

# 2021 Community Improvement Awards

Huntingdon County Chamber of Commerce  
Huntingdon County Planning Commission

March 2022

## Award Promotes Excellence in Development

The Huntingdon County Chamber of Commerce and Huntingdon County Planning Commission are proud to announce the winners of the seventeenth annual Community Improvement Awards.

The Planning Commission and the Chamber jointly reviewed the nominees and the final selection was made by the Planning Commission. The sponsor for the Awards is Kish Bank.

The 2021 Award categories are Community Spirit, New Construction, Preservation and Special Merit.

- Community Spirit includes the recognition of individuals and organizations that have made a significant contribution to Huntingdon County in the field of community development.
- New Construction includes any type of new construction of buildings of all types.
- Preservation includes the restoration, preservation and/or rehabilitation of buildings of all types to retain historic character.
- A Special Merit Award may be made for projects, persons or groups that demonstrate outstanding achievement on their own merits.

The principles of sustainable development include:

- Creating walkable neighborhoods;
- Directing development toward existing communities;
- Creating housing choices;
- Providing transportation choices;
- Encouraging a mixture of land uses; and
- Preserving open space, farmland and environmentally-sensitive areas.

Community Improvement Awards are based on both the visual and the environmental impact of the project. Nominations were judged on how each project:

- Enhances the attractiveness of Huntingdon County;
- Is compatible with the site area and environment;
- Shows creativity/innovation in design and use of materials;
- Enhances the quality of life, including job creation; and
- Exhibits the principle of sustainability.



2020 Community Improvement Awards Presented September 16, 2021

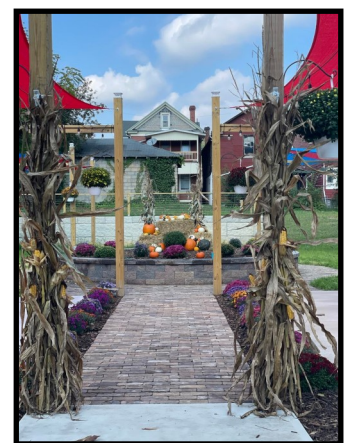
# *Community Spirit Award*

## **BRYAN PARK, HUNTINGDON, PA**

In August 2019 a fire destroyed the M&T Vacuum business and apartments on the 500 block of Washington Street and created a vacant space in Huntingdon's downtown business district. This vacancy presented a threat to the value and functionality of the downtown area and surrounding businesses. Because building codes, the space layout, no off-street parking and no open traffic access limited the rebuilding value of this property, the Huntingdon Borough Manager envisioned creating a uniquely attractive ADA-compliant community park space, focused on outdoor dining, gathering, and entertainment.

With the approval of Huntingdon Borough Council, the plan for this downtown park included repurposing the original Bryan Street pavers to provide a foundation for the park and installing water, sewer, and 30/50 amp electric to accommodate two unique food trucks using the space simultaneously. Also envisioned for the site was planting a centralized blue spruce, installing support poles to anchor overhead sails, string lighting and hanging flower arrangements.

The completed Bryan Park was officially dedicated on Saturday, October 16, 2021; and Huntingdon's annual tree lighting celebration was held in and around Bryan Park on Friday, December 3, 2021.





# *New Construction Award*

## PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE LINEAR PARK RETAINING WALL, MOUNT UNION, PA

The primary purpose of this project was to replace the existing structurally deficient Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR) retaining wall, replace broken sidewalks and reconstruct a large portion of Pennsylvania Avenue between North Division and North Franklin Streets. In 2020, demolition, excavation and reconstruction of the portion of wall between North Division and North Jefferson Streets was completed. Excavation and reconstruction of the portion of wall between North Jefferson and North Franklin Streets was completed in July 2021.

This \$2.8 million multi-modal project is locally and regionally significant as it reestablishes safe access to homes along the corridor and provides multiple means of transportation, including rail, motor vehicles, bicycles and walking trails. A variety of State, Federal and local funding sources enabled completion of this project. This restored retaining wall and street reconstruction has turned a blighted corridor in the center of Mount Union into a central community gathering space, sparked rehabilitation of housing in the corridor and serves as a catalyst for expanding economic development in Mount Union Borough.





# **Preservation Award**

## **HARTSLOG HERITAGE MUSEUM ANNEX, ALEXANDRIA, PA**

The National Bank building in Alexandria Borough served the community as a bank and post office since 1919. It has also been one of two public landmark buildings that have contributed to the charm and community spirit of Alexandria. When the First National Bank announced in August 2016 that the branch bank would close in November 2016, board members of the Hartslog Heritage Museum began to consider acquiring the prominent landmark to preserve the building and to address the curatorial needs of the Museum, housed on the second floor of the adjacent Alexandria Memorial Library. In late 2017, the Museum Board acquired the empty Bank building through pledges from Board members and other community-minded individuals.

Volunteers tore out unneeded or unwanted bank and post office fixtures and assessed a myriad of damages to walls, floors and ceilings due to many years of inattention. After several years of sweat equity from Board members and friends of the Museum, donations and earnings from hosting Hartslog Day, the restored building provides space for Museum storage, displays of large donated items, temporary Museum exhibits, special Museum events and meetings of the Museum Board and Alexandria Borough Council.

Preservation efforts included period-appropriate paint and lighting fixtures. Attention to detail in the restoration and repair of furnishings and reinstallation of a portion of the postal boxes from the building's Post Office era point to a high aesthetic standard and express an appreciation for the history of the community. Although plastering and repairing damage from roof and window leaks was contracted to professionals, the majority of the work to restore this historic building was completed by Board members, their families and community members.



# *Preservation Award*

## ROBERTSDALE OLD POST OFFICE, ROBERTSDALE, PA

Constructed in 1916, the Old Post Office of the Robertsdale Company Square is part of the Friends of the East Broad Top (FEBT) Robertsdale Museum Complex. Located at 570 Main Street in Robertsdale, PA, this building has served many purposes, including post office, barbershop, temporary lock-up, arcade, and apartment. The FEBT purchased the building in 1987 with funds from a private donor. To rehabilitate the building, they also obtained various loans and grants from the State government and the National Railroad Historical Society. Although rehabilitation of the building was substantially completed in 2003, not much happened with the facility until the East Broad Top Foundation bought the East Broad Top Railroad in 2020 and announced plans to reopen the railroad. At that time, the FEBT realized completion of the museum was necessary to draw tourists visiting the East Broad Top (EBT) Railroad site in Orbisonia, PA.

FEBT volunteers fitted custom made hardwood doors, installed locks, removed all construction materials from the first floor, and prepared and installed interactive display panels and select exhibits. They also established a gift shop with a state-of-the-art sales system in the historic building. With sustainability in mind, volunteers reused original materials when possible and changed halogen track lighting to LEDs for safety and energy conservation.

The Robertsdale Museum officially opened on June 12, 2021, the same day as the rejuvenated EBT. In addition to all the work completed inside the historic structure, volunteers also cleared the railroad right-of-way and designed an official walking tour of the mine area.

The goal of the entire museum complex is to demonstrate the importance of Robertsdale and its mines during the heyday of the East Broad Top Railroad.





**Special Merit Award**  
**JOHN EASTMAN AND CHRIS WENCKER,**  
**HUNTINGDON, PA**

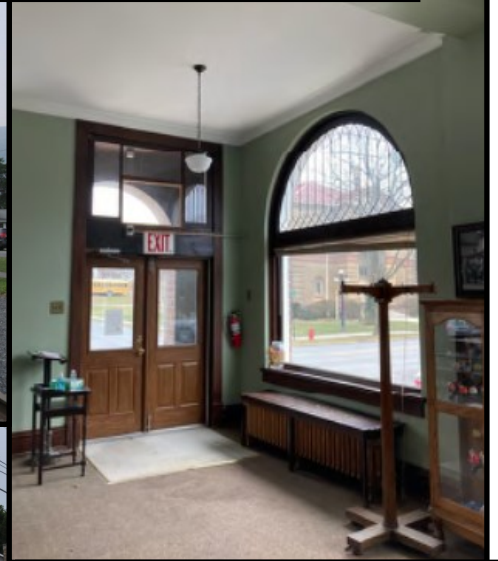
On October 19, 2020, John Eastman and Chris Wencker helped a neighbor in need. Shortly after 8:00 A.M. a huge explosion occurred and they realized the home of their neighbor Michele Shovlin was completely destroyed. After John called 9-1-1, he ran to see if he could help and heard Michele calling for help. After unsuccessfully trying to climb over debris at the front of the house, he ran to the rear of the house and was able to get to the basement area where he found Michele, with burns over her body, hair singed and clothing in tatters, starting to climb out of the basement debris! John helped her out, led her to a safer area and placed his coat around her to help avoid shock. Chris Wencker also heard Michele calling for help and arrived on the scene. He brought a deck chair for Michele to rest in while waiting for emergency services. After being assured by Cpl. Straightiff and another officer from the Huntingdon Police Department (HPD) that emergency services were on the way, John and Chris carried Michele in the deck chair to an adjoining neighbor's driveway to wait for the ambulance.

While the HPD Officers and John waited with Michele, Chris went to the homes of neighbors to alert them of the fire danger and to check for damage. A neighbor's young son, Will Woomer, also went to the neighboring Heaton home, which was on fire, and rescued their dog Odin. John credits the Huntingdon Fire Department's great job of putting out the fire and saving homes in the neighborhood. He commented, "if credit or merit is due, it should go to the ...EMT's, Fire Department, Doctors, Nurses, Care Givers, and Michele's incredible family." John also observed that "this tragic explosion event really showcased how this wonderful Huntingdon Community can rally around one of it's citizens who is suffering. This has been demonstrated in so many ways... neighbors providing water to the firemen putting out the fire, businesses having fundraisers for Michele, Go Fund Me collections, a parade for Michele when she was able to come home from hospital, and countless other acts of kindness and support. All, during a global Pandemic shutdown!"



6/15/2021 photo from Michele Shovlin's Facebook page





# Community Improvement Awards

## Partners

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## Sponsor

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