

FOCUS ON READING REVITALIZATION

Downtown Reading: Historic Foundations, New Beginnings



By Aaron Gantz,
Executive Director
of Downtown
Revitalization, GRCA

The vision for downtown Reading: a place where people want to live, work, and play. A place where businesses and entrepreneurs thrive and invest. Reading is steeped in history: from an industrial past to a railroad hub to a shopping destination. Reading's future, however, is something we want to actively shape: a vibrant, diverse urban center that provides outstanding nightlife and dining, easy access to trails, and a thriving business community.



That's why the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance, along with the City of Reading, the Berks Alliance, and the Berks County Community Foundation are leading efforts to revitalize downtown. Here's where GRCA is focusing efforts:

- Encourage and facilitate economic development to strengthen the downtown Reading commercial core and the surrounding neighborhoods;

- Attract and retain quality investment in downtown Reading;
- Cultivate an environment where businesses and entrepreneurs thrive in downtown Reading;
- Foster a positive perception of downtown Reading with the city viewed as a unique and attractive place for business, entertainment, and living.

While we work collectively to address both challenges and opportunities in the downtown area, it is important to highlight key assets and accomplishments.

- Arts and entertainment continue to be a vital draw bringing people into downtown Reading with various performance venues, art centers, and art galleries
- Over the last two decades downtown Reading has welcomed over \$251+ million in investment in key projects including:

- \$30+ million at Reading Area Community College – one of the anchor institutions in downtown Reading at 2nd and Penn Streets
- \$36+ million in "Entertainment Square" comprised of the Goggleworks Center for the Arts, Goggleworks Apartments, and the IMAX movie theater
- \$50+ million in the Santander Arena and Santander Performing Arts Center – anchor the commercial corridor on Penn Street
- \$60 million for the DoubleTree by Hilton – a top performing DoubleTree in the nation

Currently, projects underway in downtown Reading are estimated between \$10 and 20 million in total investment upon completion in the next 1-3 years. In addition, there are mixed-use, residential, retail, and office redevelopment opportunities - 35 properties to be exact. These properties are actively being marketed to the investment and the development community locally, regionally, and beyond.

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What to Expect in 2019

Marketing Available Downtown Properties

GRCA is using its online property database, GreaterReadingSites.com, to provide a special focus on marketing those properties that offer available space in downtown Reading. Businesses and entrepreneurs can access information so that they can explore becoming part of the business fabric of the downtown. This past summer, in partnership with the Reading-Berks Commercial Industrial Council, we hosted a downtown walking tour, bringing realtors and brokers into the downtown to see firsthand what is available for their business clients. We are planning to replicate this model on a smaller scale in 2019 offering several, more intimate walking tour starting in the late spring through the fall.

Penn Street Market

One of the events in 2018 that brought together downtown workers and residents seeking the convenience of obtaining fresh and locally grown food items was the Penn Street Market. And from June 7 to September 27 these groups had easy access to locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables, lunchtime offerings, nutrition education, and entertainment in the 400 block of Penn Street every Thursday from 10 AM to 2 PM. In 2018, mar-

ket transactions increased by 13% from 2017. The market team is preparing for a bigger and better season in 2019 which kicks-off on June 6!

Downtown Concerts

In 2018, we saw the Downtown Alive concert series attract thousands of people to the downtown area. Funded by the Berks County Community Foundation, the summer concert series was produced and executed by the Reading Downtown Improvement District. This summer we can expect to see more of the same in terms of attendance and the caliber of artists who bring their sounds to our downtown area.

Streetscape & Façade Improvements

You may not know that downtown Reading's walkability score is 94/100, making it a "Walker's Paradise," according to walkscore.com. Downtown Reading is also home to several iconic Harry Bertoia sculptures: "Untitled" and "Island Moss" are in the 600 block of Penn Street; "Tulip" is at the Miller Center for the Arts, 4 N. Second St., near Reading Area Community College. Coupled with some truly one-of-a-kind historical architecture, the streetscape is a hidden gem. As part of the strategic plan, there has been special focus on the physical environment and greening of Penn Street with plant scape plans and identifying buildings for facade improvement investment.



In 2018 six downtown Reading property owners took advantage of nearly \$50,000 total of facade improvement funding made possible by the Berks Alliance. Because this was a matching grant program, it is estimated that over \$150,000 in investment was made collectively. Matching funds will be available in 2019 to downtown Reading properties via the GRCA.

These very visible improvements and investments help ensure that downtown Reading provides the vibrant, clean, safe and desirable downtown streetscape where people want to be.

A Measurable Vision

Success of this revitalization effort will be measured with a few quantitative and qualitative indicators. From tracking retail development, to taking a hard look at downtown housing indicators, to downtown design indicators, there are many pieces that must move together to create a successful downtown.

The time is now to create the Reading we wish to work, live, and play in. The work—and the opportunity—is ahead.

**Check us out: Downtown
Reading Facebook page
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(Continued on page 12)

FOCUS ON READING REVITALIZATION

(Continued from page 11)

Judy's on Cherry

Reading native, Judy Henry, is the chef-owner of Judy's on Cherry, located in downtown Reading. Henry is a single woman restaurateur who has dedicated her entire life to participating in Reading's future and contributing to the vibrancy of Reading. She is a visionary who understood early on that downtown was the place where young upwardly-mobile professionals would want to live and experience an urban lifestyle.

Judy's on Cherry is a beautifully renovated, Mediterranean-inspired fine dining restaurant in the heart of downtown Reading. At Judy's you'll bask in the warm glow of vaulted wooden ceilings, gorgeous appointments and relaxed, comfortable service. Judy's hearth



fired oven turns out everything from freshly baked focaccia bread to crispy, gourmet pizzas, pastas and tapas-like small plates.

Henry also owns and operates a sister restaurant and pub, the Speckled Hen, located next door in an authentically restored 18th century log house. Before opening her own restaurants, Henry had made a name for herself with innovative cooking at The Peanut Bar and Restaurant, another local area landmark. Judy says she



Judy's on Cherry

hopes "her unique restaurant gives people a reason to come back to downtown. She offers a one of a kind urban fine dining experience that the 'burbs simply don't have."

Judy's on Cherry is located at 30 South 4th Street, Reading, PA 19602. If using GPS, please be aware of it taking you to West Reading. Map Quest in particular will direct you to the Penn Avenue (19611) exit from route 422. Please be aware there is a 4th and Cherry Street address in West Reading and many of our new guests mistakenly end up there.

\$1 parking is available across the street 11:30 am - 5:00 pm. Free parking across the street after 5:00 pm. Please call 610.374.8511 for reservations, and visit: www.judysoncherry.com.

Mi Casa Su Casa

Mi Casa Su Casa Cafe / Restaurant, located at 320 Penn Street in downtown Reading, is a Dominican Breakfast and Brunch restaurant specializing in cafe, comida Latino Americana, comfort, community, conversation and creative arts. Mi Casa Su Casa is a family business that treats all customers like family and provides them with a home-away-from-home dining experience.



Cuban Sandwich

Mi Casa Su Casa is Spanish for "my house is your house," providing a home away from home type of ambiance & environment. We are located in downtown Reading, on Penn Street just off the Rt.422 exit, two blocks from the bridge. Parking is provided in the rear.

(Continued on page 14)

LIFETIME AWARD
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With 10 wins in the Best of Berks Fine Dining category, it's no doubt Judy's on Cherry has certainly earned it's Lifetime Achievement status.

Judy's
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SHUMAN DEVELOPMENT GROUP

Shuman Development Group (SDG), Reading's premier commercial real estate development company, was founded in 1994 by husband and wife team Alan and Marina Shuman. After years of experience doing one-off projects (and honing real estate development skills) restoring historical, multi-unit residential properties and smaller-scale commercial sites, SDG switched its focus to long-term neighborhood rebuilding.

This turning point came about in 2006 with SDG's acquisition of the former Reading Outlet Center (ROC) buildings. This set of ten buildings (comprising over 640,000 square feet of space and covering six city blocks) was vacant and deteriorating — essentially a ghost town, even though it was the commercial heart of Northeast Reading.

Over the next ten years — building by building — SDG followed its neighborhood revitalization plan. Originally the plan called for some parks, green space, additional off-street parking, and a new playground. However, while the County was on-board with working together to make this happen, the various City administrations countered that their resources were needed elsewhere and would not be used in any way for this neighborhood. Still not diminished and ever-persistent, SDG forged ahead and by 2016 had renovated nine of the existing ROC buildings, with a total investment of over \$40 million.

The neighborhood now also boasts one of the finest apartment complexes in the area — Big Mill Apartments (located in the former Nolde and Horst Shoe factory) — now with 69 huge, two-bedroom/two bath apartments. They feature all the modern conveniences while maintaining their historical charm, like all exposed heavy timber beams and huge windows with views of the Pagoda and the Reading City's skyline.



This long-term project proved that a grand plan, with persistent and steady efforts towards its completion, can turn around even the most deteriorated neighborhood. Now, SDG is focused on Reading's Central Business District (the downtown) with its renovation of the former Exide Battery Building (located caddy-corner from the Santander Arena) and the M&T Bank Building (located at 5th and Washington Streets). Further, in May of 2018 the occupancy permit was issued for the historic Abraham Lincoln, which SDG had renovated and converted from a struggling hotel into 97 upscale apartments with associated parking, retail, and event space on the lower floors. This site is now bustling as well and has proved there is a huge demand for nice residential units in downtown Reading: SDG had over 500 applicants for the 97 units within the first six weeks.

... But there's more! SDG has several other projects that it hopes to announce in Downtown Reading in the next year and, while there is still much work to do, has a plan to revitalize this area following its tried and proven strategy of long-term, consistent, and focused neighborhood revitalization.



For additional information, please call 610.736.9393 and visit: www.InvestinReading.com.

FOCUS ON READING REVITALIZATION

(Continued from page 12)



Hours of operation are Monday – Saturday from 7:00 AM to 4:00 PM. (9 AM to 7 PM) and Saturday (9 AM to 4 PM).

Mi Casa Su Casa also serves Dinner Buffet every Thursday at Caliente's Night at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, 1741 Papermill Rd, Reading, PA, 19610. Food is served from 6 PM to 9 PM.

Mi Casa Su Casa also can be found at Shillington Farmers Market, 10 S Summit Ave, Reading, on Thursday and Friday

Catering Available Upon Request and Extended Hours Available Upon Request for Parties of 10 or More by Reservation Only.

For additional information, please call 610.375.1161; email: Johannycepeda@gmail.com; and visit: www.micasasucasa.cafe.com.

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The Guy Behind EDI Support LLC



My name is Jim Gonzalez, a 20-year EDI veteran. I am from the Reading PA and Berks County area. I graduated from Berks Technical Institute in 1998 with an Associate's Degree in AS/400 programming. I was then hired by Kissinger Associates as a programmer in January of 1998 to work on MAS90/MAS200.

Six months into the position I was asked to move to Technical Support to learn EDI as well as other formats for integration. That was when I got a real EDI education — learning how to handle client EDI support, onsite installation of EDI software, and how to run formal EDI training classes and manage support staff as well as consultants.

I consider myself to be well versed in all aspects of EDI, and what it takes to support an organization. I also have extensive experience in Sage ERP products. I would consider myself an established professional in this industry. I work with clients to offer support for daily processing, bringing on new integrations and planning towards the future of where to take their organization. I have a knack for learning the deficiencies in any company I work with and turning those deficiencies into areas of success.

One problem that I enjoy solving for my clients is helping them to become more self-sufficient. Client's would say I am all about improving their business processes and making EDI profitable again. I am passionate about being the client's advocate when it comes to dealing with software companies, EDI Trading Partners, and other organizations they need help with navigating. I know I have done my job well when I see clients growing and are profitable.



EDI Support LLC

On a personal note, family and friends are important to me. In my spare time, you can find me either wedding planning (my own), learning, reading,

watching sports or spending time with my dogs. I love to laugh and have a good time with good people. I grew up in Reading and still live in Berks County. Although I have traveled all over the country, I would never call anywhere else home. I volunteer with the Children's Home of Reading and also support the local Animal Rescue League. When asked how I want to be remembered, I say, "I want to be remembered as a great Dad, loving family member and friend. I want people to think of me as working side by side with them. Your name is the only thing you can take with you."

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Reading Hospital Tower Health

Reading Hospital has been the centerpiece of healthcare in the Greater Reading and Berks County region for 150 years, first opening their doors to patients on January 27, 1868, as the Reading Dispensary located at 618 Court Street. Little did they know, it would become the nationally recognized, flagship hospital of Tower Health, an award-winning, integrated health system serving southeastern Pennsylvania. A century and a half later, Reading Hospital is still providing advanced, comprehensive, and compassionate care to improve the health and wellness of our community. Beyond what happens within their walls, which eventually moved from Court Street

to their existing location in West Reading in 1926, the hospital has also been an important part of our economy and community. Now under the leadership of newly named President and CEO Bill Jennings, Reading Hospital and Tower Health are taking healthcare to new heights by empowering YOU – the people of Berks County and beyond – to live your healthiest lives.



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ROUTE 29 AND SHIFFERT ROAD, Hereford Township, Berks County. 1.94 acres zoned Village Preservation (retail and offices are permitted uses). **\$109,900. Call Ed Brooks.**

TOLL GATE ROAD, Amity Township, Berks County. 8.9 acres zoned Light Industrial/ Office. Public sewer at site. **\$210,000. Call Ed Brooks.**

MONOCACY HILL ROAD AND LIMEKILN ROAD, Amity Township, Berks County. 60 acres zoned Planned Business/ Office/ Industrial. Public sewer close by. **\$975,000. Call Ed Brooks.**

INDUSTRIAL BUILDING, BOYERTOWN – 26,000 square feet (two stories). 1st floor leased to 3 tenants with \$53,000 of base annual income plus "nets". 13,000 SF on 2nd floor with dock is vacant. Price includes a 3500 pound material lift. **\$790,000. Call Ed Brooks.**

ROUTE 29, Hereford Township, Berks County. 5+/- acres zoned Mixed Use (allows business/ retail/ office/ industrial). Two buildings totaling 21,000 +/- SF. Front building of 10,000 SF is leased at \$4,000 per month + utilities. Rear building is 11,000 SF with 15 drive in doors – can be leased at \$4,000 per month plus utilities. **Buy at \$990,000. Call Stan or Steve Rothenberger.**

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