Laurel Highlands Historical Village, was first recruited to volunteer at Lift's Project Party. He leads his group in building awareness of the ethnic cultures that form the Johnstown community, moderating events and public speaking.

Elisabeth Felix was nominated through an impressive 5-page endorsement document by the Cambria County Camp Cadet pro-



Elisabeth Felix poses with State Troopers Frank Lasinsky and Robert Kunsman, who nominated her for the Volunteer Spotlight Award.

gram for her leadership skills, work ethic, mentoring and fundraising efforts on behalf of the Camp. She was also nominated by Rev. Ray Streets of the Journey Church for her volunteer efforts at her church and her numerous successful community service projects.

Wellness, Community, Economic Efforts Promoted

The March for Peace and 2nd annual Johnstown Walk of Hope were among many community events promoted by Lift Johnstown.

Marlene Singer of Conemaugh Health System, leader of Lift's Community Health Committee, organized teams to raise over \$30,000 for local cancer patients through the Walk of Hope. This year's Walk is June 2 at Trojan Stadium.

The March for Peace brings together area residents from diverse backgrounds to support peace and justice.

Numerous social, cultural, recreational and other events, as well as Path of the Flood Race and several 5K and similar fundraising events, were promoted in Lift's monthly e-newsletter, which is received by thousands of area residents.

Also promoted were Discover Downtown Johnstown's Christmas parade and highly acclaimed Christmas tree, which was named one of the 10 best trees in



Walk of Hope

the country. Light Up nights also were promoted in the West End and Moxham. Lift writes a monthly Johnstown Magazine column. Several articles interviewed young professionals who remained in or returned home to Johnstown to work in family-owned businesses, in part to highlight why they love our area.

Lift's stakeholder meetings bring together community leaders to encourage collaboration and partnerships, and to identify projects that need a little extra "lift."

Economic efforts promoted include 814 Worx, providing inexpensive space for entrepreneurs to get started; the Bridge to Pittsburgh effort to get Pittsburgh businesses to hire area residents who can

work remotely or in satellite offices here; and Entrepreneurial Alchemy, providing monthly entrepreneur meet-ups, one-on-one counseling for budding entrepreneurs and brainstorming on broad economic-development ideas.

PITtchFest, which offers cash awards for the best new-business ideas, this year added prizes for the best "social capital" ideas. Central Park Square won with a plan to stimulate and brand businesses around Central Park. The project to build a better Path of the Flood finished second.

Improving Transportation

Lift Johnstown continues efforts to get more passenger-rail service in Johnstown but has merged its Transportation Committee into a similar committee at the Cambria Regional Chamber of Commerce to avoid duplication. Several Lift committee members will serve on the Chamber committee.