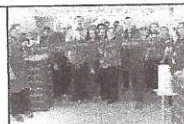


Friends team  
up on purchase  
of Nature's  
Closet  
— page 14



- Inside this issue**
- ◆ PROGRAMS CONTINUE AS TYLER STREET LAB SEEKS NEW LOCATION ..... 2
  - ◆ CIGAR LOUNGE PLANNED FOR CRAWFORD SQUARE SPACE..... 3
  - ◆ PINE BROOK PUB PUTS FOOD FIRST AT FORMER CHICK'S BAR & GRILL..... 5
  - ◆ MORESI TURNS FOCUS TO UPSCALE RESIDENTIAL PROJECTS..... 18



Major upgrade  
for Price  
Rite store in  
Pittsfield  
— page 12

# BERKSHIRE TRADE & COMMERCE *monthly*

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## Lever expands internship program, adds new job placement function

**Emphasis on attracting young talent to become part of local workforce**

BY BRAD JOHNSON

After two successful years of operation of its Berkshire Business Interns program,

Lever is revamping it to broaden its scope and impact.

"We're expanding the program to include more non-business internships," said Jeffrey

Thomas, executive director of Lever, a North Adams-based nonprofit organization that works to foster an ecosystem of entrepreneurship and innovation in the Berkshire region.

While facilitating the placement of college students or recent graduates in meaningful internship experiences with area businesses will remain the primary emphasis, Thomas explained that the program will also look to

place interns in the nonprofit and municipal sectors. "In these cases, we'd be looking for situations where the interns would be working on mission-central projects, just as we've done in the past two years with area businesses," he said.

With this expansion comes a new, shorter name: Berkshire Interns. This change, while subtle on its surface, is intended to promote

**"A big part of what we're trying to do is to get more young people to choose to live and work in Berkshire County."**

interest in the program among college students who may feel that a "business" internship doesn't line up well with their future professional or personal goals.

That was the perception of at least one participant in the inaugural internship program in summer 2018.

"I was looking for a summer job or internship going into my junior year," recalled Jade Schnauber, who is pursuing a degree in education at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA). "My mom sent me a link to

*continued on page 10*

Jade Schnauber, a former intern at Lever, has been named director of workforce programs. These programs support the goal of attracting talented young people to live and work in the Berkshires.



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# WORKplace

## Berkshire Interns

continued from page 1

the Berkshire Business Interns program, and I said, 'Why would I want to do that when I'm an ed major?'"

Despite her reservations, Schnauber connected with organizers of the program at Lever, who ended up recruiting her for one of the internships the organization itself was hosting to help run the new program.

"We sat down and talked about the program, and they thought my skills were a good fit for [being] a Lever intern," she said.

Her skills turned out to be more than a good fit, as Schnauber spent the 10-week program "basically assisting with anything and everything BBI." That included creating aspects of the curriculum through

which interns were assessed as part of their workplace activities, and coordinating some of the social programming and events that the program offered to enhance the interns' overall experience outside of the workplace.

Following her internship, Schnauber stayed on as a part-time staff member at Lever during the next school year. With the second iteration of Berkshire Business Interns approaching in 2019, she was then given an opportunity to take on a much larger role in coordinating the program, especially in the social programming aspect.

"It was great," she said regarding the second year of the program, in which the number of interns placed with area employers rose to 45 (from 35 the first year). "The program was basically the same, but the things we did change made it better."

That assessment was supported by positive feedback from interns and employers, many of whom were also participants in the inaugural year of the program.

Following the 2019 BBI program, Schnauber temporarily left Lever—and the Berkshires—when she traveled to Greece for a semester abroad at the start of her senior year at MCLA.

Upon her return, she rejoined the Lever team—this time in the new position of workforce programs manager. "I'm working part time now, and will go to full time in May," she said. That's when she will be graduating from MCLA, as well as when the ramp-up begins for this summer's Berkshire Interns program.

### Berkshire Entry debut

It is also when Lever will be launching another related program, Berkshire Entry, that Schnauber will oversee in her new position.

"With Berkshire Entry, we'll be marketing entry-level job opportunities in the Berkshires to seniors graduating from college this year," said Thomas.

He noted that, with the success of the internship program, it was a logical next step to facilitate full-time job placements for students who are graduating this spring. "We're so excited about the talent we've seen in our internships," he said, adding that one way of keeping some of that talent in the region is by creating attractive job opportunities for alumni of the program.

That also touches on the underlying goal of Berkshire Entry and Berkshire Interns. "A big part of what we're trying to do is to get more young people to choose to live and work in Berkshire County," said Thomas. "It's a big challenge, and a big priority for those involved in workforce development."

Thomas added that Lever's selection of Schnauber to manage Berkshire Entry and Berkshire Interns reflects both the high

level of talent that the internship program has attracted and the benefits of absorbing that talent into the local workforce through meaningful job opportunities.

"I've definitely been the poster child for our programs," said Thomas. "I have complete confidence in her in this role."

From Schnauber's perspective, her involvement in the internship program and subsequent transition into a staff position at Lever does give her unique insights into the programs she now manages.

"I've definitely been the poster child for all our programs," she laughed.

She noted that her own internship and work with Lever, aside from leading to her current position, also has influenced her thinking on the direction of her future career path in education.

"Being an education major, I kind of decided I wanted to end up in a classroom," she said. But, based on her organizational

**Lever's operation of these programs has been made possible by funding from Berkshire United Way. "Their support has been critical to the success of these programs," Thomas said. "They have really gotten behind the vision we have for them and their potential to impact the region's economy."**

Schnauber said she plans to pursue a master's degree in education following her graduation this spring, which she would do in tandem with her work at Lever. "I'll be busy," she observed.

### Outreach efforts

For the upcoming Berkshire Interns program, Schnauber said she and Thomas are teaming up on outreach to area businesses and organizations to line up postings for internship positions.

This will also overlap with outreach for Berkshire Entry, in which they will coordinate with area employers on postings for entry-level jobs they are looking to fill.

The postings for Berkshire Interns and Berkshire Entry will be marketed to potential candidates through two new websites that are being developed for Lever by Stockbridge-based Mungy.

Those sites—berkshireinterns.org and berkshireentry.org—went live in early February. (Information about the programs can also be obtained by contacting Schnauber at 413-346-4840 or jschnauber@leverinc.org.)

The process for matching interns with employers will remain largely the same as the first two years—with students free

to apply to those internships they are most interested in, and employers able to decide which candidates to offer internships.

The basic parameters for internship positions remain the same, with employers agreeing to host the interns they hire for the full 10-week program, to pay at least the prevailing minimum wage, and to provide interns with a meaningful and challenging work experience.

Schnauber said they are hoping to place as many interns as the 45 they had last year. "Fifty would be great," she said, adding that a higher number than that would begin to stretch the logistical framework of the program.

As noted earlier, that framework includes an emphasis on non-work social activities throughout the 10-week program. These range from group outings to cultural events, recreational activities and other opportunities for interns to gather and enjoy the company of their peers in a non-work setting.

"That's an important part of the overall Berkshire Interns experience," said Schnauber, noting that it provides opportunities

to enjoy many of the county's attractions in a social setting, while also promoting a positive impression of what living and working the Berkshires entails.

Those same goals also apply to Berkshire Entry. Schnauber explained that the program is being structured so that graduating seniors selected for positions with area employers would begin those jobs along the same general timeline as the Berkshire Interns program.

"The idea is that Berkshire Entry students would be starting [their jobs] right after they graduate," she said. "That would also allow them to get involved in the social programming for Berkshire Interns."

While some candidates for Berkshire Entry positions may already be based in the Berkshires, Schnauber noted that the program is open to those from outside the area as well. "They can be from anywhere," she said.

Whether from near or far, she added, "The goal is to find young adults who want to live and work in the Berkshires."

The program's appeal to these graduating students will also depend in large measure on the types of entry-level jobs offered by employers participating in Berkshire Entry. "Students are looking for opportunities to grow within an organization," she said.

Finding employers able to offer those types of opportunities will be the focus of outreach efforts by her and Thomas this winter and spring.

In terms of basic numbers, the goals for the first Berkshire Entry program are more modest than for Berkshire Interns. "Our view is that being able to post 10 positions would be great," Schnauber said.

For this initial iteration of Berkshire Entry, Lever's assistance to employers in filling these positions will be provided at no cost. "We're piloting it this year, so we're offering it for free," Thomas said.

He noted that Lever's operation of these programs has been made possible by Berkshire United Way, which has been a lead source of funding for the internship program since its launch in 2018, and for the debut of Berkshire Entry this year.

"Their support has been critical to the success of these programs," Thomas said. "They have really gotten behind the vision we have for them and their potential to impact the region's economy." ♦

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