



A Gigantic Step Forward

It's the beginning of a new year. The time for making resolutions has just passed, and the challenge of keeping them will probably pass without much fanfare in a week or two.

But how do you take the most meaningful and boldest step possible into the future? Can you imagine the biggest step you could possibly take at this juncture? Does it reflect the ultimate level of confidence in yourself? Your organization? Your community? Could you even step forward with enough confidence to tackle the largest opportunity in view, something bigger than anything you've even thought about doing before, something that represents a monumental leap into a completely new horizon, by taking on a project that lies at the very heart and center of everything that matters to you?

Almost a year ago, a "For Sale" sign went up on the largest traditional retail space on Monongahela's West Main Street. It was the main thing you could see if you sat in the offices of the Monongahela Area Chamber of Commerce and looked out the window. *(continued on newsletter side)*

Photo by M.A.C.C. President Anthony Bottino

2

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<p><i>Check out our "Monongahela Main Street Program" Page on Facebook & "Like Us" if you do (Please!)</i></p>	1 Happy New Year!	2 7PM, New Eagle Borough Council 6-8PM, Crochet Club, Monongahela Area Library	3 11AM, Story Time, Monongahela Area Library 5:30, Writers Group, Monongahela Area Lib. 6PM, Library Board, Monongahela Area Library	4 Noon, Monongahela Rotary Club, Hills Restaurant 6-7PM, Intro to Taxes, Marianne Kleppner of H&R Block, Monongahela Area Library	5 7PM, Friday Night Praise, 1st United Methodist Church Computer Classes by Appointment, Monongahela Area Library	6 8AM-5PM, Donut Sale, St. Damien's Noon-5PM, Mid Mon Valley Model Railroad Club "Open House," Upstairs of New Eagle Borough Building Midnight-2AM, Monongahela Main Street Program's Pajama Party at Eat'N Park
7 8AM-Noon, Donut Sale, St. Damien's Noon-5PM, Mid Mon Valley Model Railroad Club "Open House," Upstairs of New Eagle Borough Building, Last Day of the 2017-18 Season Open House 6-7PM, Orthodox Christmas, St. Nicholas Orthodox Church	8 6-8PM, Crochet Club, Monongahela Area Library Last night of all-night dining at Eat'N Park <i>Save The Date — March 17th:</i> 5PM, Monongahela Area Chamber of Commerce's annual Purse Bash New Eagle VFD Social Hall	9 11AM, Story Time, Monongahela Area Library 6-8PM, Crochet Club, Monongahela Area Library <i>Save The Date — March 24th:</i> 7PM, Rotary Club of Monongahela's "Funny Fundraiser," New Eagle VFD Social Hall (Show Starts at 8)	10 7PM, Monongahela City Council 11AM, Story Time, Monongahela Area Library Noon, Monongahela Area Chamber of Commerce membership meeting, Hills Restaurant 7:30PM, Brian Anselmino Mem. Basketball Game, Canon-Mac Gym	11 Noon, Mon. Rotary Club, Hills Restaurant 10AM, Monongahela Ministerium, 1st UMC 5-6PM, Positive Refusal Skills, Monongahela Area Library, program by Marissa Scullion (Washington Co. Drug & Alcohol Commission) on resisting drug use 7PM, Boy Scouts Troop 1448, 1st Christian (every Thursday)	12 5-8PM, Steak Night Monongahela Elks 7PM, Family Movie Night, showing "Hidden Figures," First United Methodist Church Game Night, Little City Coffee Computer Classes by Appointment, Monongahela	13 3-6PM, Spaghetti and Meatball Dinner at First United Methodist Church 10AM, Mommie and Me Cake Decorating, North Charleroi Dairy Queen
14 <i>There are 79 events listed on this month's calendar, 72 of which are in January and in Monongahela. That's a lot of reasons to come into town.</i>	15 Martin Luther King Day 4:30-5:30PM, Art of the Month, making Bath Bombs, Monongahela Area Library 6-8PM, Crochet Club, Monongahela Area Library 6-8PM, Quilter's Group, Monongahela Area Library	16 11AM, Story Time, Monongahela Area Library 6-8PM, Crochet Club, Monongahela Area Library <i>Save The Date — Feb. 24th:</i> 7PM, Steel City Comedy Tour, ben. Monongahela Area Hist. Society, at Rippel's on the Creek	17 11AM, Story Time, Monongahela Area Library 5:30, Writers Group, Monongahela Area Lib.	18 Noon, Mon. Rotary Club, Hills Restaurant 5:30-6:30, Minecraft Party, Monongahela Area Library 6PM, Girl Scouts at First United Methodist Church	19 5-6PM, Boy Scouts Troop 1352, St. Damien's (every Friday) Computer Classes by Appointment, Monongahela Area Library	20 <i>Suggestion:</i> Schedule future January events: for the 2nd Sunday or 3rd Saturday
21 Orders due for Pepparoni Rolls & Soup at First United Methodist Church for pick-up on 3 & 4 February <i>Additional Event for 15 January:</i> 6PM, MARC General Membership meeting, Sunday School Parlor, 1st Presbyterian Church	22 4:30-5:30PM, Adulting 101 — Taxes, Monongahela Area Library 6-8PM, Crochet Club, Monongahela Area Library 6-8PM, Quilter's Group, Monongahela Area Library	23 11AM, Story Time, ILibrary 11:30-1:30PM, Building Kick-Off at new Chamber Headquarters, 211 West Main Street, Press Conference at 12:15. 6-8PM, Crochet Club, Monongahela Area Library 6PM, Presentation on Stem Cell and Platelet Rich Plasma in Orthopedics at Mon Valley Hospital	24 11AM, Story Time, Mon. Area Library <i>Additional Event for 12 January:</i> 7:45AM, Mon River Towns Program Coalition Meeting, Kara Alumni Center, California University of Pennsylvania	25 Noon, Mon. Rotary Club, Hills Restaurant 1-2PM, Book Bites Book Club, reading Half Broke Horses by Jeanette Walls 6-7PM, Environmental Health Project, Mon. Area Lib. 6PM, Girl Scouts, First United Methodist	26 5PM, Scouts Pinewood Derby, First United Methodist Church 6PM, Game Night, Little City Coffee Computer Classes by Appointment, Monongahela Area Library	27 8AM-1PM, Heritage Tourism Summit, Washington & Jefferson College 7PM, Scouts Pinewood Derby, First United Methodist Church 10AM, Mommie and Me Cake Decorating, North Charleroi Dairy Queen
28 10AM-4PM, Train Sale and Show 2018, Sponsored by: Mid Mon Valley Model Railroad Club and New Eagle Volunteer Fire Department, New Eagle VFD Social	29 4-5PM, Nookworms Teen Book Club, reading "The Testing" by Joelle Charbonneau, Monongahela Area Library 6-8PM, Crochet Club, Monongahela Area Library 6-8PM, Quilter's Group, Monongahela Area Library	30 11AM, Storytime Monongahela Area Library 6-8PM, Crochet Club, Monongahela Area Library	31 11AM, Storytime Monongahela Area Library 5:30-6:30PM, Pajama Storytime, Monongahela Area Library	New Chamber Headquarters Building Kick-Off <i>The Monongahela Area Chamber of Commerce Cordially Invites You 11:30-1:30PM</i> Press Conference at 12:15 Lunch will be Served, Music, Remarks by Key Players	<i>The appearance of the duende always presupposes a radical change of all forms based on old structures. It gives a sensation of freshness wholly unknown, having the quality of a newly created rose... The duende likes a straight fight...on the edge of a well...the character of a fight to the death. - Lorca</i>	<i>Check out our "Monongahela Main Street Program" Page on Facebook & "Like Us" if you do (Please!)</i>

Copies of calendar available at: Sparkles by Shell — 246 W. Main St., Monongahela Area Chamber of Commerce Office — 211 W. Main St., Rabe's Trading Post — 210 Fourth St., or by emailing a request to mainstreet15063@gmail.com
The Monongahela Main Street Program

by Terry A. Necciai, RA, Preservation Architect / Architectural Historian (703) 731- 6266

Vol. 5, No.1

Check out the "Monongahela Main Street Program" Facebook Page, and "Like Us" (if you do).

Officers/Members of the Monongahela Main Street Program
President: Dan Tregembo **Vice President:** Tobias Provan
Secretary: Paula Pro **Treasurer:** Christopher Grilli
City Representative: Ken Kulak

At-Large Bd. Members: Anthony Bottino, Randall Rodriguez, Dorothea Pemberton, Scott Frederick, and Margaret Brown.

Executive Director: Terry Necciai

The Monongahela Main Street Program is a charitable corporation incorporated under the laws of Pennsylvania and has been designated by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service, as of August 2017, as a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation.

(Continued from Calendar side)

In the last couple of days of 2017, after almost a year of research and negotiations, Anthony Bottino, Dorothea Pemberton, Frank Duda, and our chamber of commerce's board of directors, with help from the Mon Valley Alliance, and the legal counsel and bankers working with these entities, not to mention a few others behind the scenes, sealed a deal on a sale that was, at times, very difficult to finalize. The Monongahela Area Chamber of Commerce now owns a building whose first story is about ten times as large as the office space they have been renting. Kudos, kudos, and more kudos to them for taking this huge step by faith and making this transition happen. Maybe the difficult spots were that thin threshold where our community's recent past crosses over a razor's edge into a future that can only be based on optimism, growth, and synergy, ...that same barely visible line we all pass from time to time as we cross from what we know for certain onto the ghost-like foot prints before us, steps we are constantly being asked to take into the future, the kind of a step forward that is always based more on faith than on certainty.

On the first story, this building consists of a single room that is about 60 feet wide and about 110 feet deep. It is located at the very heart of our downtown retail area. Over 170,000 automobiles pass by it every day, according to our City government leaders. It is at the very vortex of an ever-increasing whirlwind of community-based activities in which 30 or more organizations have been making over 900 noteworthy activities happen annually in the name of their beloved community, Monongahela.

As the saying goes, the three things that matter most in real estate are: "Location, Location, and Location."

And Does This Building Ever have an argument for Location!

Like the center of a huge wave, or the peak of a musical crescendo, or the largest diamond on a multi-jeweled ring, this one glass-fronted room is the summit of our City's downtown hierarchy. With a bold facade that is slightly larger than everything around it, it has been the architectural centerpiece and the natural focal point of our City's downtown district ever since its walls rose, in 1904, out of the ashes of an older row of downtown buildings that just burned down. It represents the very crosshairs of the "genius loci" of a place that matters to us all, the fulcrum on which our downtown was balanced for many years, central to the row of buildings we think of when Monongahela's iconic memory comes up in the warm moments that most of us experience within our personal or collective memory when we think of our old home town. It is the epicenter of the irresistible "duende" (in the sense used by Federico Garcia Lorca) of our communal identity, our sense of place, when it does its work within us, the very core of what we think of as words like "childhood memories," "hometown spirit," and "coming home" come to mind.

In economic and geographic terms, this one building is arguably the property at the center point of the single most strategically viable commercial "Location, Location, Location," in all its conceivable dimensions, between Elizabeth and Rostraver Township, and between West Newton and Bentleyville.

But that will only be so when it is put to some use, or set of uses appropriate to the larger context. And it will only be true, in the fullest sense of the words "strategic" and "commercial," if there are interesting things to do at the core of this community: attractive shops, good banking services, availability of food and beverages, clean and well-lit sidewalks, attractive buildings where it looks like the owners really know what they have, a wide variety of events, local citizens and supporters who really care about the community and who work together smoothly and can "sing together in both unison and harmony." Things we can only aspire to, as it sometimes seem

Wait a minute! This is Monongahela in the late 2010s. Although we sometimes behave as if we are stuck in the ruts of our own past, we now have most of these things – Almost daily events occurring on West Main Street and our riverfront, from weekly and monthly live music to a farmer's market and ethnic food and annual festivals, at least twelve major events a year, and daily activities at our local library, to strong organizations, solid banks, places to eat, and a citizenry that is increasingly expressing its love for the community. In the last year, more building fronts were restored or rehabilitated – started or finished in a 5-month period – than in any year since 1976. People and organizations are beginning to work together more than ever. Hundreds of local citizens are making these things happen, and former residents now express their love for the town too, on a daily basis – often online, thanks to modern electronics. The problem spots, from neglected buildings, undercapitalized businesses, and vacant real estate – as well as a lingering association, mostly by non-residents,

with a long-gone steel industry that was never located here in our City limits in the first place, and other heavy industries that are no longer as relevant as they once were to the local economy – to carelessly strewn litter and disengaged or disillusioned people, or personal problems that have kept some people from getting a footing here as productive citizens, (...all of these) ...are gradually fading from our local scene.

Back to the building in question, a historic building with a tremendous story, one with interesting facade details, designed by Frank P. Keller, one of our most important local architects, long the center of foot traffic and trade in our downtown, a fun place to visit, as recently as the early 1990s, when you had a couple of dollars to burn, yet it is also a building that was almost lost to a fire ten years ago, a building whose upper stories, inside and out, have received very little attention either before or (especially) after the fire, and one whose first floor has contained has an attractive show room that has been, on average, only open about 6-8 hours a week.

Realtors love to preach the "location, location, location" mantra, but then they switch arguments quickly to their second-most-favorite expression, "highest and best use."

There may be other ways to calculate the highest and best use for 6,600 square feet in an old downtown area with limited parking (not to mention the basement and two upper stories, 19,800 addition square feet under roof here, above and below the highly visible first story, all of which could one day become occupancy-worthy downtown space, but which are now out of view, in crumbling condition, in an era in which construction can be very expensive).

But this is a case where the "highest and best use" of a 6,600 square feet of first story floor plate is not the real "highest and best use" issue. Downtown buildings were traditionally built (at least from ancient Rome until about 1950) to rely on one another, economically and socially and architecturally, as contiguous rows, aggregated in a "cheek-to-jowl" type of construction where each building touches others and shares walls with others, usually on two sides. Buildings built this way typically create the "street-wall" of the core area of a community. In Venice, these "street-walls" created charming piazzas (plazas) where a hundred or so neighbors gathered, over the centuries, to share the water from a communal well. Along the Grand Canal, the street-wall composed of the facades of the palazzi (palaces) of the wealthier families evolved into a picturesque scenes that came to symbolize how the individual character of the strong individual can also weave together in harmony with others, just like a row of people having their picture taken with arms on each others' shoulders in a big communal hug. These rows of facades became the prototype for architecture elsewhere. They form an essential characteristic of almost every image we've seen of Amsterdam, for instance. They line the grand Main Street of Austin, Texas, and they form the setting of a great courthouse in Waxahatchie and thousands of other court-house towns around the country. This kind of Main Street, composed of hierarchically arranged buildings assembled into contiguous rows, is central to what we see in our mind's eye when we think of *It's a Wonderful Life*, or *Miracle on Main Street*, or *Back to the Future*, or *The Truman Show*. It is part of what draws thousands of tourists on a regular basis to Galena, Illinois, and to Ellicott City, Maryland, and to Bedford, Pennsylvania, and part of what Walt Disney built at the center of his first great amusement park to attract tourists.

The highest and best use of the Towner's Mammoth Store Building (see our March 2016 edition of this newsletter if you would like a history of the building), known to most of us as the "McCrory's" or "The Finishing Touch," relies on its neighbors also being put to use in their highest and best use. It's really all one thing here. If the surrounding buildings are used well for economically viable purposes, then this one can also thrive. And the inverse is also true: the smaller buildings can not find their way to their highest and best use if the lights are never on at the largest building that dominates the center. This is true even though the neighboring retail spaces are all smaller than this one, often much smaller, and owned by different owners with wildly varying ideas of what their real estate investments are all about. But putting this building to the kind of use our Chamber of Commerce has in mind is the best way to increase the chances of achieving economic success in the surrounding buildings as well.

The "highest and best use" calculation that matters here, at least to us, is the "highest and best use" of the 200 block of West Main Street, and the "highest and best use" of the entire downtown area. These buildings need to work together.

Take parking, for instance. In truth, there is no parking problem in most of downtown Monongahela right now at all. We don't even have the problem that some communities have of there being too much parking – In some communities, the parking problem is that adding parking over the years has put the buildings too far apart for any business to benefit from shared pedestrian traffic. In the worst examples, some towns have privately held lots with signs saying not to visit other downtown stores without first moving your car to that store's privately held parking lot, which leads to even more griping that "there isn't enough parking here." (Parking, by the way, will most likely be "tighter" in the future here in Monongahela, since we are determined to build this community up, and bring it back into its highest and best use, ...and yet right now nearly half the upper story space in our downtown buildings is vacant, and nearly half of the first story space in the 200-

block of West Main Street was vacant at some point in 2017; - To the benefit of everyone, all of that is about to change as six downtown buildings are at some stage of rehabilitation as future retail rental space and as the upper story space of at least four locations is soon to contain viable uses.)

From a community point of view, the question on the table that the Chamber of Commerce has had the foresight to recognize has been "How can this community maximize pedestrian activity, including tourists and other people who participate in our events, while minimizing largely 'perceived problems' like limited parking, in a time when people are less accustomed to walking the sidewalks of downtown business districts, ...plus the challenge of independent business ideas gone awry in an epoch dominated by shopping malls and big box stores, ...and the challenges of effective maintenance where old buildings are concerned..." (Maintenance is especially a concern here, not so much because the buildings are old enough to be "broken," but because we have so many really well-built old buildings with materials designed to last a very long time, and the use of shorter-life materials in remodeling them, over the last 50 years, is very often the source of the problems that arise.)

So, therefore, "How can the use of this building become again the center of trade here, the lynchpin, to bring our entire downtown area to its highest and best use?" "What needs to be at the vortex of the whirling new economy that already appears to be taking shape here in downtown Monongahela?"

We need the retail space at the Towner Building location to be what it was built for if we are to continue to grow as a community. It needs to be open to pedestrians; it needs to generate foot traffic; it needs to offer modest-priced and small-scale merchandise that brings people back over and over again. It was, after all, a "Five and Ten," a store that offered things people needed on an everyday basis, at prices that anyone could afford, as low as "five cents" and "ten cents" in the era before the Great Depression when the long-time store that was located here took shape. Maybe today, with other discount stores now at our community's fringe, the prices could be higher at the center, but the building still needs to engage people, from passersby looking in the windows in the evening and shoppers looking for a shopping experience, to entrepreneurs in need of a place to try a business idea and community groups looking for a place to meet.

Think of what could have happened here if the Chamber had not taken this step. The first story could have become apartments or a suite of offices, in either case most likely at the cost of losing about 50 feet of plate glass and the opportunity to light the center and focal point of our business district once again with window displays. It could have become someone's storage warehouse. It could have become a place frequented by fewer than 10 shoppers or visitors a week.

The opposite is now possible, since the Chamber office, as it now stands, has more visitors a week than the former business had in a month. A plan for gradual growth is now possible, as a retail incubator or shopping emporium or restaurant facility, or some combination thereof, and such plans could take shape here in ways that would eventually be worthy hundreds of visitors or shoppers each week, maybe even thousands, maybe even those thousands who come to this town already for the weekly rock concerts along the river, the monthly band concerts at the Chess Park Gazebo, the Fleatiques, and Light-Up Night, and our July and November Fireworks displays... – The Fourth of July alone draws over 5,000 people to the riverfront and streets of this City – *Why not* keep them here and do business with them?

The answer will now not really address the question of "Why Not." It looks pretty clear to just about all of us now that, ...because the Chamber has taken this step leading us onward toward a stronger future, ...the questions before us are no longer about "Not" doing something, or even about "Not" doing *anything*, but about "How...?": "How do we do what we seem to see happening in this move?" "How far can we all go now that the first really big step has been taken?" In how many big or gradual steps? How long will it take?"

Happy New Year, Monongahela. Let us continue to step forward, one-and-all, arm-in-arm, aggressively, into the first new year of an amazing future!

As of 8 January, Eat'N Park will no longer be open past midnight. The new hours are: Opening at 6AM each day, Sunday-Thursday to 11PM, and Friday-Saturday to midnight.

The Monongahela Ministerium's Food Pantry has moved from the old Armory to First United Methodist Church.

As per a recent press story, the City of Monongahela is receiving additional LSA funding for the public boat launch.

Our Sympathy to the Kevech Family, including Elaine Amos, David and Misty Kevech, and Kevin and Sherry Kevech, as well as their other family members, in the passing of their mother and grandmother Mary Virginia "Jean" Kevech, on December 28th. Although she lived on the family farm in Fallowfield Township all her life, Jean was the co-owner of Frank and Jean's Restaurant at the corner of West Main and Second Street, located here in the 19800 after the long-tenured Peter's Restaurant; also in the 1980s, the property became home to Elaine's Styling Salon, which recently became Christalynn's Hair Designs. The exterior of the building was recently painted and refurbished as a project of the Monongahela Façade Grant Program.

"For a Thriving Downtown and a Fully Engaged Community"
 The Monongahela Main Street Program