

With Brainy, Creative Executives, Otsego County's Future Secure

By: Jim Kevlin 04/17/2019 5:00 pm

EDITORIAL

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A couple of months ago, Gerry Benjamin, director of SUNY New Paltz's Benjamin Center and an expert on Upstate New York, saw the region's economic future in nurturing and growing what we have.

Craft brewing and yogurt production, in particular, are developing nicely, he said, although neither is generating sufficient jobs at sufficient salaries to begin replacing the manufacturing behemoth that was the Mohawk Valley.

The advantage to incremental growth, of course, is that it can be absorbed organically, with job along I-88 incrementally reviving the declining community centers to the north.

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Springbrook, of course, is the poster child, growing to over 1,200 jobs on a simple concept: Better care for handicapped children can be provided more humanely and at lower cost in proximity to their New York State families. Win, win.



Paul Landers, Pathfinder Village president/CEO

Two more examples of growing in place – growing and excelling is more like it – may be found in the two organizations that will be honored at the Otsego County Chamber's annual Gala & Celebration of Business Thursday, May 2, at Foothills. (Reservations, call 432-4500, ext. 2.)

One, venerable Pathfinder Village, is vigorously placing its Down syndrome and otherwise handicapped residents in real jobs, filling real employer needs. For instance, with Astrocom in Colliersville unable to find workers, Pathfinder is deployer a half-dozen trainees and two supervisor daily to that aircraft parts fabricator.

Former Pathfinder residents are also working at Golden Artists Colors, Price Chopper, Silver Dollar Optical, NYCM and NBT Bank.

Two, Les Grummons arrived in Oneonta in 1970, having acquired the Rotherby-Murphy Funeral home, and knowing virtually nobody.

He quickly developed a strategy: Get on friendly terms with as many people as possible. He joined the Rotary, the Elks, Moose and Eagles. He pursued his interest in the Sons of the Legion, rising to state commander. He served on the board of Catholic Charities, St. Mary's and Hospice. He rose to the state Funeral Directors Association presidency, cementing his reputation in the industry. He was elected to Common Council.



Les Grummons, 49-year proprietor of the Lester R. Grummons Funeral Home

In the process, he solidified the Lester R. Grummons Funeral Home among the front ranks of such local institutions, a solid business that has provided service and employment to many over almost a half century.

As detailed on Page B1 of this edition, Pathfinder will be honored at NBT Distinguished Business; Grummons, as Eugene A. Bettiol Jr. Distinguished Citizen.

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Successful businesses create successful communities.

The state Comptroller Office a few years ago reported that only 29 jobs had been created in Otsego County in 2016 but, one, state data lags and, two, it doesn't reflect the groundwork that was being done to make way for growth we're starting to see now.

For instance, Custom Electronics is creating 50 jobs for to make high-storage batteries, building blocks of a renewable future. A grant has ensured Corning's 175 Oneonta jobs for 15 years. Cooperstown Distillery and Andela Products, Town of Richfield, are anticipating expansions and 10 new jobs each. Some 50 jobs are unfilled at Amphenol in Sidney. A little bit of natural gas would allow a distribution center to bring 300 jobs to Schenevus in short order.

Plus, the colleges, schools and hospitals provide a stable base.

And with Paul Landerses and Les Grummons among us, the current downward trend, we can confidently hope, is temporary.