

## Reinvention is our strong suit *NEPA adept at handling tough times*

By Natalie Gelb Solfanelli

It is customary to welcome a new year with ambitious goals and plans for the next 12 months. Businesses establish benchmarks to measure progress. This year is particularly challenging, given the stressed economy and concerns about world events. It might be comforting to remind ourselves of the old saw, "Tough times don't last, but tough people do!"

The folks in the Lackawanna Heritage Valley are not unfamiliar with economic, hard times. From the demise of the coal industry, the shift from railroads to highways, air and sea for transporting goods, the morphing of the textile industry to garment manufacturing, which faced deadly competition from offshore and overseas production, northeastern Pennsylvanians have had to reinvent themselves numerous times. The work ethic and adaptability of our citizens, a legacy from our immigrant culture, are noteworthy and appealing to companies when contemplating relocating to our region.

Ironically, the hard economic times of the 1950s and 60s were a blessing in disguise. With a dearth of money to tear down old buildings and replace them with the unremarkable structures of that era, we preserved the magnificent edifices designed and constructed in the industrial heyday. Visitors marvel at the architectural gems that enhance Scranton. These buildings define us as the descendants of visionary entrepreneurs, philanthropists and craftsmen, who possessed determination, social conscience, religious tolerance, talent and the courage to take risks.

Today, as efforts are made to transition from a manufacturing economy to a service economy, one can observe the same perseverance and progressive attitude that established the Lackawanna Valley as an industrial giant 100 years ago.

"Wall Street West" is a collaborative effort to promote the region's location as an ideal location for back office operations for major financial institutions. There are proposals for the utilization of the facilities at Tobyhanna Army Depot as an important location for strategic purposes during times of national crisis. The joint Lackawanna Monroe County Rail Authority is working to establish passenger rail service from New York to Scranton. The Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce is establishing prototypes for the needs of particular industries requiring natural resources that are abundant here. Scranton Tomorrow focuses on economic development with the Scranton Business Alliance, a consortium of downtown businesses. The Commonwealth Medical College (TCMC) will admit its first class this fall, bringing not only students, but also the incentive for programs and courses of study at

regional colleges, universities and health-care organizations.

LHVA has an ambitious agenda for groundbreaking and ribbon cuttings along the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail (LRH1). Construction of the long-awaited Scranton Riverwalk from Steamtown to Olive Street will begin this spring. LHVA will commission a Greenway Plan to connect the LRHT with spur trails, parks, educational and recreational facilities, streams, lakes and open spaces throughout the Lackawanna watershed from Forest City to Duryea. New sections of trail will be designed for between Archbald and Jermyn and from Scranton to Taylor. LHVA will acquire additional properties required to complete the LRHT. The first of several interpretive kiosks will be erected at an historic venue, not only to provide information about that location, but also to provide maps and directions to guide visitors from site to site throughout the Heritage Valley. LHVA, LRCA, Scranton Tomorrow and Scranton Area Foundation will unveil an exciting and ambitious plan for a Riverfront District that will link the Riverwalk, the planned mixed use development at the Scranton Laceworks, including the ArtSpace live/work facility, TCMC and the redeveloped 500 block of Lackawanna Avenue.

All of this takes money and each and every organization faces its own challenges to be creative and innovative in identifying new or untapped sources of funds. Both the Pennsylvania Heritage Parks program and the National Park Service have had severe budget cuts that will limit LHVA's ability to provide grants to many of the worthy cultural and historic projects that will come its way. Fortunately, however, LHVA is extraordinarily fortunate to have the strong support and commitment of the Lackawanna County Commissioners, who are promoting the Lackawanna Heritage Trail as a key project for the economic stimulus program under President-Elect Obama. Completion of the 40-mile trail is expected to create hundreds of construction jobs, in addition to the services of planners, landscapers, engineers and many other professionals in the acquisition, design and development of the trail and greenway.

And, last but not least, the Lackawanna Heritage Valley gets better all the time at being an affordable and friendly place for tourists looking for accessible, fun, interesting and enlightening activities in a welcoming environment for all ages. Let's continue to welcome them!

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