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Friends of Rogers powers through year of transition

SARAH GENTER

EVENING SUN

SHERBURNE — It's been a busy and transitional year for the Friends of Rogers Environmental Education Center, but the organization has no intention of slowing down.

Friends of Rogers is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that operates the 600 acres of land, five facilities, and seven miles of trails at the Rogers Center, located at 2721 State Route 80 in Sherburne. The organization is made up of 14 board members and a four-person staff who were all hired in the past year.

While bringing in all new staff members in one year was a significant transition for the organization, operations at the Rogers Center remained smooth, program offerings grew, and new community partnerships were formed.

A year of growth

Towards the end of 2022, Friends of Rogers bid farewell to Executive Director Simon Solomon and welcomed in David Carson as their new Executive Director.

Ellen Rathbone was also brought on as Senior



Friends of Rogers hit a major milestone this year at their annual First Day Hike on January 1. The event had its highest turnout ever with 110 participants. (Submitted photo)

Environmental Educator, and the organization hired Media and Marketing Coordinator Jeremy Fetzko and Bookkeeper and Administrative Assistant Amy August-Ruiz.

Although staff members

agreed it was a challenging year as they were all new to the organization, their goal was to keep the same caliber of programming and service for the public.

"We convened as a team to

remind one another that however challenging it felt to go through such a significant transition, that was only our experience of it," said Carson. "The experience of the public was

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THE EVENING SUN

Building Chenango County's future

TYLER MURPHY

EVENING SUN MANAGING EDITOR

We can wait for the future or we can try to build one. So, how are local communities preparing for the future? Over the last few decades, The Evening Sun's Progress Chenango has offered readers a chance to learn more about the key businesses and organizations of Norwich, Sherburne, Greene, Oxford, Bainbridge, New Berlin, Otselic Valley, and all the other surrounding towns in Chenango County.

The Evening Sun publishes this annual review as part of the regular newspaper.

Each section of this five-day series will double the number of daily pages and be delivered or sold at no extra charge.

Past Progress editions are on our website, evesun.com.

On March 16, The Evening Sun will celebrate 133 years as Chenango County's Daily Newspaper.

We have run a daily edition almost every weekday since 1891. Christmas are our only official holiday, meaning we publish every other weekday of the year.

If the roads are closed, if the power is out, the Evening Sun newsroom is open and our dedicated staff is still working.

The writers, sports editor, design artists, press workers and delivery people are here every morning before the sun even rises. The writing staff often end their days late at night attending after-hours meetings, sporting matches or weekend events. There is always a next deadline and nothing is ever completed.

The history of the newspaper is as rich and deep as Norwich itself.

The Evening Sun is the descendant of the first and only daily newspaper founded in the county, which was called the Morning Sun.

The newspaper's actual history goes back even further if you count older weekly publications.

The very first newspaper in Norwich was created on Nov. 14, 1816 when J.F. Hubbard began publishing The Norwich Journal for two cents a copy.

The journal continued to be published successfully for several years, changing hands numerous times.

In 1877, publisher B. Gage Berry changed the name to The Chenango Semi-Weekly Telegraph, with an issue coming out every Wednesday and Saturday mornings at a cost of two dollars per year.

Eventually, The Telegraph merged with The Norwich Sun nearly a century later.

The paper was first known as The Morning Sun until 1904. It then became The Norwich Sun until 1961, when it was renamed The Evening Sun.

In 1996, the newspaper moved headquarters from Hale Street to Lackawanna Avenue.

The Evening Sun was purchased by Snyder Communications on May 2, 1994 and for the first time in 15 years it was locally owned.

The Evening Sun is an independently and locally owned publication to this day thanks to the support of our readers and advertisers.

Raymond continues to lead with innovative technology



The Raymond Corporation achieved record production volumes in 2023 and hopes to continue its success in 2024. (Submitted photo)

KELLI MILLER

EVENING SUN

GREENE — The Raymond Corporation, a Toyota Industries company, has deep roots in Chenango County that have been growing for more than a century.

The company, founded in 1922 by George Raymond, celebrated its 100th anniversary year in 2022 and continues to move forward with innovative

thinking and modern technology.

In the beginning, Raymond ambitiously worked through patents of key elements for material handling that were also used for automation and mass production. His insight to the value of the common wood pallet that was being used by so many companies aided in the creation of an industry standard.

He was also inspired by the hydraulics of the barber chair

and created the first lift truck, commonly known as a fork lift.

With continual research and the patents placed on key designs, he released the rights to some of those designs, making them free for any business to copy and use. It was a major success and changed the industry.

The company has employed and provided for thousands of local residents and remains one of Chenango County's oldest and most successful companies

headquartered in the Village and Town of Greene.

Record-level production and key workers

"It's been an exciting year for Raymond in total and on the positive side, we were able to achieve record production volumes in our manufacturing facilities," said Raymond Corporation Executive Vice President Steve VanNostrand.

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that there were new programs here, there was new staff here, there was new funding here, so it was really exciting.”

“Rogers Center is 120-odd years old. So translating that amount of institutional knowledge is just not going to happen quickly,” he added. “We are just the people that work here now. There are so many people who have worked here, and there will be so many people that work here in the future. Our

In 2023, the Friends of Rogers Bird Cabin got a floor-to-ceiling renovation by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). The remodel was revealed to the public at Rogers’ Winter Living Celebration on February 3. (Submitted photo)

names are just on the roster for this period in time. It’s our chance to do something with it.”

Despite any transitional challenges, the staff saw a year full of milestones and growth, including the launch of a community science project in collaboration with Colgate University through the Colgate Upstate Institute.

“We launched a community science program around pollinators that hopefully will be a multi-year project, and will bring a new era of scientific research to Rogers,” said Carson.

“Community science is the forefront of environmental science and community engagement. You essentially take a research question or a research project and then have a scientist or an educator devoted to cultivating community input,” he continued. “The community then gets involved by collecting the data, uploading it to a database that’s accessible by academic researchers, and then universities are able to use the data collected by individual citizens from the public to conduct large-scale research.”

The Bird Cabin at Rogers Center, which Carson calls a “high class mini museum” of taxidermied birds, received a floor-to-ceiling renovation by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) in 2023. The new cabin was revealed to the public at the 2024 Winter Living Celebration scheduled for February 3.

The addition of Rathbone to the staff also allowed for the addition of several new programs at the Rogers Center.

In 2023, Rathbone started the Monday Morning Rambles,

which is a weekly hike around areas of the Rogers Center property as well as occasional trips to nearby hiking locations. She also began Three Things Thursday, a summer adult education program that brings guest speakers to Rogers.

“This was really one of the best things that Ellen [Rathbone] did last year, was to bring a whole suite of adult education programs,” said Carson. “Three Things Thursday happens on the third Thursday of every month in the summer, and it brings in high-caliber guest speakers to talk about a specific subject, whether that’s fishing in Chenango County, or deer overabundance and its impact on the ecosystem, or people who are obsessed with mushrooms and want to learn all about fungus and their role.”

She also began equinox trivia nights, held on the two solstices and equinoxes each year, as well as several one-time educational programs.

In January, Friends of Rogers held a tracking workshop hosted by Rathbone, which taught attendees how to identify what animal left specific tracks and how to determine their gait, identifying animal scat, and identifying various other environmental signs left by animals.

In April, Rathbone led a workshop on phenology, which is the practice of tracking the seasonal changes of the natural world. Attendees learned why tracking local phenology is important to environmental science, how to use the nature tracking app iNaturalist, and the practice of nature journaling.

“You go out with your note-

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There is a wide range of wildlife to observe at Rogers Center, and the organization offers several programs throughout the year to teach visitors even more about the natural world. In 2023, Friends of Rogers offered workshops on animal tracking and phenology, as well as bird walks, and weekly hikes around the Rogers Center property. (Photo by Dustin Genter of 5th Dimension Photography)



Know where to go!

A reference guide on where to go for care.

Your child falls and sprains an ankle while playing at the park...

You catch a bug, and now you're running a high fever, coughing and more...

It can be tough to distinguish where to go for medical care when your symptoms feel unbearable, and your primary care provider is unavailable. Here are some key differences to help you decide.

 VIRTUAL WALK-IN VISITS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal or insect bites • Coughs • Cuts • Diarrhea • Dizziness • Eye injuries • Fever • Headache • Nausea or upset stomach • Rashes • Sinus pain • Sore throat • Urinary tract/ bladder infections • Vomiting
 PRIMARY CARE or WALK-IN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal or insect bites • Broken bone • Burns • Concussion • Coughs • Cuts • Diarrhea • Dizziness • Eye injuries • Fever • Headache • Nausea or upset stomach • Rashes • Sinus pain • Shortness of breath • Sore throat • Urinary tract/bladder infections • Vomiting
 EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asthma attack • Broken bone (if skin is punctured) • Burns (if severe) • Concussion (if loss of consciousness) • Cuts (if uncontrolled bleeding) • Fever (for patients under 3 months old or with fever over 105°F) • Headache (if severe) • Seizure • Shortness of breath (if severe) • Vomiting Blood

What to expect in the Emergency Department

Emergency Departments are designed to assist patients experiencing life-threatening medical situations. When you come to the Emergency Department at any UHS hospital, a triage nurse will assess your condition. Although they are open 24-7, wait times vary because healthcare staff need to treat the most seriously ill and injured patients first.

What to expect at a Walk-In Center

UHS Walk-In Centers are created to provide patients with immediate care for situations that cannot wait for a scheduled doctor's appointment. This typically includes many medical problems, such as coughs, fevers, flu or ear infection.

STAY PREPARED! Learn more on how to prepare for your Emergency Department or Walk-in visit at nyuhs.org

YOUR CARE. YOUR WAY.

nyuhs.org



Friends of Rogers held their first ever Fall Festival at the Sherburne Inn in October 2023. Rogers staff said the event was a major milestone for the organization. (Photo by Dustin Genter of 5th Dimension Photography)



The Friends of Rogers Environmental Education Center is located on 600 acres of land in Sherburne, and features several ponds, five facilities, and seven miles of hiking trails. (Photo by Dustin Genter of 5th Dimension Photography)

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book and you record your observations of nature. Some people are writers and they write an awful lot. So, 'I'm out here today and I see, oh gosh, there's a little critter moving underneath the feeders, and I'm looking at it and, oh, it looks like this, and it sounds like that, and I believe it's a short tailed shrew,' and just start recording their observations," Rathbone explained.

"Other people are artists, or like to sketch, and so they put a lot of illustrations in their journals. The ideal mix is to have a little bit of both," she continued. "You're recording in a notebook the things you are exposed to there out in nature. Some people like to bring in quotes, others are very philosophical about it, some people are very clinical about it and just list what they saw that day."

Other workshops and programs at Friends of Rogers included Snow Science, Maple Magic, Spring Wildflower Walkabout, Mid-Morning Bird Walk, Native Bees Seek and Find, and many more.

In the fall, Friends of Rogers partnered with the Sherburne Inn to host the first Rogers Fall Festival fundraiser on October 14, which Fetzko said was a big milestone for the organization.

The event included dancing to music by Big Band Sounds, delicious hors d'oeuvres, and a silent auction. Attendees were also able to enjoy the building restorations made to the historic Sherburne Inn.

October also brought along the launch of Rogers' artist residency in the Stone House, a historic structure built on the Rogers Center property in 1835 using stones dug from the Chenango Canal.

"It was the original foreman's house when this was a game farm, and then it became the director's residence when it became an education center," Carson said. "Now it houses the interns in the summer and for the other ten months of the year we are turning it into an artists' residency to bring artists here to learn about environmental science and translate environmental studies to the general public."

The program was funded by the Statewide Community Re-grants Program and administered by The Earlville Opera House, and all supplies were donated by Golden Artist Colors. The residency will culminate in an open house art show on April 20, just in time for Earth Day.

"[Golden] supplied us with all of the paint we needed for our artists this year. They are the premiere paint maker in the world, and they just happen

to be located in upstate New York," said Carson. "Having them as an advocate for this pilot project is pretty big. They have a mature and world-renowned residency program, so if we can be like them that would be great."

In a testament to their dedication and ingenuity, the Rogers Center staff also spent 2023 creating a new website – a task that was completely new to them.

"Our last website was managed by a third party provider that kind of disappeared and put us in just an annoying operational inefficiency. So it took longer because none of us are web designers, but we were able to ultimately design our own website, so now we know exactly how it works," Carson explained.

Friends of Rogers embraced change in the past year and were able to adapt and grow from it. Part of their success in 2023 was due to their partnerships with other organizations, which Carson says they hope to continue to cultivate in the future.

Powered by partnership

"In 2024, what I would like to see is leaning into this idea of powered by partnership," said Carson.

Friends of Rogers has plenty of history partnering with other organizations, but Carson said he wants to expand that area of Rogers to offer even more educational opportunities, as well as opportunities to further environmental science efforts and connect with native cultures.

One of the ways to accomplish this goal is by continuing past collaborations with schools, organizations, and foundations.

Rogers has partnered with local school districts for many years, and Carson said this year they reached an unprecedented amount of schools and students. They also partner with several area colleges for programs and internship opportunities, including SUNY ESF, SUNY Morrisville, SUNY Cobleskill, and Colgate University.

"We're a small team. It's 600 acres and five facilities. For us to activate this place requires meaningful and regular partnerships, and so I'd love to see us grow tighter with Cornell Cooperative Extension, Colgate University, SUNY ESF, SUNY Morrisville," Carson said. "Universities that have a budget and have students that can use Rogers as the laboratory. I would imagine we'll see some of that take shape this year as well."

Rogers has also received consistent support from local foundations over the years, which allows them to provide many of their programs to the community for free.

"We have a solid base of local philanthropic foundations. The Follett Foundation, the Greater Norwich Foundation, the Brown Charitable Trust,

the Mabey Foundation, the Cook Foundation. These are all multi-generational wealth that intentionally stayed in the area through the creation of foundations," said Carson. "That's how we can offer our programs for free, because they are supported by these philanthropic organizations, and we do have a nice core here in this region."

Friends of Rogers' relationship with the Bullthistle Hiking Club was renewed this year at the annual First Day Hike. The event was first created by the DEC around 20 years ago, and environmental centers and organizations across the state participate every year.

Rogers joined the tradition approximately eight years ago, and just a few weeks ago they saw their highest attendance with 110 participants – a significant increase from 30 participants in 2023. Carson said they were able to handle the unexpectedly high numbers thanks to help from the Bullthistle Hiking Club, who helped lead the four groups of hikers around different areas of Rogers Center.

Moving forward, Carson hopes to not only continue these partnerships, but forge new ones, and there are already collaborations and projects in the works for 2024.

In the coming year, Friends of Rogers will be partnering with the Chenango County Historical Society to relocate their "Sugar Shack" to Rogers Center, where they can provide maple sugaring demonstrations and programs. They will also launch a pollinator habitat restoration project at Adam's Farm in partnership with the Soil and Water Conservation District.

"It's like 120 acres that we haven't really used much in the last 60 years, and so the Soil and Water Conservation District has funded a community grant for us to take one of the fallow fields and restore pollinator habitats at about a two-acre scale. It should be fun," said Carson.

He said bringing awareness to pollinators is hugely important, as the earth is seeing its sixth major extinction event, which could have devastating consequences for the environment.

"We are losing species at a rate faster than anything we've ever seen since the last extinction, and so projects like these bring attention to the fact that it's a food desert out there for pollinators. The cascading effects that it has on an ecosystem are real and terrifying, and there's something that we can do," he said. "Even if it's just a two-acre scale, it's a chance to take a concise project and start to push the needle in the other direction."

Friends of Rogers will also work to strengthen new partnerships forged in the past year, one of which is a partnership with the Oneida Indian Nation,

which first took shape in 2023.

Carson said they hosted two educational programs titled "Legends and Lore of the Haudenosaunee," which was the most well-attended public program offered by Friends of Rogers last year.

"A lot of it was narrative storytelling using animals as the protagonists. So, how the bear lost its tail. What's the significance of the turtle in Native American culture, or at least for this region? Stories about the three sisters: squash, beans, and corn. Essentially translating the value systems and histories of the native peoples of this area through animals and plants and trees and things like that," said Carson.

Due to the extremely good reception, Carson said he hopes to continue building a relationship with the Oneida Indian Nation to bring even more cultural programming to Rogers Center.

"It was very well received, and while we don't know what our partnership will look like next year, that will open us up to a whole new world of knowledge and understanding another demographic," said Carson.

Future development

After an exciting year of new developments, Carson said a large part of their goals in 2024 is exploring what programs and offerings were best received by the community, and how they can be integrated with one another.

"A lot of this new stuff that we have tried with all of us being new and some fresh ideas coming in here, we essentially gave ourselves the liberty to try new things and see what stuck, and now that we have found the things that the public has been the most receptive to, our task is now to figure out how they all work with one another," Carson explained. "How does the Stone House residency intersect with the arts program and our school program that we do here at the center? How does the pollinator habitat work at Adam's Farm integrate with school field trips? So how do we take these new ideas that have come to light and tie them together?"

Carson said they will also be working to "intentionally cultivate and increase the diversity of the audience that we serve" by hiring a community engagement coordinator, thanks to a grant provided by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation.

He said the community engagement coordinator's responsibility would be to further Rogers Center's role in community science through more public participation projects, as well as launching a youth advisory council.

"The youngest people on the planet will be those that inherit the consequences of our environmental actions. So putting together a youth advisory com-

mittee where we have like 15 to 18 year olds, or 14 to 18 year olds, involved in coming up with programming and helping to steer the direction of this organization would be something pretty novel and fun," said Carson.

Having a youth advisory council would help Rogers to see what today's youth are interested in and what kinds of programs they can offer to spark an interest in the environment among young people.

Carson asked, "What do you want? What kinds of programs do you want to see at Rogers? How do you want to be engaged?"

"Creating a space for them to help dictate what happens here would be really neat," he said.

Furthering the knowledge and skills of staff members is another key element of Friends of Rogers' plans to grow in the new year. Carson said all employees are provided a professional development stipend to take classes and workshops related to their jobs and interests.

Fetzko said this year he'll be looking for online and digital marketing courses, and potentially some courses on fundraising. Carson said he will be working on his Spanish skills, and Rathbone will be taking a class on primitive skills such as fire starting, knot tying, and wilderness survival.

Of course, as an educational center, Friends of Rogers will also continue to educate the community about the environment. This will be done through programs and workshops as well as their internship program.

There are three internships offered at Rogers: environmental education, summer camp, and development. Environmental education interns help teach school programming; summer camp interns help to run the Rogers summer camp; and the development internship is for students on the business administration or finance career track who want to learn about environmental science or how to run a nature center.

Carson stressed that although internships are traditionally for college students, the internship opportunities at Rogers are also open to non-students who have experience working in environmental, educational, or child care and youth fields.

"I do want to make sure we are opening up these opportunities to people with lived experience and not just academic experience. You don't have to go to college, you don't have to be on the college track, to work here or to get an internship here," he said.

"There's a lot of intelligence you can gain outside of a college classroom ... Someone who's worked in this field in some capacity, someone who's been a caretaker for young children for a while and it's been

paid or unpaid labor but they have this wealth of experience in dealing with and teaching and guiding kids. This could be a good opportunity to move into this field."

To educate the community at large, Rogers Center will continue to offer various programs, and have even begun to introduce new ones. For example, Rathbone is beginning a quarterly book club this year, which will spend three months at a time reading and discussing a book, and closing out the quarter with a field trip to a location related to the book.

During the first quarter they'll be reading "Eager: The Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter" by Ben Goldfarb. There will be a book club meeting at the end of January and February, both in person and virtually, to discuss the book. Then in March they will take a trip to Beaversprite, a nature preserve for beavers in Dolgeville.

Most of the programs at Rogers Center are free to attend or participate, but some cost a small fee. Moving forward, Carson said they may explore making all programs free, with the option to donate, to make their programs even more accessible to the community.

"It also keeps us in line with that, you don't have to have anything to come here, and you don't have to pay anything to come here. And so if you want to come and you can't afford to pay, you don't have to pay. But if you do come and you can afford to pay, consider paying for you and that someone else that can't afford to pay," said Carson.

"I know that people talk about the economic vitality of this region as a challenge, and it is, there's no doubt that at large it is a challenge. But Rogers is free. It's free to come here, kids get to come to programs through the school, our public programs are largely free," he added. "The DEC owns the buildings and grounds still, so major capital projects are taken care of by New York State, which allows us to keep things really affordable. So I know economic vitality is a challenge, but it suits us well because we're able to provide this service to anyone."

The Friends of Rogers Environmental Education Center Visitor Center is open to the public from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday to Saturday, from noon to 4 p.m. on Sunday, and Monday and Tuesday by appointment.

For more information on Friends of Rogers, visit FriendsOfRogers.org or the Friends of Rogers Environmental Education Center, Inc. Facebook page, or call 607-674-4733.

Raymond continues to lead with innovative technology -

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“That was our key priority and we made good progress on that front and were also able to grow the number of talented people we brought into the organization, even in a really tough labor market,” said VanNostrand. “We also made significant investments in our facilities that will enable further productivity and volume growth in 2024.”

He said in Greene, they have three major facility expansion areas that will allow them to have further volume increases in capacity improvements in 2024.

“At the same time we have some exciting new products and most importantly, further strengthened our relationships with our customers around the world as we continue to have record market share,” VanNostrand said.

He explained they were able to increase their production levels by approximately 30 percent year after year. And if you think about the global supply challenges that was a huge accomplishment through a lot of hard work by a lot of people.

He said in a really tough labor market, they added over 400 people to their core manufacturing business.

“We achieved record market share,” he said. “Our market finally slowed up a little bit but not really slow, it just went back to what it was pre-pandemic. But our share of that market continues to grow and I think that demonstrates the strength of our brand and our strategy of how we go to market.”

Manufacturing outreach

VanNostrand explained there are a lot of small things about partnerships and outreach. For



Raymond Corporation associates on the factory floor in Greene prepare for a day of volunteer work in the community. (Submitted photo)

a number of years now, he said they do a manufacturing day where they bring people in where they can see the plant.

“We do associate testimonials to high school students from very experienced people about their career in manufacturing and how that has worked,” he said. “It’s one of those opportunities that we have, to reach between 1,000 and 2,000 people but the fact is, the schools continue to be highly interested and really engaged and participating in this and I’m just proud of the way the team delivers on that each year.”

“I’m really proud for the team, we got quite a few awards we won this year, we’re on the Forbes list for ‘Best Mid-Size Employers,’ which is great for our location,” said VanNostrand.

He said they had planned engineering product of the year awards and Raymond proudly

announced Greene employee, welder Jordan Taft, won gold in the welding category of the international Toyota Material Handling Group (TMHG) Skills Competition.

VanNostrand said they had great product introductions that helped them further strengthen their leadership position in the market.

Innovation and energy

“A mix of technology products, new trucks, and new market space have all come together in 2023 and we have some good follow up items for the upcoming year that will build upon that history of innovation,” VanNostrand added.

“We introduced our first outdoor electric lift truck. Generally our trucks are intended to be used indoors in warehouses,” VanNostrand said.

“This is an electric product that you can use outside and

replaces historically what’s been an internal combustion sit down type of truck. It’s a new market space for us and we’re really excited about the potential.”

According to the Raymond Corporation the 4800 and 4810 models both feature the confidence-inspiring Raymond Performance Stability System, which offers a high level of vehicle control for reduced damage to goods and facilities. Both models give users an ergonomically-designed operator station featuring a full-suspension and fully adjustable seat, with an attached armrest and fingertip hydraulic controls, with faculty side shift and much more.

Raymond Corporation Product Manager Tim Rice said, “Both of these machines are designated specifically for outdoor applications. This makes them perfect for lumberyards, big-box stores and building material suppliers, as well as for container yards, agricultural or commodity applications—any customer who’s interested in an emissions-free, low maintenance all-electric lift truck, but is unwilling to compromise on performance, indoor/outdoor capability and way of operation.”

“In almost every industry we serve, there’s a growing interest in more sustainable operations,” Rice said. “We’re seeing an increasing number of users making the switch from conventionally powered lift trucks to electric trucks. For any lift truck user interested in converting to an all-electric fleet, the 4800 and 4810 models make perfect sense.”

VanNostrand continued to list additional new technology. He said they have a new product called an Integrated Tether.

The Integrated Tether System is a first-of-its-kind operator assist tool designed to alert operators and managers and to limit lift truck functionality if an operator is not properly tethered. The wireless connection in the Integrated Tether System is compatible with Raymond lift trucks, is unique in the marketplace, and offers valuable data-gathering capabilities that can help reinforce best practices with all operators, enhancing security and confidence.

Raymond Corporation Product Manager Shannon Curtis said, “Over the last several years, facility owners and managers have had to deal with increasing the number of operators in the warehouses and the need to reinforce and monitor best practices.”

“As a result, managers are looking for technology-based offerings that can help assist managers with these ever-increasing demands,” she added. “This solution comes at a perfect time to support the new U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety and

Health Administration national emphasis program and reinforces Raymond’s dedication to providing secure solutions and operations.”

VanNostrand also noted the new lithium ion battery launched and is another huge area of growth around energy solutions.

Raymond Corporation Energy Storage Technology and Integration Senior Product Manager Damon Hosmer said, “The 48-volt drop-in lithium-ion battery offers customers a smart alternative energy solution to upgrade existing or new lift trucks.”

“This new product solves three of the biggest concerns our customers tend to have when adopting alternative power sources: footprint, power, and run-time,” said Hosmer. “This battery delivers higher energy density in a smaller footprint, which creates more power, decreases charging times and increases run-times.”

According to The Raymond Corporation, the battery is designed as a direct, plug-and-play replacement for conventional lead acid batteries, the new 48V lithium-ion battery fits lift trucks with compartments of 13 inches and larger and requires no additional modifications.

The new battery also provides for continuous data exchange between Raymond lift trucks and chargers, giving customers easy access to critical operating metrics and to the Raymond portfolio of telematics and intralogistics solutions.

Hosmer added, “Our chargers, LIBs, and telematics packages all work together to optimize performance and data acquisition. Used in conjunction with the Raymond’s Power Source Integration and iWAREHOUSE platform, this new battery gives users access to a more holistic view of their operation, allowing for better decision-making, boosting battery life span, improving operational efficiency and increasing productivity.”

“Those are the things that are unique to Raymond,” VanNostrand said. “Our customers say our technology is driving well beyond the ability to lift something and put it away.”

Building on strong foundations

VanNostrand said, “The key is to build on the strong foundation we put in place in 2023, so it’s going to be major challenges to make sure we retain the strong talent we brought into the organization, that we continue to work with our supply base, and we work with suppliers around the world.”

He said as they continue to expand, suppliers need to progress to support them so they

have a lot of efforts happening to focus on ensuring they can provide a stable supply as Raymond Corporation grows.

“And of course,” VanNostrand said, “To maintain our quality and focus on continuous improvement, that’s always a priority for us.”

He said there are local challenges finding workers but they company has been very successful and performed better than expected in this type of market. The key is to have a community where they can attract talent from around the world, primarily throughout the US.

“Having a community with reasonable tax rates and great schools are areas where we all have to continue to work together to ensure we’re providing that type of environment because as hard as it is to sometimes get people to relocate to New York, very often once they’re here, they stay,” said VanNostrand. “They have great quality lives and a good family environment and all of those factors tend to keep people with deep roots here.”

“We have a relatively wide expanse of recruiting talent and manufacturing tends to be more local hires but we do have outreach programs to all parts of New York and beyond where we think we can attract talent,” he said.

“We do have a couple temporaries and within 90 days or so they can transition to a full time role as long as they demonstrate a good work ethic and ability to learn those types of things that are going to make them successful in the future,” said VanNostrand.

He said the turnover numbers are very competitive compared to most manufacturing facilities. He added they have a lot of associates with over 40 years of service and one this year will celebrate 55 years of service.

“We have a group of very long-tenured people, that I think provide a lot of stability for the organization in total,” he said.

In the short term, VanNostrand explained they brought in a lot of people that had no manufacturing experience at all and transitioning for some went very well, while some struggled with being reliable and coming to work daily in the pace of the manufacturing environment. He said turnover for those people is usually within the first month where people say “this is just not what I expected” or “this is just not for me.”

“In this environment, there are a lot of positions that are hard to fill for all organizations across the country,” he said. “Really, even globally, when you look at some of the labor shortages that are taking place, I would say for us the biggest challenge is on the manufacturing side or more skilled positions like welders, machinists, and then on the corporate office side, engineers and professionals in a number of different areas.”

“We work very hard to make sure we have the right level of talent for the company,” said VanNostrand.

He explained manufacturing associates coming in are provided on the job training and provided opportunities to work outside the assembly. They also have a safety training area where you’re taught basic skills and continue to build upon those. He said they have those for a number of different areas of the organization.

“We want people to join us but we want to hire them for a career, where they can develop and grow over time,” said VanNostrand. “So, we have

Continued on page 5 ►

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Raymond continues to lead with innovative technology -

Continued from page 4 ▶

invested a lot on the leadership development side because these days it's more critical than ever. I always reinforce people leave leaders before they leave companies."

He said supervisors and managers have such an impact on the quality of peoples' lives and retention with the organization, so they're spending a lot of investment in that area to ensure they have a strong leadership team that can grow the company and take care of their associates.

"We believe we have to be super active in the community and at the highest level we believe we need to educate teachers, guidance counselors and others in influence, about what exciting careers actually exist in manufacturing," he said. "A view of manufacturing they may have from 30 years ago, things look quite differently now with technology and the environment we work in now."

"We work very closely with local BOCES, many of the school districts, Department of Labor, STEM initiatives, we work with a lot of the universities with financial support, speaking, mentoring projects, and doing all of those types of things," said VanNostrand. "It's one of the areas of outreach that has really impacted our ability to attract talent."

He said Raymond Corporation has a couple of high school apprentice pro-

grams where eight or ten high school students work with them, four hours a day. He said they do a lot of co-ops for multiple colleges and those are all opportunities to attract talent and sell manufacturing as a future career.

Investing in automation, research and telematics

"We'll have some new product introductions, but the plan expansions and our continued focus on delivering and innovating around our core product of lift trucks," said VanNostrand. "Also, an additional focus is on automation, energy, telematics, all of the technology related products that our customers are becoming more and more reliant on us to help them become more efficient and more successful businesses."

The Raymond Corporation continues to sponsor the University Research Program, which was created to encourage and support professors and student researchers to apply their engineering and technical research to discover innovative solutions for the material handling industry. The theme for the 2023-2024 research proposals is "Research to Enable the Future of Material Handling." Raymond will announce grant recipients early this year.

The company had their first job fair in January and if their projections hold out, VanNostrand said they would like to grow another 200 people in Greene this year.

VanNostrand noted The Raymond Corporation in total is now over 9,000 people. The core company of manufacturing and parts and distribution center has just over 3,300 in New

York. In Greene, they have over 2,300 with about 2,100 being full time employees.

VanNostrand said he believes they hired 35 people a few weeks ago to start the year.

"Of course we'll have people retire and transition, but we plan to further grow our net head count number," he added.

"The key thing is, we feel like we have the right talent in place but we need to continue to provide people a reason to either move here to Upstate New York or to stay here in the community," VanNostrand said. "The more we can do to make this an attractive place to live and grow a family, that's the top priority where we could use specific help from local government and the community."

"I actually think things are improving in Greene, with new restaurants and businesses that have recently opened," he said. "Raymond has been a part of Greene for over 100 years now and we had our great celebration over a year ago."

According to the Raymond website The Raymond Corporation's long history of innovation, quality, and service have been part of our DNA since the beginning.

The Raymond Corporation states from our continuous improvement practices in our manufacturing facility to our game-changing products and solutions, we are excited to be recognized by industry publications and global organizations for ultimately supporting our customers' ever-evolving needs while continually challenging ourselves to run better and manage smarter.



One of the many trucks in the Blueox Fleet. (Submitted photo)

Business SPOTLIGHT **Blueox Energy Products & Services**

OXFORD - Blueox is a midsize energy delivery company in Oxford, serving Chenango County and beyond for over 50 years.

Blueox focuses on supplying fuel and heating and cooling services to homes and businesses in central NY. They also heavily invest in technology to make the customer experience as smooth as possible.

Blueox Senior Vice President Julia Miller said, "If you want traditional customer service, we offer that. If you want the Amazon experience, we offer that too. We empower customers to choose an energy supplier that can do business how it works for them, not the other way around. It's why our tagline is "We are a different kind of energy company."

Owners David Emerson, Neil Bartle, Jared Bartle, and Julia Miller appreciate the fact that their business is centrally located between a variety of bigger cities but can enjoy the peace that comes with country life. It is also a more affordable place to live for many families. The business has sold millions of gallons right out of Oxford.

Blueox delivers energy to homes and businesses. Most commonly this includes: BIOFUEL, Propane, Kerosene, Diesel and Gasolines. They also provide heating and cooling maintenance, repairs, and replacements. They are also the only energy company in the area that offers an ecommerce platform to buy fuel.

When asked what she likes about living and working in Chenango County, Miller stated, "This area has a great community of people who are truly committed to continuing to drive our county forward. Compared to other parts of the world Chenango County is also relatively safe. It's a great place to raise a family."

Blueox is invested in the community where it was founded. Miller stated, "We donate to a variety of nonprofits, schools, and community events. We hope if we support our community, they will support us back by choosing us for their energy needs. Everyone working together builds a community stronger."

Last year Blueox remodeled their entire office building. According to Miller, "We did this to show the community we are here to stay and are invested in local success. It has really helped beautify Oxford as you come into town, and we hope that momentum continues to inspire others to do the same."

Recently, Blueox installed a new 30,000 gallon propane tank to have more product supply security and to be better able to serve their customers efficiently. They also expanded their territory into Deposit, Walton, Oneonta, and Cooperstown. The company has been growing since 2015, and Miller looks forward to continuing that growth.

Miller is appreciative of the Blueox employees and said that they are the company's most important resource. "We sell a commodity that no one really wants to spend their money on. The experience you have choosing Blueox is what makes us different from national and regional companies. We are confident that our people make the experience unique and better for our customers."

There are approximately 40 people who work at Blueox, and they know the importance of their job while making it interesting. According to Miller, "We keep saying that one of these days we need to start writing a book of everything that happens here good and bad. Overall, we have a great work environment, a lot of laughs, a lot of support, ...and a lot of hard work!"

Blueox is open 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. To learn more about Blueox, apply for employment, or are interested in their services, visit their website at www.blueoxenergy.com.



A new Raymond 8910 forklift powered by a lithium ion battery being used at a storage facility. (Submitted photo)



Raymond employee Darius English works inside the company's headquarters in Greene. (Submitted photo)

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2023

Commerce Chenango Highlights

Commerce Chenango celebrated 247 members throughout the year and added 63 members in 2023

Vibrant Membership



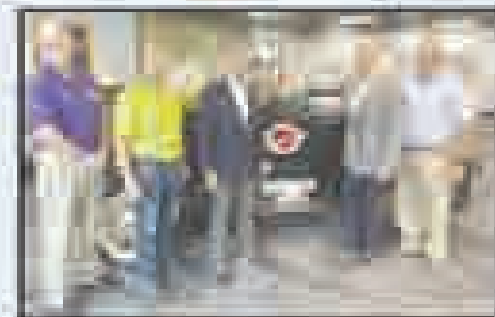
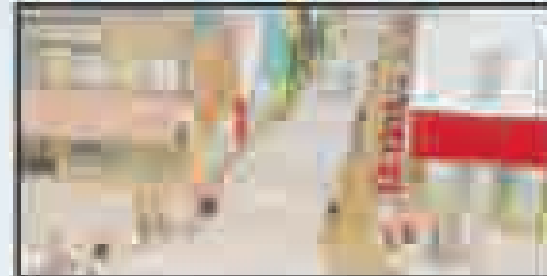
Annual Golf Classic

Community Impact

- Commerce Chenango has been serving the community since 1959 and works as an advocate for the Community at the Local, State and National Levels.

Economic Development

Continue to execute the DRI projects and grants



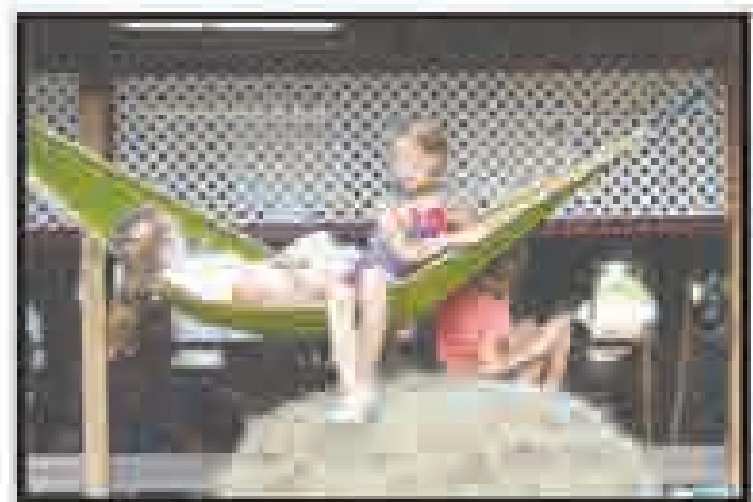
- Attracted US Silicon Trading to Chenango County
- Focused on bringing daycare center to Chenango County
- Continuing proven leadership programs such as
 - Mentorship Program
 - Leadership Chenango 2024
 - Women's Leadership Forum

Tourism

- Thousands of people attended the inaugural Taste of Chenango festival
- Promoted almost 20 events and activities in Chenango County, including 7 festivals.



What can Commerce Chenango do for YOU in 2024?



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