



## SECOND ANNUAL INVESTORS' CONFERENCE ENERGIZES ONGOING WORK TO REVITALIZE POTTSTOWN

More than 100 investors, potential investors, and individuals actively engaged with the Pottstown community attended the second annual Pottstown Investors' Conference held on campus on Friday, April 20 in the Center for The Arts. Hosted as a partnership of the Hobart's Run neighborhood revitalization initiative and The Hill School, the conference was planned to build upon success stories sparked by last year's notably energizing conference.

A keynote address was offered by Dave Zellers, the Commerce Director for Montgomery County, who emphasized that Pottstown should not strive to be like any other community. "You need to be who you are and embrace who you are," he said, citing numerous strengths that Pottstown offers to investors of all types, from the presence of strong educational institutions including Montgomery County Community College, to beautiful heritage areas, strong housing stock, great architecture, and a business-friendly geographic location.

"Most importantly, you have to take the word 'no' out of your vocabulary," Zellers stressed. "When you look at other communities that have been successful (in their revitalizations), the first and biggest thing they did" was stop naysaying, he added. He referred to several towns that have markedly improved through open-minded revitalization efforts.

Zellers also said the Pottstown must be patient and understand that revitalization will not occur overnight, and he urged town leaders and potential investors to always think about making quality choices. "Every dollar that gets spent here needs to have a return on investment, 10, 20 years from now," he said.

Also, new business owners need to have a team in place to help them not only open their business but keep it running smoothly — a team that includes collaborative connections with local resources as well as a lawyer, an accountant, and marketing advisers.

*(Continued on page 11)*

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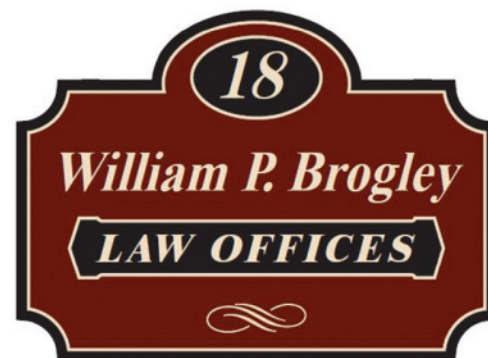
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(Continued from page 9)

Donovan Mitchell of the Donovan Mitchell Real Estate Group noted as part of a question and answer session that he is always struck by people who choose to complain about the Borough and lament that things are not “the way they used to be” before major industries closed down. “When I first came into Pottstown for business, I thought it was beautiful,” he observed. “It’s a really neat area, and it has a cool history. I applaud what all of you here are doing, and I appreciate it. Pottstown may not be exactly what it once was — but I am confident about what it will be.”

The conference also included reports from Pottstown anchor institution representatives, including Rich Newell, CEO of Tower Health/Pottstown Hospital; Justin Keller, interim Pottstown Borough manager; Mike Bettinger of Montgomery County Community College’s West Campus; Stephen Rodriguez, superintendent of the Pottstown School District; Cathy Skitko, director of communications for The Hill School; Eileen Dautrich, executive director of the TriCounty Chamber of Commerce; Sheila Dugan, Main Street manager for the Pottstown Downtown Improvement District Authority; and Peggy Lee-Clark, executive director of Pottstown Area Industrial Development, Inc.

Aliyah Furman, southeast regional director for the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, presented information regarding the State’s Neighborhood Tax Credits programs.



Bob Mensch



Peggy Lee-Clark



Sheila Dugan



Justin Keller

Pennsylvania State Senator Bob Mensch (R-24) also shared encouraging remarks about Pottstown’s proven potential.

During lunch — which featured wonderful food prepared by Pottstown eateries — conference participants were asked to discuss various questions regarding priorities, challenges, and solutions to assist with Pottstown’s economic development. Group leaders then reported back to the entire conference audience.

The afternoon ended when students from The Hill School and Pottstown High School made “Shark Tank” style short, five-minute pitches to a panel of “judges” regarding ways to improve the community through social innovation. The projects included “The Social Exchange,” an app designed to connect people with community service and activism opportunities, presented by Gillian Wenhold, a Hill alumna from the class of 2014; “Venture Farm,” a philanthropic endeavor that would help fund and encourage new businesses,

presented by Hill students Louis Alpert ‘18 and Michael Vanelli ‘18; a program that would bring high school students together to assist with care of Edgewood Cemetery while also promoting peer-to-peer counseling and support, presented by Hill student Noorie Dhingra ‘21; discussion of the “Y Without Walls” concept to address the looming potential closure of the Pottstown YMCA, presented by students who participate in the Pottstown CARES Student Leadership Council, Gabby Painter and Megan Mikuen, both Hill 2019, as well as David Van Wallace, a Pottstown High School student; and advancement of a largely student-run Community Basketball League, presented by Jibree Hill, a Pottstown High School junior.

Following the students’ presentations, Hill Headmaster Zachary G. Lehman surprised the young innovators by presenting \$500 checks to each group with the caveat that each group must spend the money to tangibly advance their projects in the next six months.



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