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Fall foliage and striking skies added a new dimension to this year's Creek Float held in conjunction with the Morris Sesquicentennial celebration.

*Photo by Robin Elliott.*

**BUTTERNUT  
VALLEY  
ALLIANCE**

*The BVA is a 501(c)(3)  
that serves the communities  
within the watershed of the  
Butternut Creek*

# THE CURRENT

Fall  
2020

*Protecting and Conserving the Quality of Life in the Butternut Valley*

## Into the Wild...

BVA's award-winning Morris Sesquicentennial parade float, aptly named "Into the Wild", reflects our intention to enjoy the Butternut Valley's natural resources together.

Whether it be opening an educational trail system at Texas Schoolhouse State Forest in New Lisbon or mapping potential trails to link the General Jacob Morris and Wagner Farm State Forests, BVA is expanding public use and accessibility. Come and volunteer with us to explore these previously undiscovered forests and help us make these initiatives happen.

Or join us on the water like 25 people with nine canoes, five kayaks, and one paddleboard who thoroughly enjoyed a majestic September afternoon floating the Butternut Creek. Developed in partnership with Otsego County Conservation Association (OCCA), this annual event underscores our commitment to creating year-round public access to our waterways as well. Currently, we are exploring additional water ac-

cess opportunities with OCCA, Otsego Land Trust and Upper Susquehanna Coalition.

A grant from Upper Susquehanna Coalition of \$13,000 has led to a partnership with Morris Central School to create riparian buffers along Calhoun Creek and develop a walking trail to the Butternut Creek. This effort will provide pedestrian access to these waterways, involve community volunteers, and continue to expand our partnership opportunities throughout the area.

Internally, the BVA board has been updating our strategic plan and envisioning new opportunities such as a valley-wide arts and music festival, an application for a New York State Scenic Byway Grant for Routes 16 and 51 and a roundtable series with local business owners, to name a few. We invite you to share your ideas and help us accomplish our plans.

This issue is a reflection of the diversity of our resources and Tom Washbon

illuminates the many ways to develop our economy and use our capabilities to impact our quality of life. Erica Jamieson celebrates the resurgence of "Victory Gardens" becoming an unforeseen benefit of Covid-19 in our communities and we identify local resources as well as ways to protect them.

BVA's focus is to support projects and activities that foster equity and accessibility, and reflect the long-term vision of our community. The heart of our mission is to protect and conserve the environmental qualities, farming, economic development and cultural heritage in the Butternut Creek watershed. But we can't do it without you. Please join us for any of these activities. Send us an email expressing your interest and we'll be in touch with you.

Take care and stay safe.

Graham Stroh, Executive Director

**30 Miles** {  
Length of the watershed

**4,400 People** {  
Approximate population

**130 Sq. Miles**  
Watershed area

by Tom Washbon

# What do we mean by Economic Development?

Judge Cooper, founder of Cooperstown, was, perhaps, one of the most forward-thinking economic developers of his or even of our time. For many, the concept of economic development simply means encouraging large industries to locate in their area; however, as Cooper demonstrated, successful economic development involves much more. Since the BVA's mission includes fostering economic development, it is important to understand the rich historical context that Cooper and his cohort Jacob Morris brought to Otsego County and the complexities of the concept.

Economic development is the process by which the economic well-being and quality of life of a community are improved according to targeted goals and objectives. Economic development organizations primarily focus on the growth aspect – a phenomenon of market productivity and increases in community wealth. In New York State, the efforts are primarily the function of Empire State Development, Regional Economic Development Councils and County Industrial Development Agencies. Banks, electric utilities such as National Grid and

NYSEG and railroads such as Norfolk Southern and CSX maintain departments to assist in growth in their franchises. Organizations typically measure growth by the number of firms assisted, jobs created, jobs retained and capital investment made. Some organizations use grants, tax incentives, and infrastructure enhancements such as water, sewer and roads, while others may make

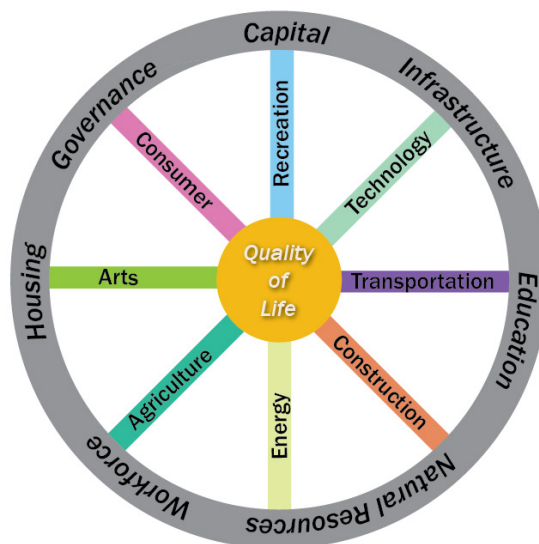
direct capital investments and offer rate rebates to encourage growth.

But economic growth is but one aspect of the process of economic development focusing on the monetary aspect and the economy at large. Community economic development encourages using local resources in a way that enhances

economic opportunities while improving social conditions in a sustainable way. Successful economic development requires a thorough knowledge of a community and its resources, environmental awareness, a shared consensus of vision and integration of activities to achieve it. It also requires a nimbleness in thought to recognize and adapt to changing circumstances. It is a subtle and ever-changing process.

“...the first difficulties are the greatest, and it is only by combination and cooperation that they can be surmounted. The more the settlers are in number, the more hands can be brought to affect those works which cannot be executed by a few; such are the making of roads and bridges, and other incidents to the cultivation of the Wilderness, which are impossible to individuals, but which numbers render practicable and easy.”

*A Guide in the Wilderness,*  
Judge William Cooper, 1806



As illustrated in the graphic above, workforce, natural resources, governance, infrastructure, capital investments, education and housing provide the driving forces for development. Agriculture, energy, construction, arts, technology, recreation, transportation, consumer services and products, are the endeavors or lines of business to be nurtured. Wealth and quality of life are net results.

What can we do to influence the growth? How do we choose where to focus our efforts? What is missing from our valley that would enhance our quality of life? What is our shared vision? These are the questions the BVA will address through community focus groups and partnerships with other organizations such as Otsego NOW.

It is somewhat ironic that Cooper's economic development carved a settlement out of the wilderness and now we are looking to, in many ways, return to that wilderness to enhance the economic viability of our community.

Board member Danielle Rhone and family celebrate the outdoors in the Morris Sesquicentennial parade winning the Best Overall award for the BVA float.







by Erica Jamieson

# Backyard Gardens Offer a Sense of Security During COVID-19

Inspiration for Elaine Ranc's backyard garden arrived via a school project. Her daughter Victoria and other students had been working with Mrs. Grant, the Morris Central School Environmental Studies teacher, to grow vegetables in the school greenhouse. After in-person classes were suspended due to COVID-19, Victoria was instructed to get her green fingers to work at home – and so the pair began growing potatoes, tomatoes, pole beans, greens, herbs, and a slew of other vegetables.

Across the Butternut Valley, there seems to have been a rush to get outside and garden this summer. Nationally, increased time at home and a dwindling trust in supermarket supply chains led to a resurgence of “Victory Gardens”, with people taking the issue of food security into their own hands. While small-scale agriculture is common in the Butternut Valley, when grocery stores in Oneonta faced shortages, many people looked for alternatives. For Elaine, what started as a school project became a question of how to stay prepared for the worst and provide for herself at home.

Elaine has learned how to dry and save seeds for next year and joined a homestead canning group on Facebook. “The whole idea of gardening to have enough for weeks of dinners, instead of a week or two, is more appealing, because you never know. Something like this has never happened in my lifetime,” said Elaine.

Elaine has also created a gardening club with her colleagues at Springbrook, working with people with developmental disabilities. Over the summer, they have watched their clients revel in eating homegrown produce. “For the challenges of the adults that I work with, it was nice

to see them recognize that ‘I did this.’”

For Eric Bankus, who lives with his wife and five-year-old son at Pastured Primitive Farmstead on Copes Corners Road, the goal to become self-sufficient emerged during the 2008 financial crash. Eric was enticed by homesteading as a way to safeguard his family's finances. “We're always looking for ways to look inward and do some things for ourselves, rather than spend money and go into debt,” he explained.

The same philosophy applies to his

*“It has been fantastic! I can't go anywhere and so I have lots of time to garden!” – David Gibson, seasoned Gilbertsville backyard gardener*

COVID-19 experience. Eric and his family live on a 14-acre farm and raise sheep and pigs along with various produce. Their lifestyle helped the family avoid any shortages. “We lost a lot of the fun things we do in our free time, but our day-to-day stayed the same because of those choices about making food ourselves and being self-sustaining.” While trips to the store for grains are a necessity, the Bankus family plans to make cheese from the sheep's milk, build up the root cellar, and stock the freezer with home-reared meat. Amid the disruption of routines and the systems that people rely on, home gardening endures and sustains.

Debi and Ed Cotten, both in their 60s, decided to reinstate their backyard garden after a five-year hiatus. “We had just gotten to where we were too old to bother with it, and too much work for

**Board member Stacia Norman and grandson made sure their scarecrow was wearing a mask!**

what we get out of it,” explained Debi, “but because of COVID we didn't know what we would be facing.” Debi spent the summer making pickles, dilly beans, jam, zucchini bread and tomato sauce while Ed took care of the garden. Debi has enjoyed putting food away for the winter, but ultimately found the garden a welcome respite from pandemic-associated anxieties. “It was a good distraction,” said Debi. “This gave me a purpose, something to do pretty much every day, because there was always something that needed to be taken care of.”

These local families often found more than security, respite and joy in their gardens. Elaine loved learning and growing alongside Victoria. “When we dug up the potatoes, when they finally withered and we knew they were ready, it was just the warm feeling of going through the soil and finding, you know, gold,” she remembered.

Though the Coronavirus sowed uncertainty and anxiety throughout the Butternut Valley, it also reminded people to get outside and get planting. For many, growing food is a security blanket to carry them through uncertain times. Cultivating a garden can also bring people together, settle nerves, and – let's face it – it's fun.



# Watershed Treasures

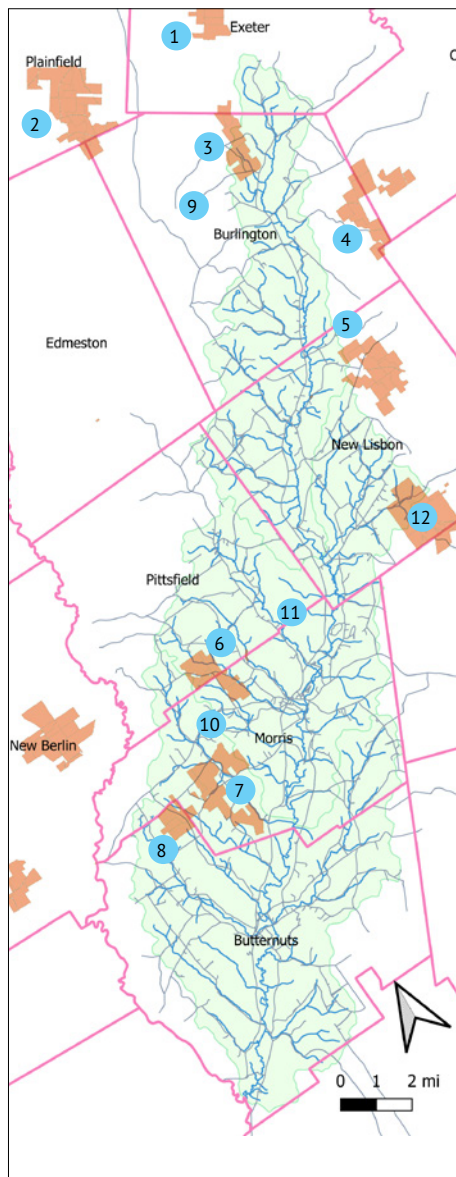
Eight state forests fall under the auspices of the Leatherstocking Management Unit named for James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales. Located at the eastern end of the Central Appalachian ecozone, they lie in or near the Butternut Valley watershed and host a plethora of wildlife such as deer, turkey, ruffed grouse, rabbits, squirrels and coyotes as well as a variety of songbirds and birds of prey.

Hiking, jogging, fishing, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and snowmobiling are activities available at most locations. Primitive camping and seasonal hunting and trapping are permitted in various locations. See DEC website: [www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)

**1** Exeter (1957 acres), **2** Plainfield (1403 acres), **3** Basswood Pond (720 acres), **4** Hartwick (1242 acres), **5** Texas School House (1245 acres), **6** Calhoun Creek (727 acres), **7** General Jacob Morris (1190 acres) and **8** Wagner Farm (463 acres).

Otsego County Soil & Water Conservation District manages county owned forest property for sustainable timber harvesting, ecosystem health and recreational opportunity. These areas are **9** Taylor Hill (427 acres), **10** Charles H. Bingham Memorial Forest (231 acres) and **11** Chapin Memorial Forest (312 acres).

Adjacent to the Butternut Valley watershed, **12** Gilbert Lake State Park is a valuable local resource with 1584 acres, offering a wide range of recreational activities as well as being home to the New York State Civilian Conservation Corps Museum.



## We Need Your Help

This year we need your help more than ever to support the BVA. Because of the pandemic, our largest event, the Summer Harvest Festival, was necessarily canceled. Without this event, a significant opportunity for membership renewals and donations was lost.

It's a fact of life that our small organization is dependent on our members and friends for financial support, small and large. Your support pays for our part-time staff to schedule, organize, and do the work of the BVA alongside our volunteers as well as fund programs and events. Support us with a check or online at the Butternut Valley Alliance website: [www.butternutvalleyalliance.org](http://www.butternutvalleyalliance.org)

## Our Board

Chair: Edward T. Lentz  
Co-Chair: Stacia Norman  
Secretary: Bob Thomas  
Treasurer: Rick O'Keefe  
John Braunius  
Alyx Braunius  
Doug Ernst  
Norm Farwell  
Carla Hall  
Les Hasbargen  
Flo Loomis  
Glen Noto  
Danielle Rhone  
Tom Washbon  
Alex Wing



# 1

**Visionary Scholar Award Submission Deadline**  
Open to high-school seniors from the Butternut Valley watershed. See Website for details.



### Trash Your Walk!

Resident Beth Childs takes a bag to pick up trash when she walks or jogs. Do the same and send us a photo to share on our Facebook page: [ButternutValleyAlliance](https://www.facebook.com/ButternutValleyAlliance).



### A Pandemic Worth of Plastic

One local couple saved its plastic film while schools were closed. Morris Central School is once again accepting plastic film for recycling.