

Main Street Magician

Stephen Barth is helping small towns find their economic future

Chris Ruvo

Stephen Barth is on a mission to breathe new life into the Main Streets of America, one small town at a time.

Barth, a Doylestown resident with a fast-growing reputation as an economic development and revitalization guru, says it's all about identifying opportunities that will do the greatest good for a community, bringing the right people together, and giving them the support they need to succeed. Prosperity for all, he says, is the ultimate goal.

"Each town has its own culture and identity," he says. "I help them grow to meet their highest aspirations for what they want to be."

So far, Barth has worked his magic on behalf of Hatboro, Perkasie, and New Britain boroughs, creating hundreds of millions of dollars of new investment in those aging communities. Through his newly-formed Barth Consulting Group, he hopes to replicate that kind of success for small towns



Barth's hand-drawn vision for the future of Perkasie's town center.

throughout the region.

Over the last few weeks, tangible evidence of Barth's transformative powers have been on display in all three towns.

In New Britain, for example, his work was integral to getting a new Mixed-Use, University Village zoning overlay district approved – a measure expected to lead to the development of a Main Street that reinvents the borough as a hip uni-

versity town in partnership with its greatest asset: Delaware Valley University. Phase-one of the University Village breaks ground this summer.

In Hatboro, meanwhile, a huge crowd attended the ribbon-cutting of a multi-million dollar, high-end American bistro called 58 York, the latest in a string of over 150 new businesses that have opened in the borough since Barth started working there in 2011.



Stephen Barth is a catalyst for economic development in small towns.

And in Perkasie, developers put the finishing touches on the American House/Perkasie Business Center, a pair of three-story, mixed use buildings totaling 30,000 square feet on the site of a lot that had remained vacant for 27 years after the devastating Great Fire of 1988.

"Steve has an amazing ability look past the current situation and see what is possible," said Joe Ferry, who helped bring Barth to Perkasie four years ago. "He lays out the vision and helps the key players make it happen."

Barth, a one-time professional photographer and corporate branding expert, has parlayed his Quaker upbringing (George School/Wilmington College) and multiple work experiences with large corporations into a new career bringing diverse interests together to facilitate projects. Not surprisingly, he leans on Quaker philosophy to get things done, a philosophy grounded in consensus building.

"Consensus building focuses on leaving egos and politics out of problem solving, and zeros in on the issues at hand," he says. "It focuses on the greatest good and outcome that can be achieved by a collective decision. It's the perfect tool to satisfy different viewpoints."

While impressive, these most recent positive developments are only the latest in series of sweeping, broader revitalization efforts he is spearheading in his client communities.

Barth's handiwork is certainly evident in Hatboro. When he started working for the Montgomery County community, its town center district had a 25-percent vacancy rate and some absentee landlords who did little to keep up properties and attract quality tenants.

Fast forward a few years, and the borough is humming with fresh,

vibrant life. The commercial occupancy rate is about 99 percent, lease rates have more than doubled to \$15 per square foot, all but one of eight, vacant, anchor properties are filled, and a diverse range of strong businesses, from eateries to a micro-brewery to national retail chains, now call Hatboro home. A new high-end Italian restaurant is slated to open next month in what was formerly a blighted property.

Residential initiatives include redeveloping a former factory into Soho-style apartments and much more. The walkable downtown and easy access to Philadelphia via the train station have helped Hatboro attract a growing number of young professionals to move into town, says Barth.

"Hatboro is experiencing a huge renaissance," says Barth.

A similar transformation is underway in Perkasie, where Barth's vision and a pro-active, development-friendly Borough Council have sparked several projects. More than 300 housing units are either under construction or soon will be within the borough. The Delbar building, a vacant factory with a history of environmental issues, is under agreement of sale and soon will become home to high-end apartments and business space. A new brewpub in Perkasie's town center, with rooftop dining, is in the works. Plans are also underway to create a high-tech industrial park by the Penridge Airport – a move that could bring 300 to 500 quality jobs.

Free WiFi for the downtown area is also being discussed.

"Perkasie is such a gorgeous town with so much upside," said Barth.

The hard-working consultant helps achieve positive results for communities by courting developers, architects and businesses whose goals align with those of the towns for which he works. Part of this includes playing an indispensable facilitator's role, streamlining, for example, the development process by helping towns and would-be developers and businesses troubleshoot, smooth out potential wrinkles and get on the same mutually beneficial page.

"It's very fulfilling to help communities and individuals grow and achieve their dreams," says Barth. "I'm very honored to help people, businesses and communities change their lives and build their futures."

Dogs rescued from South Korean meat farm arrive at Animal Alliance

Two of the dogs rescued from a dog meat farm in South Korea by Humane Society International arrived at Animal Alliance in Lambertville, N.J., on April 30.

The dogs are part of a group of 250 dogs and puppies rescued by HSI's Animal Rescue Team from a dog meat farm in Wonju, South Korea. Due to the complex logistical planning needed to transport

and place the high number of dogs in the U.S., HSI flew 79 dogs out in several shipments that began in February. All of those dogs are now with shelters that are part of The Humane Society of the United States' Emergency Placement Partner program.

In the final leg of the shipment, HSI has brought the remaining 171 dogs to the U.S. and Canada: 121

dogs arrived at its emergency shelter in Madison, N.J., and 50 dogs are being transported nationwide to Emergency Placement Partner shelters, including Animal Alliance, as well as to foster families in Ottawa, Canada.

The two dogs in Animal Alliance's care will be evaluated and treated for any medical issues and later be put up for adoption.



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