

Phoenixville Today An Interview with Manny DeMutis



By Barry Cassidy

Manny DeMutis is a Phoenixville native who attended Phoenixville School District along with his two sisters Dodi and Ann. They currently comprise the 3D Group, which was responsible for the revitalization of Phoenixville. Manny is married to Kate and they have three daughters Hope, Paige and Ava.

The ultimate family man, he currently spends time traveling to Paige's Field Hockey events in East Carolina or visiting Hope at Penn State. Because of the nature of his work, Manny spends most of his summers doing business in his beach chair at Cape May.

Manny's grandfather was the town barber and real estate investor with a barber shop on Bridge Street, and his descendants have a large real estate presence in the downtown area. Manny is responsible for much of the downtown infill development which at one time were vacant lots.

Manny's dad, Emmanuel DeMutis has an office on Bridge Street at the Main Stay Hotel. His mother Betsy has passed away, but her memory lives on at the Main Stay. She hated the blue light poles and complained about them pretty much every day.

Manny currently works out of the lobby at 131 Bridge Street Phoenixville apartments. Although one of the most powerful people in Phoenixville, he is always accessible to anyone who comes in the lobby and wants to talk about Phoenixville.

Cassidy: What do you think are Phoenixville's most significant assets?

DeMutis: There are a couple, but I think the top asset is the people of Phoenixville. The strong sense of community, limitless energy, and creativity of the people who want to enrich the lives of the people around them. It is almost a selfless town where people are always ready to help each other.

There is an incredible number of creative people who live in Phoenixville, and that is not just after the revitalization. The core of artists that were here in 2003 are still around, but many of the newer members of the community have made a significant impact on the local arts scene.

There is also the leadership in Phoenixville from the Borough Council and Borough Administration to the business leaders. They do a lot to keep Phoenixville first. There also is a strong sense of commitment monetarily from the philanthropic community concerning the health and welfare of the less fortunate.

I also think this is a town where people put their money where their mouth is. Investment in the town is thriving, as more and more people are buying into the town. There were some early pioneers like Steve Friedman and Dave Chawaga, who had a vision concerning how the town could evolve. There is no lack of projects in the town, and the investment climate is somewhat competitive.

Finally, I think that our location is an asset. We have a strategic location along the DC-New York corridor.

Cassidy: What kind of constraints do you have in Phoenixville today?

DeMutis: We need to improve parking. Our parking is very tight in town. As a victim of our success, we desperately need to remedy the situation. Phoenixville has become a regional draw, and the people patronizing the stores need to have a place to park.

One of the essential things which need to be remedied is the transportation network. We have put together a committee concerning improving public transportation in and around Phoenixville. That committee has focused on providing train service to the area as an answer to the gridlock.

We tried to do this a few years ago with the greenline but were unsuccessful. We learned some lessons from that experience and have made some adjustments in the way we are approaching the prospect of train service.

Cassidy: What do you think of the current store mix and the breweries that have clustered?

DeMutis: I think that the store mix is getting better. As the town matures, we see some excellent retail offerings in the downtown. The downtown is developing a well-rounded selection of goods and services to the consumer.

There has been a massive influx of people living downtown, considering that all of the development and the retail moving in is very much in tune with new markets that have developed with the latest arrivals.

As for the breweries, I have to say that they are one of our greatest assets as every one of them offers a crafted product that is unique and special. I do not look at it as we have a lot of bars in town. I believe we do not have a lot of bars in town. We have a lot of choices in town, with each brewer offering something different.

I believe the breweries and the coffee houses are very much alike. They offer something you can get nowhere else. The food selection is extensive, the art of not only crafting a product but the cooperation with visual artists to display works around town lends to the sense of community which has developed here over the years.

Cassidy: You don't rent to just anyone that wants a store front and some of your properties remain vacant.

DeMutis: I want to get the business mix right. Money isn't the primary thing when you are talking about creating downtown competition for your neighbors and life-long friends and acquaintances.

Cassidy: Are you happy with the way things turned out with the revitalization?

DeMutis: I think that is a wrong question because the revitalization is ongoing. Could we have predicted which way it would turn out? No, because it was something completely different from whatever I could have thought is 2003.

What we have is good, but it could always get better as things evolve. Sometimes things happen that you never could imagine, and it takes the dialog concerning development in a new direction. The market is responsive, and a lot of that is a result of the liquidity of capital when it comes to investing here.

I live here, work here, and play here. Phoenixville is fantastic.

Cassidy: I understand you are on the train committee...how is that going?

DeMutis: So far so good.

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