In 2019, Belknap EDC continued to focus on its’ strategic economic development goals: retain and attract young talent; support entrepreneurs; enhance workforce development programming, and be a pro-active catalyst, partner, and investor, and/or owner in property development that enhances quality of place or economic opportunity. We look forward to continuing to play a more direct role in driving new investment to parts of Belknap County that need it the most.

We are pleased to report the following progress on our strategic plan in 2019.

Goal 1: Retain and Attract Young Talent

We used our radio ad campaign, e-newsletters, and social media presence to push information relevant to young workers and entrepreneurs out into the community to generate positive word of mouth about the opportunities the Lakes Region offers. In May, we co-hosted a Golf Scramble event with Fusion, the local young professionals’ organization, which included more than 90 young professionals and business leaders participating. Throughout the year, we partnered with Stay Work Play, New Hampshire’s statewide young professionals’ organization, promoting opportunities for young talent in our great region and state.

Goal 2: Support Entrepreneurs

Thanks to support from the University of New Hampshire and the NH Community Development Finance Authority (CDFA), Belknap EDC was able to continue to contract with the NH Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to provide a dedicated business advisor for Belknap County. Rita Toth was hired to be the Small Business Advisor for the region in November and has made a positive impact quickly. Rita has provided dozens of hours of one-on-one counseling time, many separate sessions with more than 40 business owners/prospective business owners; made many outreach presentations to large groups; canvassed downtown blocks in our communities doing one-on-one outreach to business owners over several days; and met with several Belknap EDC loan clients to assess need for services with financial management and funding. We are so pleased to partner with SBDC and CDFA to provide this critical layer of support for entrepreneurs in the Lakes Region.
Belknap EDC has continued to work closely with the City of Laconia and many state and federal partners to build the funding stack and plans for the redevelopment of the Colonial Theater block in Laconia. Belknap EDC has led efforts to build capital for the project and construction began on the project late in 2019. The past year has been very productive with community support helping us move this economic development project forward. With more than ten government and private funding partners and more than 300 community leaders investing in the project, we feel the renovated theater and housing/commercial spaces, will drive economic activity in Downtown Laconia and the region. We are excited to lead construction for this project in 2020. For more details on the project’s progress, please visit 609mainstreet.org.

In an effort to build community awareness of the career opportunities that advanced manufacturing offers, Belknap EDC once again partnered with the State of New Hampshire Division of Economic Development to coordinate events and open houses geared toward educating local students, parents, and the general public to the cutting-edge careers available with our local manufacturers.

Goal 4: Be a pro-active catalyst, partner, investor, and/or owner in property development that enhances quality of place or economic opportunity in Belknap County.

Belknap EDC dedicated a significant amount of time and energy to addressing our region’s long-term workforce needs. As part of the 200 by 2020 Initiative, an outstanding local workforce development partnership initiated by the United Way and the Lakes Region Chamber of Commerce in 2010, Belknap EDC continued to spearhead lakesregioninternships.com. This online database of internships and job shadows has grown quickly to include more than 100 internship and job shadow opportunities and is a valuable tool and resource for our local high school students and teachers. All local high schools are now using the database as a way to connect students and businesses to grow our local workforce for future career opportunities.

Goal 3: Enhance Workforce Development Programming

Belknap EDC continued to market our revolving loan fund. In 2019, Ken advised over 20 businesses on financing issues. Three of those businesses became Belknap EDC loan clients last year, including Wayfarer Coffee, which expanded their operations in Laconia. Our investment in a dedicated loan officer continues to generate more leads for our loan fund than we have seen in the past and provides local businesses with a higher quality of service.

A December meet and greet was held at Hermit Woods Winery & Deli to introduce Rita Toth (center), new Small Business Advisor to the business community. With Rita are (l to r), Justin Slattery, Executive Director of Belknap EDC; Liz Gray, State Director of NH-SBDC; Chris Kelly, Belknap EDC Board Chairman; and Robert Manley, Owner of Hermit Woods.

Proud owners of Wayfarer Coffee Roasters (left), Ben Butlerwell and Karen Bassett pose with Belknap EDC Loan Officer, Ken Wilson and Belknap EDC Executive Director, Justin Slattery after closing on their loan.
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