

2024 Mid-Year Update

CLARION COUNTY
ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT
CORPORATION

Here's what has happened so far this year and what's to come!

On behalf of the CCEDC, I am pleased to share exciting updates pertaining to activities and developments that have taken place so far this year!

At the end of 2023, the growth of the CCEDC was marked with the addition of two key staff: Hind Karns as our new Tourism Director, and Eric Funk Jr. as our new Community Development Coordinator. These key additions represent the operational expansion of the office, but more importantly, they represent the increased ability for the CCEDC to meet its mission.

As we entered 2024, it was my expectation that this year would prove to be one of the most challenging and rewarding years the CCEDC has experienced. Reflecting on the first half of 2024, I would say that those expectations have been exceedingly met. Staff has continued to grow, with the addition of Rachel Bennett as our Executive Assistant, and Callie DeMasters as our Communications & Marketing Coordinator. This brings our total to five full-time employees, which is a fivefold increase in only eight months.

Although this growth naturally comes with growing pains, the CCEDC is arguably in the strongest position it has historically ever been in. Our expanded duties to promote Clarion County as a tourism destination have strengthened organizational capacity credibility. This new reality has already begun to open doors for Clarion County, most notably demonstrated by a visit from Governor Josh Shapiro in May 2024.



Hind Karns chats with Governor Shapiro in Foxburg, PA

In parallel with tourism, the CCEDC has taken significant strides towards the creation of new community development initiatives, notably our Regional Main Street Initiative and brownfield activity.



(from left) Eric Funk Jr., Jarred Heuer, Gustavo Ustariz, Bill Arrowood, Mayor Gordon Barrows, Mayor Bill Rode

In February, the CCEDC was selected by Main Street America as one of thirty communities nationwide to be a community participant in the Rural Communities Equitable Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Pilot Program (E3). With E3, staff from Main Street American have been facilitating focus groups, workshops, and virtual meetings with community members with the goal of mapping out Clarion County's entrepreneurial ecosystem. This, in turn, will equip Clarion County with valuable insight into how to best shape the county into an attractive and effective place for entrepreneurs to invest and succeed.

With tourism and community development as our mainstays, the CCEDC aims to position Clarion County as a strong and viable community for new business, new residents, and new travelers. This position will feature a renewed identity for Clarion County, which will be carried outward with modern marketing that reaches our key audiences. In the weeks and months to come, the CCEDC will be introducing and implementing several new pieces to this direction, including tourism branding, main street visioning, and brownfield redevelopment.

On behalf of the CCEDC, thank you for your continued support of our organization and mission!



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR -
JARRED HEUER

In this update you can expect:

New Staff

Tourism Updates

Main Street Revitalization Updates

Grants

Brownfield Development

Healthcare Collaborative

Staff Profile Highlights



Hind Karns

Tourism Director

Hind is the engine for destination planning and marketing! She has an insatiable level of curiosity and enjoys testing ideas of all kinds!

Her laser vision keeps her focused, and her elasticity keeps her adapting from one challenge to the next!



Eric Funk Jr.

Community Development Coordinator

Eric is Clarion County's best friend! His fair-minded nature ensures everyone's ideas are heard.

Eric's shapeshifting abilities help to keep him adapting to a variety of challenges and make him a trustworthy partner!



Jarred Heuer

Executive Director

Jarred is the visionary for all things CCEDC!

Meticulous in nature, his clairvoyant sixth sense helps to ensure the work of the office will be impactful in the years to come!



Rachel Bennett

Executive Assistant

Rachel is the heartbeat of the office! Her strong organizational skills and proactive mindset ensure we're all productive!

Her telekinetic superpowers enable her to solve problems and get things fixed!



Callie DeMasters

Communications & Marketing Coordinator

Callie is the creative voice of the CCEDC! Her keen design sensibilities give the office and county a strong aesthetic.

Equipped with x-ray vision, Callie is able to see through barriers and bring concepts to life!



Discover Clarion County - Your Trailhead to Happiness

The CCEDC, as Clarion County's new destination marketing organization, has created and launched the county's tourism brand - Discover Clarion County - Your Trailhead to Happiness.

This brand is the culmination of many partners working together with a vision to ensure Clarion County's future remains bright. Tourism is a key opportunity that is being embraced as a primary economic development tool. A great place to visit is also a great place to live or do business. As the county's DMO and EDO (economic development organization), the CCEDC believes that responsible, impactful tourism promotion, and development will energize the county's economic outlook and create momentum for future growth. Having the county's tourism

operations under the same roof of the county's EDO will ensure that tactics and strategies for both operations are mutually beneficial, collaborative, and wholistic.

We are also excitedly awaiting the launch of the official tourism website in August 2024! The website will be found by visiting, www.DiscoverClarionCounty.com.

Be sure to follow Discover Clarion County on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn!



"A trailhead isn't just a starting point - it's a gateway to happiness.

Whether you're exploring a charming downtown, embracing the beauty of nature, or embarking on a voyage of self-discovery, every journey in Clarion County promises transformation.

From the thrill of adventure, to the joy of shared moments, each step forward brings us closer to our call. Find your trailhead to happiness - discover Clarion County."



Downtown Revitalization – Clarion County Regional Main Street Initiative

Main Street revitalization has been identified as a key economic goal within the CCEDC’s 2030 Economic Development Strategy. The CCEDC has taken a strategic focus on five county downtowns: Clarion, East Brady, Foxburg, Knox, and New Bethlehem. These communities will be the CCEDC’s first collaborative partners with the aim of promoting economic development across all of Clarion County.

Since 2022, the CCEDC has been internally positioning itself to be an effective facilitator of downtown revitalization. This most notably has been the acquisition of staff focused on carrying out this work. In December 2023, the CCEDC welcomed Eric Funk Jr. as its new Community Development Coordinator. This position was newly created so that the CCEDC would have greater ability to operate in local downtowns, assist small businesses, and foster entrepreneurship. Since joining the CCEDC in late 2023, Eric Funk Jr. has been immersed in all things main street!

In recent months, Eric has been meeting with community leaders, elected officials, and business owners across Clarion County as a primer for the revitalization work ahead.

In addition to staff, the CCEDC has contracted with the Pennsylvania Downtown Center (PDC), a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to providing technical assistance to main street programs and communities. The CCEDC was the recipient of a \$24,250 grant from PA DCED’s Keystone Communities

Program (KCP). This funding, which is matched by a grant from the Dr. Arthur Phillips Charitable Trust, is funding the partnership with PDC.

The first official regional main street meetings are slated to begin in July 2024, with the creation of a regional steering committee, followed by local focus groups. This work will be the early steps towards the creation of a Regional Visioning/Action Strategy for main street revitalization. The ultimate goal of this process is to create a revitalization strategy for each downtown community. Through partnerships with local community members, business owners, and elected officials, we aim to identify key projects and pathways to funding. The CCEDC will be pursuing funding through PA DCED programs, including Keystone Communities Program and Main Street Matters, which will fund the implementation of identified projects and opportunities. This may include facade programs, streetscaping/beautification, and commercial redevelopment.

If you have an interest in learning more about the Regional Main Street Initiative, please reach out to the CCEDC’s Community Development Coordinator, Eric Funk Jr., via email at Eric@ClarionCountyEDC.com.

Grants Awarded in 2024

- **McELHATTAN FOUNDATION**
 - \$150,000 toward Main Street Initiative in Knox. PA
-  **pennsylvania** DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
 - \$24,250 toward Regional Main Street Visioning/Action Strategy



Introducing the Rural Pennsylvania Healthcare Collaborative

In 2024, healthcare partnerships in Clarion County have been a focal point. Rural communities inherently possess challenges that other portions of the Commonwealth and nation do not share. Given the low-density nature of our population, counties like Clarion must often act with greater intentionality and focus in order to ensure resources and expertise head our way. When it comes to healthcare, that reality rings true.

In early 2022, the CCEDC began regularly interfacing with a group of local healthcare professionals. Dr. Kayla Lee, Training & Education Director with Clarion Psychiatric Center, took the initiative to gather representatives and counterparts from other area healthcare institutions in order to share open conversations about challenges mutually shared by all. Over time, this group began to identify itself as the Clarion Regional Healthcare Collaborative (CRHC), which convened would-be competitors with the purpose of seeing a higher vision for a healthy Clarion County.

In August 2023, the CCEDC received a grant from the Dr. Arthur Phillips Charitable Trust to legitimize this loose partnership into a legal entity. In conjunction with the Alliance for Nonprofit Resources (ANR), the CRHC has officially evolved into the Rural Pennsylvania Healthcare Collaborative (RPHC). Its mission to advocate for rural PA communities and ensure all have access to reliable and affordable healthcare.

In the coming months, the RPHC will continue to define itself as a non-profit organization and construct its Board of Directors, Mission/Vision, and overall operations.

The CCEDC sees value in this effort and intends to continue supporting its growth. Healthy communities are strong communities, so we believe that health and wellness must remain a priority for community and economic development.

EPA Brownfield Update

In spring 2023, the CCEDC was awarded a \$500,000 EPA Brownfields Community-Wide Assessments grant. Following a selection process earlier this year, the CCEDC has selected BL Companies as the environmental firm that it will partner with to carry out the scope of this grant!

It is the aim of the CCEDC for this assessment grant to be the first of several, which will carry out the redevelopment of known and suspected brownfield sites in Clarion County.

Prior to this EPA award, the CCEDC had been successful with two state-funded brownfield grants through PA DCED's Industrial Sites and Reuse Program (ISRP). ISRP funds were leveraged in order to assess sites at the truckstop along I-80 exit 70 and at the Glassworks Business Park, formally the Owens-Illinois Glass Plant. Both sites are currently under private ownership with plans for redevelopment.

To learn more about brownfields and the assessment process, click the link below.

[BROWNFIELD ASSESSMENTS INFO](#)

