

Legacy *Matters*

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Smart Investment Community Spirit



Valley Shakespeare Festival founder and Executive Director, Tom Simonetti, organizes performances in front of a range of different audiences and settings.



Ansonia Mayor, David Cassetti, encourages Valley residents to participate in local community events.



Founders of The Valley Voice website and newsletter, Ralph and Patti Villers, report on local happenings in the Valley.



Valley Independent Sentinel Editor, Eugene Driscoll, interviews a local guest about community events on the Valley Navel Gazing Podcast.

A community is defined by what its people share both individually and collectively. Whether it is entertainment, special events, or holidays celebrated by municipalities, these positive experiences shared amongst participants strengthen the fabric of the Valley, deepen relationships, and build community spirit.

While it can be difficult for families to find low or no-cost opportunities to participate in community events, there are many local nonprofits, organizations, and small businesses that play a role in providing something for everyone. The Valley's rich history of industry, close proximity of towns, and diverse population creates a unique opportunity for communities to come together.

Tom Simonetti, founder and Executive Director of the Valley Shakespeare Festival, knows how powerful community events can be. "Seniors, kids, families, and neighbors come together at our shows with a great sense of spirit and love. Last year, a woman told me about her friend who grew up in the Valley but now lives in Texas," he said. "This friend plans her trips home to see family in Shelton around our shows because of the community spirit she experiences at our performances. I hear stories like that again and again. People return to see what we've put together because of what it means to them and how special it is to reconnect with others or create new friendships on a lovely summer night in the park."

Before each show, Tom makes time to enjoy a peek from the wings of the

stage to see members of the audience waving to one another.

He added, "Through what we do, everyone in the Valley has the opportunity to experience a free, professionally-produced show with Equity performers. Not everyone has the time or resources to go to Broadway and anyone in the theater can tell you how important it is to reach a broad audience."

This year, three performances of Shakespeare's play, King Henry VII, will come to life at Veterans Memorial Park in Shelton on July 11th-14th. While there is no charge to attend, donations of \$10 will be gratefully accepted.

Classic literary works however are not the only entertainment available to the community.

Nicole Heriot-Mikula, Co-Founder of Celebrate Shelton, said, "We work hard to bring quality events into our area to be another option for everyone to enjoy what's taking place in our own city - like the quality theatre, local festivals, small businesses and local restaurants to show our children why we're proud to raise them in these Valley towns."

Heriot-Mikula described, "Celebrate Shelton is a city-wide, private initiative that began in 2014 to create low to no cost events while highlighting the best our area has to offer. Through Celebrate Shelton, we've created a series of events that we hope excite individuals, families, and music lovers."

Events in 2019 will include: Food Trucks on the River on June 21st and September 13th from 4-9pm; the Downtown Sounds Summer Concert

Smart Investment Community Spirit



The Alpaca Gnomes kicked off the first week of Celebrate Shelton's Downtown Sounds in July 2018 to a full house.

Series on July 19th, 26th and August 2nd from 5-9pm, featuring live bands, artisans, food trucks, and a Kids Hour; and the Community Tree Lighting on December 6th at 6pm. All events take place at Veterans Memorial Park in Shelton.

"We're a proud part of this community and we value our small businesses and the thriving community which surrounds them." Heriot-Mikula said.

Ansonia Mayor David S. Cassetti commented, "Participation from local government and residents is important in making any town successful. It's not just to boost the local economy but to boost spirits, too. I want to keep that spirit up and continue the trend I've helped foster since coming to office. We have something to do from spring to fall, like the Easter egg hunt, the enhanced Memorial Day parade with more school participation, and our Veterans Day celebrations."

Generating ideas, pulling together volunteers, selecting a location,

cooking food, and booking the entertainment is not enough to create community spirit. One critical ingredient is communication. How do potential participants in the Valley learn about these opportunities to have fun and make plans to attend events where

they can meet others? Informing the community at large about upcoming opportunities to celebrate and participate in local happens is arguably just as important as the events themselves.

Ralph and Patti Villers have taken on the job of spreading the news through The Valley Voice website and newsletter.

Ralph is also involved with the Ansonia Cultural Commission, which is responsible for events such as the Harvest Festival that typically generates an attendance in the thousands. Rock the Valley attracts even more visitors with vendors and multiple bands such as The Cast of Beatlemania in 2017 and Draw the Line, a Boston based Aerosmith tribute band.

"Events like the tree lighting and the raising of the Irish flag on St. Patrick's Day draw large crowds." He noted that community members oftentimes

do not immediately disperse following the ceremonies. Many join their fellow residents at a local restaurant to savor a buffet organized by the commission.

Ralph said, "The goal of the Valley Voice is to inform others about what's going on in Ansonia, Derby, Oxford, Seymour, and Shelton. We are always looking for news, events, and content, and welcome anyone who wants to share stories with us." He continued, "It's important to have access to information and the Valley Voice is filling a void. We focus on local news and help promote some unique events."

Similar to Ralph and Patti's blog and newsletter, the Valley Independent Sentinel is the region's online newspaper, which since 2009 has been reporting Valley news. In addition to sharing stories about "All Valley. All the Time." the Valley Independent Sentinel's Editor, Eugene Driscoll, maintains a community calendar. It is on this page where local organizations can post events available to those in the Greater Valley and surrounding areas. Sharing local happenings in such a small, engaged community has never been easier.

Now that spring has arrived, these events will take place in full force until the cold weather comes again. Because of the countless hours invested by volunteers and compassion for those who call this region home, the Valley community will be defined by a spirit of friendship, culture, and fun.

Featured Fund

Lawrence J. DeTullio, Jr. Fund

When Lawrence (Larry) J. DeTullio, Jr. passed unexpectedly following surgery, both his mother and widow decided to honor him with a fund to benefit the citizens of his beloved City of Derby and support local organizations serving Derby youth.

Maryanne DeTullio remembered establishing the fund in her husband's name with the Valley Community Foundation (VCF), "My children were in grammar school at the time and my mother-in-law had the idea to help to them and those in the community to remember their father. I knew former VCF President & CEO, Jamie Cohen, for a number of years. He was very helpful while we established this fund in my husband's memory."

Larry was a man who truly loved Derby, and his family decided that there was no better way to keep his memory alive than to work with VCF to support the people and programs he held so dear. Larry spent his entire life in Derby and dedicated his career as community development administrator to improving the quality of life for his fellow residents.

Jimmy Ryan, former President of the Shelton Economic Development Corporation, held a position similar in Ansonia and remembered, "We worked closely

on regional and economic strategies and became friends. Larry was at the forefront of so many important issues. He turned downtown Derby around, making sure the town and the Valley received their fair share of very scarce resources from funding agencies but his greatest gift was his ability to truly hear what people were saying. He could boil that information into effective strategies to meet people's needs. Federal, state, and local officials had great respect for him and how effective his work was. Some of his work went unseen, through residential rehab loans and grants used by property owners to make safe, suitable housing. Larry had considerable knowledge in how to administer programs."

Alan Tyma, VCF board member agreed. "Larry was down-to-earth and would systematically face a problem by asking how to accomplish the goal," said Alan. "He could move the ball forward and was clearly one of the premier people in his field."

Jimmy added, "Larry had a real impact on Derby's history and the fund in his name is just part of his



Lawrence J. DeTullio, Jr.

legacy. His family remembering him through this fund is another testament to a life well lived. When I drive through Derby, he often comes to mind as a reflection of how nice Derby is and how good its people are. He had a great vision for the future of Derby and made that a reality. He was good for the community, good to be with, a good family person, and is very dearly missed."

Maryanne said, "I've always thought VCF was wonderful and helped a lot of people. I would recommend what we did to other families. When someone passes away, a fund can help the family ensure their loved one's legacy lives on forever."



Planned Giving

VCF welcomes Marc Vincent, as well as Fred and the late Karen Stanek to the Gates Society, the Foundation's planned giving community. Your planned gift will impact the charities you're passionate about forever, regardless of the amount. Call us at 203-751-9162 or learn more at valleyfoundation.org

Community Investment

2018 Grant Impact

VCF's responsive grant distributions are announced each year, providing details about the receiving organization, the grant amount, and its purpose. But what happens after VCF awards a grant to a nonprofit? These grants can range from a single-year distribution to a multi-year award and can provide operating support, assistance with capacity building efforts, or a particular project. As part of VCF's terms of grant, the receiving organization is required to report on outcomes and data showing the impact of that funding – something we would like to start sharing with you.

BHcare

With a four-year grant from VCF to provide general operating support beginning in 2013, BHcare was able to enhance its electronic healthcare records technology to streamline services, secure data, and reduce costs, all of which improved client care and increased access to services. In 2016, the organization added the Lower Naugatuck Valley Parent Child Resource Center to its service offering, making BHcare eligible for federal funding for programs that serve all ages. Phone upgrades allowed the organization to reduce capital expenses and reduced IT costs. As a result of this grant, prescriber productivity improved by more than 20% from 2016-2017 and billing has increased by \$10,000 per month over previous years.

Rape Crisis Center of Milford

With a two-year general operating support grant from VCF, the Rape Crisis Center of Milford was able to train 50 new volunteers and recertify 55 to support the organization's services and goals. Nearly 6,000 students from pre-K – 12th grade were provided with knowledge about body safety, healthy relationships, sexual abuse, harassment, and preparation for college. During the term of this grant, crisis intervention was provided to more than 1,100 victims of sexual assault and their families via a 24-hour hotline and the provision of medical, legal, police advocacy, and in-person short-term counseling.

Shelton Historical Society

Thanks to a three-year general operating support grant from VCF in 2014, the Shelton Historical Society was able to safeguard a range of artifacts from its collection of local items while also broadening its educational programming. More than 11,000 photographs were rehoused, and due to the creation of a permanent photo studio, historical society staff now has the ability to take professional-grade photos of artifacts for documentation and sharing purposes. As a result of this funding, a formerly unused building on site was opened weekly and used as part of a pilot program. New databases were developed and volunteers were trained to enter data, record transcriptions, input documents, and provide electronic transmissions. Staff was able to update its educational



The Wilson Barn is the only structure original to the present Shelton History Center site. Believed to be built circa 1860, it now is the showcase for a permanent exhibit, "Three Centuries of Shelton—From Farming to Industry and Beyond," that outlines the history of Shelton. It was once part of a farm owned by Wisner and Dorothy Wilson, who donated the land that has become the Shelton History Center.

programs for youth, which included writing scripts for programs designed for second graders and consulted with local school administrators regarding the State of Connecticut Social Studies Framework on how schools and students can best utilize the Shelton Historical Society.

Sponsored Events

The following events were supported with unrestricted funds by VCF this season:

June

PCRC

8th Annual Ride/Walk for Children at Quarry Walk in Oxford on June 9th.

The Recreation Camp

103rd Annual Lobster Feast on June 5th at The Camp in Derby.

July

Derby Historical Society

Annual Silver Tea on July 6th at the La Sala Banquet Hall in Derby.

Celebrate Shelton

Downtown Sounds summer concert series on July 19th, 26th, and August 2nd from 5-9 p.m. at the Veterans Memorial Park in downtown Shelton.

The Great Give® 2019

With the help of Valley residents, employees, and VCF donor advised fund holders during The Great Give® 2019, nearly \$296,000 was raised for nonprofit organizations located in Ansonia, Derby, Oxford, Seymour or Shelton during this year's 36-hour online giving event. In total, \$1.8 million was generated, including matching funds and prizes and other generous community sponsors for nonprofits serving the 20-town Greater New Haven region. Approximately 12,000 donors gave 17,000 gifts.



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Good News About the Valley

Grantees Share Success Stories at VCF Annual Reception



Derby students participate in Junior Achievement's Life Prep Initiative.

Junior Achievement Life Prep Initiative

Junior Achievement (JA) of Greater Fairfield County is implementing a three-year plan that provides knowledge, tools and inspiration to help at-risk students become prepared for career and life success, expanding future possibilities for themselves, their families, and ultimately the community at large.

Children who struggle with life, struggle in school. At-risk students who struggle in school have a dramatically higher potential to drop out. Young adults who have dropped out of high school are three times more likely to be unemployed and are educationally ineligible for 65% of jobs. They will earn a quarter of a million dollars less in their working lifetime than high school graduates.

JA's Life Prep Initiative is designed to help close the achievement gap and introduce important real-world topics to students in a way that traditional education does not. JA offers a distinct method of empowering youth to own their future success working through collaborative relationships with educators, local businesses, and the community at large, connecting classroom learning to real world application.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Bust Project

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Bust Committee was created to honor his memory in the Valley. Its mission is to memorialize the transformative legacy of Rev. Dr. King, Jr. and to inspire, educate, and influence Valley communities with love, equity, justice, and compassion for all residents.

This bust of Rev. Dr. King, Jr. is the first to be installed in the Valley and is one of only two busts in Connecticut.

The Committee aims to engage Valley public schools, municipalities, and communities to ensure and develop ongoing learning and community engagement opportunities for regional youth and residents to participate in an annual Unity in the Community celebration.

These are only two of many ways in which VCF invests into the community. For more info, please visit www.valleyfoundation.org.