FREE / SEPTEMBER 25, 2024 / VOLUME LIII, NUMBER 4 / Our 53rd Year

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# IthacaTimes

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# NEWSLINE

## Teamsters Local 317 Approve New Contract with BorgWarner Ending Strike

*By Matt Dougherty*

Teamsters Local 317 members have overwhelmingly approved a new tentative agreement with BorgWarner, ending a strike that lasted nearly two weeks.

The contract promises significant improvements in wages, benefits, and working conditions and was ratified by a vote of 539 to 60 — signaling strong support from more than 90% of the union's 700 members.

Following the agreement's ratification, BorgWarner's Global Director, Marketing and Public Relations, Michelle Collins, said, "Employees will return to work at their regular shift starting on the third shift [on] Sunday." However, Collins declined to comment on the specifics of the agreement.

With the new contract approved, union members are eager to return to their jobs. Teamsters Local 317 member Lane Yon said, "The majority of the members are feeling relieved that they will be able to return to work on Sunday night." He added, "They are grateful to be back in the workplace, have access to insurance, and are looking forward to moving past this challenging situation."

*An overwhelming majority of Teamsters Local 317 union members voted to accept a new contract agreement with BorgWarner on Saturday, bringing an end to a strike that lasted nearly two weeks.*

The agreement was announced on September 18, roughly a week after 67% of union members rejected a previous proposal, citing issues with health insurance benefits, limited mandatory overtime, and restrictive time-off policies.

Days after that proposal was rejected, union members began to report that workers on strike were having their health insurance benefits revoked by BorgWarner—a move that was suspected of being made to pressure members into ending their strike.

*Continued on Page 5*

# TAKE NOTE

### ▶ Tompkins County IDA Seeks Public Input on SouthWorks Incentive

The Tompkins County Industrial Development Agency (IDA) will hold a public hearing to collect community input on the proposed incentive package for the SouthWorks project on Monday, September 30 at 4:30 p.m. in the Town of Ithaca Town Hall Board Room (215 N. Tioga Street in Ithaca). Attendees will hear a short overview of the project and can provide up to three minutes of comments.

"SouthWorks is a once-in-a-lifetime project, the biggest Ithaca has ever seen, with the potential to truly transform our community. It contains all the key elements of community and economic development and will take over a decade to complete. That's why it's so important that we hear from stakeholders," said Ithaca Area Economic Development (IAED) President, Heather McDaniel. IAED is the administrative agent for the IDA.

The SouthWorks project is an adaptive reuse of the former Emerson Power Transmission facility located at 620 South Aurora Street in Ithaca. The $580 million project will turn the long-vacant industrial site into a mixed-use neighborhood of approximately 1.7 million square feet, including residential, retail, commercial, industrial, and research and development space. Specifically, the project proposes to include 915 mixed income housing units, 820,000 square feet of industrial buildings, and approximately 900,000 square feet of new construction.

More information on the SouthWorks project and the requested financial incentives from the IDA can be found here on the IDA's website at tompkinsida.org/proejcts/.

### ▶ Social Services To Limit Service due to Technology Replacement on Thursday September 26th

The Tompkins County Department of Social Services will have reduced services, phone and computer contact on Thursday, September 26th, beginning at 3 p.m. to close of business (4:30 p.m.). This reduced service is due to planned replacement of computer and phone network switches in the Human Services Building.

During this window of maintenance, staff will have very limited or no ability to reference state systems of record, email, phone services (voicemail will be available, but calls will not be returned until the next day) or other computer databases. The Department of Social Services will continue to be open but will be handling emergencies only on a walk-in basis and will be unable to reference case information and provide answers until the next business day. This maintenance will not affect the other departments in the Human Services Building.

All on-call services for Social Services that typically begin after close of business will begin on the 26th at 3 p.m. and will run as usual until the building opens again the next day at 8 a.m.

For Child Welfare concerns people should contact the New York State Central Register at: 1-800-342-3720.

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*Best of Ithaca 2024.*

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## ON THE WEB

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# INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER

*By Mark Syvertson*

**QUESTION OF THE WEEK: WHAT ARE YOU BINGING THESE DAYS?**

"I love *Aerial America* but recently it's been *Blacklist* and *Person* of Interest. And my all-time must-watch, must-binge is *Seinfeld*."
*– Todd*

"Cringe-worthy? *The Secret Lives of Mormon Wives*. An actually good one? *Suites*."
*– Cindy*

"I really like *Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power* and *Slow Horses* on Apple is amazing."
*– Wes*

"I read a lot and I've been binging the "Throne of Glass" series by Sarah J. Maas."
*– Leonora*

"I've been binging friendship."
*– Caleb*

# County to Use Old Key Bank Building as Temporary Homeless Shelter

*By Matt Dougherty*

*The KeyBank building at 300 N. Tioga Street will be turned into a temporary congregate homeless shelter for the winter season.*

Tompkins County will repurpose the vacant Key Bank building at 300 North Tioga Street in Ithaca as a temporary congregate shelter for the 2024/2025 Code Blue season, a decision met with mixed reactions from the community.

The building will serve as an emergency shelter for individuals experiencing homelessness, with bathroom and shower facilities provided in trailers outside the building. The county has budgeted $683,937 to be reimbursed by New York State to fund the necessary renovations.

The Code Blue program aims to prevent fatalities among those experiencing homelessness during extreme cold weather by offering shelter when temperatures drop to 32°F or below with wind chill.

Tompkins County Legislature Chair Dan Klein clarified that this effort is separate from the county's plans to build a permanent 100-bed shelter, which it hopes to have operational by 2026 or 2027. This future shelter would operate year-round and serve as a centralized hub for service providers and individuals experiencing homelessness. Klein noted that the current plan to use the building is only for one six-month season.

Historically, Code Blue shelters in Tompkins County have been managed by contracted providers, with St. John's Community Services handling both the regular shelter and the Code Blue program. However, St. John's has opted not to continue running the Code Blue program, prompting the county to seek alternatives.

In July, the county issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for Code Blue Shelter services, but no viable responses were received. With the Econo Lodge and other previous shelter options no longer available, the county decided to utilize the vacant Key Bank building as a temporary measure.

While the county's efforts aim to address immediate needs, the temporary shelter plan has sparked concerns among community members regarding the adequacy and dignity of the accommodations. During a recent County Legislature meeting, several residents voiced concerns about plans for the facility to be a congregate shelter with bathroom and shower facilities in outdoor trailers.

Ithaca resident Taylor Colbert criticized the plan, saying, "I feel strongly that this year's plan for Code Blue is setting us up for unprecedented failure." Colbert added, "Folks need access to a safe shower, toilet, and their own comfortable room [and] by asking folks to forego their privacy and safety, you're depriving them of dignity."

Sarah Curlis, another Ithaca resident, highlighted the logistical challenges of the proposed setup, saying, "While I see that housing people in the old bank building seems like the best available idea, it will be extremely difficult for the people who are forced to use it."

Curlis continued, "Having a bathroom truck where you need to go outdoors to use the toilet or shower for the coldest months of the year is awful. Needing to sleep in the same room with strangers will create countless interpersonal issues and affect people's dignity."

Ithaca resident Katie Sims acknowledged the county's proactive approach towards creating a permanent county-run shelter but called for improvements to its Code Blue policy to enhance privacy and dignity within the temporary shelter.

"I'm worried about some of the things in the plan, like the congregate setting," Sims said. "I think that in the next month before it opens, it would be a great opportunity to make changes to make it more private so that people have the dignity they need."

Despite concerns, County Legislators defended the plan as a necessary response to urgent needs, emphasizing that more ideal solutions are not currently feasible.

Legislator Mike Sigler underscored the immediacy of the situation, stating, "Would we like to house people in hotels like we have in the past? I guess we would. And if that was an option, that would be great, but that isn't an option."

Sigler described the plan as a "triage situation," noting that the county is racing against time to have a shelter ready before temperatures drop. "It seemed like a lot of people were ready to sacrifice the good for the better, and the better simply doesn't exist right now," he said. "We're here trying to get people into some type of shelter where they're going to survive."

According to the statement announcing the plan, this temporary shelter will operate from November through April, providing overnight accommodation for 60 to 80 individuals from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. daily.

Tompkins County Administrator Lisa Holmes explained the plan's necessity, saying, "The reason that we are temporarily repurposing the Key Bank building is the result of not having viable proposals by third-party vendors to manage the program this year, as well as a lack of other available spaces to provide emergency shelter services."

Holmes also emphasized the county's responsibility to ensure a sufficient workforce to operate the shelter, which will now be managed by county employees.

Holmes added that preparations are underway to ensure the temporary shelter will be operational by the start of the Code Blue season on November first.

The Talk at ithaca.com

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## RE: National Popular Vote Interstate Compact

"I want to thank state legislators for the enactment of the National Popular Vote InterstateCompact. As Co-President of the Tompkins chapter of the League of Women Voters, I want to emphasize the importance of an electoral system where every vote counts.

Under the current system, countless voters are overlooked in the lead-up to elections, as campaigns concentrate solely on battleground states considered essential for victory. As a result, many states' issues are ignored by candidates who perceive them as irrelevant to their electoral success. A National Popular Vote would guarantee that each voice is heard and valued. The League of Women Voters believes that direct election of the President through National Popular Vote is essential for a representative democratic government.

With 209 of the 270 electoral votes needed to implement the National Popular Vote, we are nearing a point where voters will no longer be ignored during election seasons. Thank you, state legislators, for championing the rights of voters in our state and across the nation." — ***Megan Nettleton***

## RE: County Emergency Code Blue Homeless Plans

"I'm very glad this is being thought about and a space is available (especially with St. John's no longer a Code Blue facility), and this is in an accessible downtown spot, but yeeeash... outdoor bathrooms and showers? During the coldest time of the year?" — ***Melisa Crumrine***

"Something's gotta be done about the homeless situation in Ithaca and the city is making an effort to do so. You don't fix homelessness by pushing them into a tent behind Walmart, you only make the problem worse." — ***Karlee Meier***

"Downtown Ithaca has a bad reputation.

Now this shelter will make it worse for everyone concerned. People don't like to shop downtown because they claim there's no parking. However, Seneca & Tioga Street has a parking garage!!! Lansing has a lot more land space and vacant buildings. Give everyone mandatory job training and there will be a change, a good change." — ***Purnima Prabhu***

"Just remember each and every one of us is one or two missed paychecks away from being in the exact same situation as the humans that this will shelter. They are someone's child, mother, brother, parent, etc. Speaking ill about other people's situations only speaks it into YOUR life...I've watched it happen first hand, count your blessings before you're having to count your pennies to make sure you get a meal." — ***Crybaby Shi***

## RE: Apple Harvest Festival

"I'm glad that the city was finally able to allow a festival to set up another block on state street rather than having the unsafe crossings on Seneca." — ***Josh Dolan***

"This layout sounds potentially much more comfortable! It can get really hot on Cayuga Street in the mid-afternoon, even on a late September/early October day." — ***Kelly Sedinger***

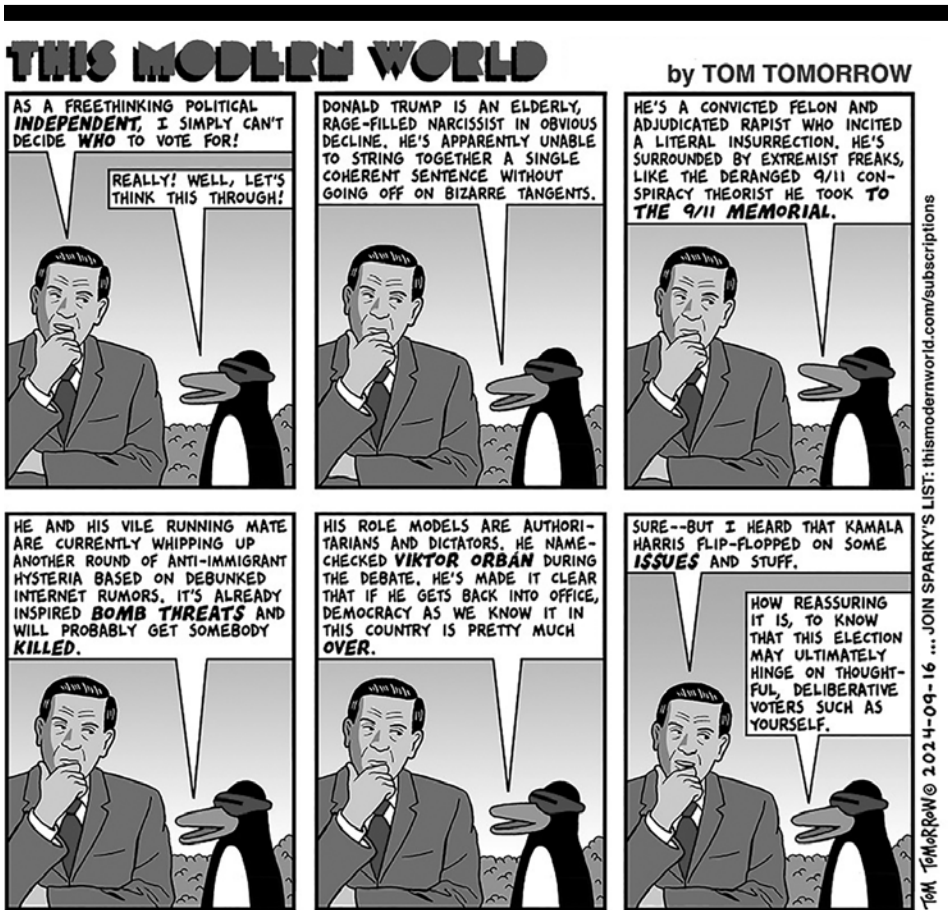
"Comfortable for stuck up people.

They are taking away the games and fun stuff for kids and adults who like carnival games because the carnival people weren't "Ithacan" enough." — ***Ekat Anible***

## RE: Ithaca's Downtown Plan

"Maybe I'm missing something or it's not being reported on, but at least as far as what is reported here, it appears that disability parking and access is not only forgotten, but is being minimized. Parking is a nightmare already, and elevators in the parking garage are not always working. With the elimination of the Seneca St. parking garage, there will only be two viable options, one in the garage on Green Street, which will be overwhelmed, and one on Cayuga Street, well away from the Commons. Try using a wheelchair, walker, or cane from there to the Commons when it's winter or even raining. I'm wondering if anyone with knowledge of this issue is on the committee or consulting with it. The silent minority continues to be sidelined in a city that claims to welcome all. I hope I'm wrong about this, and something is in place, but from this article, it doesn't look like it." — ***Donna Insero Bohn***

"Donna Insero Bohn I totally agree. I can only go where there is easy accessible parking and a short walk to my destination. No matter what gets put on the Commons, there has to be a way to access it or the same old same old. Please send this to your alderperson, the mayor, the city planner and send it all on the same email. Send it to the Solidarity Slate funders, the Democratic Socialist and the Working Party in case they consult with their installations." — ***Esther Herkowitz***




# TEAMSTERS LOCAL 317

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

The agreement, which was accepted by a majority of members on Saturday, will allow workers to continue receiving their health insurance while also including wage increases, improved vacation and personal time benefits.

Under the new agreement, the Employee Choice Health Fund Plan and Plus Plan coverage will remain, and spouses of union members can now stay on their healthcare plans without incurring an additional $100 monthly surcharge.

Medical, dental, and vision benefits will also continue retroactively from September 9, ensuring no gaps in coverage for workers who were on strike. According to the agreement, "Medical, Dental, Vision benefits continue retroactive to the beginning of strike leave, September 9, 2024, meaning no impact to Healthcare Reimbursement Accounts (HRA), deductible and out-of-pocket accruals."

The new contract also includes a 6% wage increase upon ratification, followed by a 5% increase each year over the four-year agreement. In total, workers will see an approximate 21% wage increase.

While no cost of living adjustments (COLA) were included in the deal, the ratified agreement did include a $5,500 ratification bonus, split into two installments of $2,750. Members will receive one payment upon ratification and another after December 6. This bonus was not part of the previous proposals.

Employees with 25 or more years of service will now receive four additional vacation days, and all employees will receive five additional paid personal days. The agreement also says that any unused paid personal time not carried over to the following year will be paid out at the end of the year.

Additionally, instead of requiring new hires to work mandatory overtime for their first seven years, the requirement will sunset after four years.

# UPS & DOWNS

**Ups**
The Ithaca Rotary Club is pleased to announce its 2024 Community Grants awardees. Twenty-four applications were received, and nine grant proposals were funded in full for a total of $11,724.

**Downs**
32 year old Ithaca resident Floyd G. Slater was arrested by the Ithaca Police Department and New York State Police on September 19, 2024. Several charges have been brought against Slater, including Attempted Burglary and Public Lewdness stemming from an incident that occured on University & Delaware Avenues on September 5.

# HEARD & SEEN

**Heard**
Coltivare, the downtown Ithaca restaurant that is part of Tompkins Cortland Community College's culinary arts center, is reopening for dinners. Following a private celebration on September 25, the restaurant will be open to the public from 5 to 9 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays.

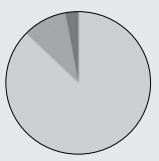
**Seen**
Senator Lea Webb announced that she has allocated $250,000 in state funding to the Ithaca Fire Department (IFD) to support the purchase of a new fire rescue boat and Assemblymember Anna Kelles announced today that A.9102-C, a bill she sponsored in the New York State Assembly that ensures Medicaid reimbursement for Emergency Medical Responders to provide treatment in place and transport to a facility other than a hospital, has been signed into law.

*IF YOU CARE TO RESPOND to something in this column, or suggest your own praise or blame, write news@ithacatimes.com, with a subject head "U&D."*

## QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Should IPD have more officers patrolling the Ithaca Commons?

- 87.1% Yes.
- 9.9% No.
- 3.0% I don't care.



**Next Week's Question:**
Should IPD have more officers patrolling the Ithaca Commons?

*Visit ithaca.com to submit your response.*

# NLRB Rules Starbucks Violated Labor Law by Closing Ithaca Stores

*By Matt Dougherty*

*The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruled that Starbucks violated labor laws by closing its unionized stores on College Ave, Seneca & Meadow Streets in Ithaca. Starbucks has now been ordered to reopen all three stores it closed in Ithaca in response to union organizing and provide affected workers backpay. (Photo: File)*

Starbucks violated the National Labor Relations Act by permanently closing its two remaining stores in Ithaca, New York, in retaliation for union activities, an administrative law judge ruled, ordering the company to reopen the stores. The decision comes as a significant victory for Workers United, which has been leading unionization efforts at hundreds of Starbucks locations nationwide.

In a decision issued by Administrative Law Judge Geoffrey Carter, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) found that Starbucks closed its stores at 130 East Seneca Street (Commons store) and 722 South Meadow Street (Meadow store) on May 26, 2023, specifically because employees at these locations had unionized.

"[Starbucks] violated the Act as alleged in the complaint and I will order [Starbucks] to restore operations at the two stores," Carter wrote. Starbucks was also accused of refusing to bargain with the union over the closures, further violating federal labor law.

The judge's ruling came after a multi-day trial, which included testimony and evidence detailing Starbucks' actions leading up to the store closures.

According to the NLRB decision, the union organizing campaign at Starbucks' Ithaca locations began in early 2022, and by April of that year, the union was certified to represent employees at all three Ithaca stores, including the now-closed Commons and Meadow locations. The NLRB found that Starbucks had taken a series of anti-union actions before deciding to shutter these stores.

The ruling highlighted multiple instances of unlawful conduct by Starbucks in Ithaca.

For example, the decision detailed how Starbucks began enforcing workplace policies more strictly at its unionized locations, which resulted in disciplinary actions and terminations that disproportionately affected union supporters.

"[Starbucks] began enforcing its workplace policies more strictly at the College Avenue and Commons stores… [and] was aware that its stricter enforcement… would likely result in employees being disciplined or discharged," Carter noted in the decision.

In one example, Judge Carter cited the firing of a shift supervisor at the Commons store, Kayli Gillett, which was followed by a strike in protest of her termination. The decision further described how Starbucks' response to union activities included not hiring known union supporters for open positions and disciplining employees for minor infractions.

"Heslop applied to be a shift supervisor… Her application was rejected… I find that Laflen's rejection of Heslop's application… was pretextual and a violation of Section 8(a)(3) and (1)," Carter wrote, referencing Starbucks' refusal to promote union supporter Stephanie Heslop.

The NLRB decision also pointed out that Starbucks failed to bargain with the union over significant operational changes, such as altering store hours in response to staffing shortages.

"There is no evidence that [Starbucks] notified the Union and afforded an opportunity to bargain over the decisions to change store operating hours or the effects of those decisions," Carter observed, underscoring another area where the company was found to have acted unlawfully.

The closure of the two stores on May 26, 2023, was described by the NLRB as a direct attempt by Starbucks to discourage union activities not only in Ithaca but potentially across its broader network of stores. "[Starbucks] closed the Commons and Meadow stores for anti-union reasons and with the intent to chill unionism at other store locations," Carter concluded.

As a remedy, the NLRB has ordered Starbucks to reopen the closed stores, although the company will have the opportunity to argue that reopening the stores would be unduly burdensome during future compliance proceedings.

Starbucks has denied the allegations, contending in its defense that the closures were based on business reasons, including profitability concerns and operational challenges unrelated to union activities.

The NLRB's decision also touched on procedural disputes during the trial, including Starbucks' refusal to produce certain subpoenaed documents and its invocation of attorney-client privilege and the work product doctrine. Judge Carter criticized Starbucks' handling of evidence, drawing adverse inferences against the company for its noncompliance with subpoenas.

"I find that [Starbucks] has not complied with the General Counsel's subpoena and, as a sanction for that noncompliance, I will draw an adverse inference that the improperly withheld email attachment would have been unfavorable to [Starbucks] defense," Carter wrote.

Workers United celebrated the ruling as a critical affirmation of workers' rights to organize without fear of retribution. Starbucks, which has faced unionization drives at more than 300 locations, including high-profile efforts in Buffalo, New York, and Seattle, has frequently been accused of anti-union tactics, a charge the company has repeatedly denied. The NLRB ruling in Ithaca adds to a growing list of legal challenges Starbucks faces as the union movement within the company continues to grow.

Starbucks has not yet announced whether it will appeal the decision to the full NLRB or the federal courts. The company's legal team argued that the closures were necessary and unrelated to the union activities, asserting that issues such as store profitability and staffing challenges were the primary reasons for closing.

The NLRB's order to reopen the stores stands unless successfully challenged by Starbucks.

**GUEST OPINION**

# Tax Breaks for SouthWorks? It's Too Soon to Decide

*By Peter Wissoker & Kieran Donaghy*

SouthWorks is perhaps the most ambitious development project undertaken in Ithaca since Ithaca College moved to South Hill from DeWitt Park. A project of historic proportions, the developers' ambition is to take the area on South Hill that was once home to Emerson and the Morse Chain Works and turn it into a vibrant community with mixed-income housing, offices, shops, parks, and more. This project has a lot to offer, with the existing factory space repurposed and 15 years of new construction including more than 900 apartments, a fifth of which are meant to be affordable, parks, and even a job training center for construction work. Folks, you might say, are getting excited. This long neglected and underdeveloped 95-acre site is finally looking at a brighter future.

To enable them to undertake this project the developers are requesting twenty years of tax breaks for each project on the site, a period that is twice as long as the usual abatements given by the Tompkins County Industrial Development Agency (IDA). Their request is currently being considered by the IDA, who are taking the project very seriously, recognizing that the enormity of the request (more than $60 million dollars of tax breaks spread over as many as 35 years) demands very careful, well-informed attention.

As part of the process, the IDA and the developers commissioned outside studies from Camoin Associates and ESI Econsult Solutions, consulting firms that work regularly with communities around the state to assess the viability of development projects in their areas. The commissioned reports are meant to provide quantitative guidance for the decisions the IDA will be making regarding property and sales tax abatements, decisions that affect the city, county, town, and the school district. And because of the size of the project, the commissioned analyses must be done well. After all, we are talking about substantial amounts of money—we estimate $116 million over a period of 35 years, plus another $20 million in sales taxes over 15 years.

The "final" draft of Camoin Associates' report has now been received by the IDA in the form of a financial viability study and a separate document projecting SouthWorks' economic and fiscal impacts. In our view, this report is fundamentally flawed and cannot support a judicious decision on the abatement issue. Like the IDA's own calculation of the amount of tax breaks the city, town, and school district will give, the report treats the project as if it will be completed, paid for, and generating income in the first year. This false working assumption results in a miscarriage of basic methodologies for conducting studies of economic impact analysis and financial stability. The report also gives the false impression that the tax breaks will end in 20 years (because of the project's phased construction, they are likely to continue for another 15 years after that) and suggest that tax revenue will begin to flow in far greater amounts far sooner than it actually will. We note that concerns about these mischaracterizations were raised by an IDA board member when the board discussed the draft report and by the public nearly two months ago. However, these mischaracterizations have still not been corrected in the final report that's now in front of us. Also missing from this report is any consideration of the costs the project will impose on the city, town, and school district and what impact fees might be appropriate. While being aware of these shortcomings, the IDA board has voted to accept the report in its current form. We find this action unacceptable. This report should not be used as the basis for deciding whether or not to grant a tax abatement and, if so, in what amount, and to pretend otherwise is nothing short of irresponsible. As it is, the IDA is holding a public hearing on the project on September 30th, with the idea of voting on whether to approve the abatements two weeks later. The report is being presented to the public as unproblematic, when in fact it is anything but.

There several ways the report could be improved to the point where it could inform a robust discussion of the merits of the project and whether to support some or all of it using tax abatements. If the IDA's consultant, Camoin Associates, is unwilling or unable to implement the most fundamental ones, then perhaps the IDA should find someone who can. We suggest the following:

*The proposed SouthWorks development on Ithaca's South Hill, transforming the former Emerson site into a mixed-use community, faces scrutiny as the Tompkins County IDA considers granting significant tax abatements amid concerns over flawed financial impact analyses. (Photo: File)*

**1) First and foremost: The IDA and their consultants should model the development and its impacts under the realistic assumption that the construction and the abatements take place annually for the full fifteen-year period with appropriate phasing of construction rather than assuming all the spending occurs in the first year.** Such a change in modeling is needed to obviate a number of problems, including:

*The miscalculation of the pattern of spending over time:* A more precise understanding of the pattern of construction will better inform the calculation of how much spending is happening in the area. Knowledge of this pattern is necessary in order to estimate when new residents and workers will be coming to the site, which, in turn, is important for understanding the economic impact of the project as it moves along. For instance, all the new residents are not moving to the site in the first year, spending locally, etc., as is suggested in the final draft of the report. This may well happen over a period of fifteen years (or more). Similarly, all the new construction will not take place at once with the spending that implies. The analysis needs to reflect this reality. Even if there is no set schedule for project implementation at this point, a schedule can and should be estimated based on the best practices of economic and fiscal impact modeling and project management.[1] The budget or pro forma as it's called, for the project also needs to be revised to reflect this.

*The miscalculation of abatements:* Assuming all the construction will be completed in the first year has led to the abatements being miscalculated, since it suggests an immediate increase in the tax base of $148.7 million, divided between the city ($86.3M) and town ($62.4M) when it might actually be a decade or more before that is a reality. This means far less in near-term tax revenue than promised in the current analysis. Presumably, the developers already realize that they will not be saving $4M+ through abatements each of the first five years of the project, as they requested, even if that's what the IDA paperwork and the Camoin Associates report say. If not, they have quite the wake-up call coming.

*The miscalculation of averages:* The executive summary of the economic and fiscal report presents average amounts things such as tax receipts. We question whether an average should even be used given that it will suggest, in this example, for instance, a far higher number than the amount the taxing jurisdictions will actually receive during a good portion of the construction period.

**2) The analysis must include an estimate of the real and full costs to our communities of the project.** It currently does not. This should include everything, from the costs of plowing and policing, to infrastructure and firefighting, and, of course, the cost of educating the kids who move into the area. These are all costs we as tax payers (including those who rent and pay property taxes indirectly) will have to bear for decades to come.

**3) The IDA needs to confirm the employment numbers and spending presented by the developers rather than take them as fact.** Employment levels and job types for the completed project estimated

[1] See, inter alia, The Project Management Institute's *A Guide to Project Management Body of Knowledge*.

Continued on Page 9

# Airport Customs Facility Faces Uncertain Future Amid Financial Struggles

By Matt Dougherty

The Ithaca Tompkins International Airport continues to face financial challenges in the years since the COVID-19 pandemic. The airport has struggled to maintain financial stability, particularly with its customs facility, which serves private jet traffic mostly affiliated with Cornell, but has failed to generate sufficient revenue.

Airport Director Roxane Noble highlighted several key issues impacting the airport's operations, including reduced passenger numbers, the cost of maintaining underused facilities, and the financial burden of the customs service. "In 2023, the total operations at the customs facility cost just over $270,000, and we only took in $15,000 in revenue," Noble reported. "That's a big hit on our budget."

Roxan Noble, Director of the Ithaca Tompkins International Airport highlighted the significnat financial losses of the airport's Customs Facility, which cost over $270,000 to operate in 2023 while only generating $15,000 in revenue. (Photo: File)

Tompkins County Administrator Lisa Holmes explained that the county is considering closing or repurposing the Customs Facility at the Ithaca Tompkins International Airport as the facility is operating at a significant loss. (Photo: File)

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, air travel has significantly decreased, impacting the airport's ability to cover its operational costs. In 2018 the Ithaca Tompkins International Airport saw more than 200,000 travelers, but by 2022 annual ridership was down to just 57,000 travelers.

This nosedive in ridership, paired with a national pilot shortage, led to American Airlines pulling their services out of Ithaca, leaving the airport with just two routes and two airlines for travelers to choose from.

In 2023, the airport saw some improvements as ridership increased to 118,000 travelers — with 60% being local residents and 40% visitors. That same year, the airport received a $750,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation to re-establish its flight routes to Washington D.C., but the airport has struggled to attract airlines to re-establish the route.

The Customs Facility at the Ithaca Tompkins International Airport was created in 2019 as part of a $24.7 million expansion project that was designed to support international private jet traffic. However, since its inception it has struggled to generate sufficient revenue to cover its operating costs. (Photo: Tompkins County)

To help the airport recover, Noble is asking the county for $642,000 to finance debt and balance the airport's operating budget.

Tompkins County has allocated funds in recent budgets, including $156,700 in funding for a strategic business plan approved in 2023. This plan aims to increase non-airline revenue, attract new air service routes, and explore opportunities for the airport's facilities, including the struggling customs building.

One of the key mechanisms being explored to bring new airline services to Ithaca is the use of revenue guarantees, which are financial commitments from local businesses and institutions to cover potential revenue shortfalls for airlines. County Legislator Greg Mezey — a member of the Air Service Board — explained that revenue guarantees are critical to securing new routes, especially at a time when airlines are being selective about expanding services.

"A revenue guarantee shows the airlines that the community is committed to flying and using Ithaca as their chosen airport," Mezey said. "We've had guarantees in the past, and they've always been fulfilled without needing to call on them, but they give the airlines the confidence to invest in Ithaca."

Legislator Deborah Dawson sought clarification on who funds these guarantees and emphasized that taxpayer money should not be used for this purpose. "I just wanted to be sure that we're not using taxpayer money in that way," Dawson said. Mezey assured her that the county does not participate in funding revenue guarantees, which are entirely backed by private enterprises.

Noble emphasized the importance of the airport to the local economy, saying that it generates an estimated $32 million in economic impact for the community and directly supports over 100 jobs.

The customs facility, which was built in 2019 as part of a $24.7 million expansion project funded by the Upstate Airport Ini-

*In 2018 the Ithaca Tompkins International Airport saw more than 200,000 travelers, but by 2022 annual ridership was down to just 57,000 travelers. (Photo: Provided)*

*Tompkins County Legislator Greg Mezey, who also serves as Vice Chair of the Air Services Board, emphasized the importance of revenue guarantees to attract more airlines to the airport in an effort to increase ridership and add a route back to Washington D.C. (Photo: File)*

tiative Grant, has been a particular point of concern.

The facility was designed to support international private jet traffic but has not met revenue expectations and has instead been a financial drain on the airport. As of May, only six flights have cleared customs, further underscoring the facility's underuse.

Lisa Holmes, the Tompkins County Administrator, echoed the concerns regarding the customs facility. "It's not a sustainable business model for the airport," Holmes stated. "If the county wants to get out of the position of ongoing financial support to the airport, I think this needs to be looked at seriously."

Holmes and Noble outlined potential steps for repurposing or closing the customs facility. They noted that the county can cancel its agreement with U.S. Customs and Border Protection with 120 days' notice, and the New York State Department of Transportation has indicated willingness to work with the county on repurposing the building.

Noble said, "We've done a lot of due diligence and looked at what we can do," Noble said. "The DOT has indicated they will work with us to repurpose the facility, and we're exploring what the building could be used for that would generate more consistent revenue."

One potential option is to use the customs facility for non-aviation purposes, such as hosting business or community events. Noble and the Air Service Board are also examining whether the facility could be integrated into the airport's broader operations in a way that better supports the local economy. A decision on the future of the customs facility is expected in the coming months, with a resolution to be presented to the county legislature for a final vote.

Several legislators have raised questions about the airport's financial strategy and its impact on taxpayers. Legislator Mike Sigler asked about efforts to attract more people to the airport, not just as travelers but also as visitors to utilize its facilities. "Is there any plan in place to kind of bring more people to the airport, maybe not even to fly, but to at least get them in?" Sigler asked, highlighting the need for broader community engagement.

Bethany Maze, a resident with expertise in environmental decision-making, criticized the county's approach, particularly the subsidization of the customs facility with taxpayer money. "To think that we are subsidizing a private jet customs facility with public taxpayers' money seems rather problematic," Maze said. "If Cornell sees value in a private jet terminal with a customs facility, Cornell should be the entity responsible for subsidizing this operation."

The customs facility has also drawn scrutiny for its limited benefit to the general public, serving primarily non-resident private jet traffic, much of which is affiliated with Cornell University. Despite these concerns, Noble emphasized the facility's importance to some stakeholders, including the fixed base operator (FBO), which services the private jets. In 2023, the FBO generated approximately $80,000 in revenue from customs-related activities, though this still falls short of covering the customs facility's operational costs.

Moving forward, the county will need to carefully consider the airport's role in the local economy and the sustainability of continuing funding.

## TAX BREAKS FOR SOUTH WORKS?

*continued from page 7*

by ESI Econsult Solutions are based on estimates of the square footage of floor space allocated to anticipated uses—not on available estimates of employment demand and local demographic conditions. The report provided by the developers suggests that the average officer worker will be earning $99,170 and the average retail employee $59,660. Perhaps median values should be used instead? Those figures seem very high, and of course with the estimated 365 and 80 workers respectively, employment levels will shape the spending figures attached to the project. The developers, Camoin Associates, and ESI Econsult Solutions also ought to have taken account of anticipated rates of inflation and cost of living increases in their projections.

**4) Address the actual number of construction workers needed at any given time and where that workforce will come from:** Camoin Associates estimates the project will create 4,650 full-time equivalent construction jobs in the county. But this number represents the sum of annual construction employment levels over the 15-year period of construction. Many fewer workers will be needed in each of the 15 years and the associated multiplier effects will be much smaller. Even so, suppose that 310 (4,650÷15) construction workers are needed each year. Given the current on-going shortage of construction workers in this area, it would be useful for the question of who will fill those positions to be addressed.

**5) Include an analysis of the project if it receives abatements for everything but the market-rate housing.** The report currently includes budgets for the developers receiving the entire amount of the abatement requested, the standard abatement, and no abatement. We don't believe that market rate housing needs taxpayer support and would like the authors of the report to include a budget for the case where the developers receive either the requested abatement or the standard abatement for everything except the market-rate housing.

**6) The analysis needs to project what will happen if things go wrong.** What experts often call a 'sensitivity analysis' should be included as an appendix. This analysis should consider worst-case and not-so-bad-but-not-great scenarios and indicate how the developers would salvage the project should these scenarios unfold. What happens if interest rates shoot up again, building material costs increase, or supply-chain shortages recur? What happens if Ithaca College closes and turns their dorms into apartments?

We hope the Tompkins County IDA

*Continued on Page 20*

# Shout Out to Shut Outs

## IHS Girls Varsity Soccer is Blanking Their Opponents

*By Steve Lawrence*

There is one very simple reality in soccer: If you give up zero goals, you will have zero losses.

Six games into the season, the Ithaca High girls soccer team is cruising along at 4-0-2, with both ties being scoreless contests. I received a text from a parent, conveying his excitement over "a big 5-0 win over rival Horseheads," and I arranged to speak to the Little Red's head coach, D.J. Roberts.

Roberts is in just his second season as the program's leader " but I have been coaching some of these girls since they were six or seven years old." D.J. Said, "Maureen Whitehead (his predecessor) has been a huge mentor for me, and in fact, she gave me my first coaching job."

Whitehead was, prior to her retirement, a ubiquitous presence in the world of local soccer, as she coached at many levels. Maureen was also a great organizer, and she founded the TC Waza Soccer Club, which gave young people many more opportunities to play, and learn. Now a happy and ambitious world traveler, Maureen also coached for several years for the NY West Soccer and the Olympic Developmental Program, and in Roberts' words, "When Maureen and Lamar (Peters) dissolved Waza, it left a huge hole in our developmental program, especially on the girls side." Knowing how busy families are, and the challenges of travel soccer, the coach added, "We are starting to build it back up, and make it more locally accessible so families don't have to go to Binghamton or Rochester to find opportunities."

I asked Coach Roberts (who played Division 1 soccer at Wells College, and spent several seasons playing professional and semi-pro) if he got a chance to lace up his cleats and get out on the pitch these days, and he said, "I play when I can, but my opportunities are very limited, especially in the fall." He added, "I volunteer with the Ithaca College women's club soccer team, and I run an indoor soccer league at The Rink." The coach's full-time job as an accountant takes another big bite out of his recreation time.

I asked Roberts about the IHS team's goals at the midway point in the season, if they were looking toward the Sectionals, then the States. "Our focus is always on the next game," Roberts replied, "and right now that is Maine-Endwell" (that game was played as we were going to press).

I asked how the roster was split among the different grade levels. D.J. Answered, "We pulled up six or seven players. we have six seniors this year, and we're heavy on the junior class. After next year, it will be a complete rebuild."

The team selected captains seniors Phoebe Colvin and Hannah Antonyak, and junior Isabel Makosch.

The Dan Swanstrom era got underway over the weekend, as Cornell traveled to Colgate, but came up short in the new coach's debut. As expected, senior quarterback Jameson Wang was his usual productive self, passing for 313 yards and three touchdowns, but the three TDs and one field goal were not enough to withstand the hosts' 41 point barrage.

Cornell's Ivy opener will take place on Saturday, as the Big Red will host Yale at 2 p.m. It will also be Homecoming weekend, so Swanstrom's home debut will see a big crowd.

*There's not been much action in goal for Ithaca High School's Girls team as they have shut out their opponents so far this season. (Photo: Provided)*

# Best of Ithaca 2024

## ESSENTIALS

### BEST NEW BUSINESS: Asempe Kitchen

Chef and Owner of Asempe Kitchen, Kuuka Yomekpe. (Photo: Mark Syvertson)

Although their location in Press Bay Court has been open for just six weeks, Chef and Owner of Asempe Kitchen, Kuukua Yomekpe, said she was excited to win Best New Business in the 2024 Best of Ithaca. Using 7 ingredients or less in most dishes, Yomekpe aims to connect the community through food with her gluten, soy, and dairy-free, primarily plant-based vegan West African cuisine.

"So far Ithaca has been very receptive to us, very kind, and also very generous," Yomekpe said. "We're definitely blown away by the reception we've received."

### BEST PLACE TO BUY A UNIQUE GIFT: Handwork, Ithaca's Artisan Cooperative

Gina Inzinna and Julia Nelson. (Photo: Mark Syvertson)

Started in 1976 by a network of 12 creatives, Handwork is now a cooperative of over 30 skilled artisans who each create different unique products featured at their storefront on State St. The co-op is owned and operated by its creative artists whose work includes pottery, sculpture, woodworking, glass, jewelry, fiber, leather, paper goods, fine art, photography and more.

"Connecting our customers with the artists behind the work is such a joy, and your support truly inspires us to keep creating beautiful art and unique pieces," said Marketing Manager Jill Hoffman, while thanking the readers.

### BEST FUND-RAISING EVENT: Women Swimmin' for Hospicare

(Photo: Provided)

Women Swimmin' for Hospicare has been raising money for local Hospicare and Palliative Care services for over 21 years, and has won Best Fund-Raising event in the Best of Ithaca annual readers poll numerous times. The event raised over $665,819 this year, well above their $500,000 goal.

### BEST LOCALLY-OWNED STORE: Greenstar

GreenStar General Manager Jeff Bessemer. (Photo: Mark Syvertson)

The GreenStar Food Co-Op is a longtime local favorite in Ithaca, a city known for its appreciation of ethically sourced and locally made goods. In response to winning Best Locally-Owned Store in the 2024 Best of Ithaca Contest, General Manager Jeff Bessemer said, "For over 50 years GreenStar has been Ithaca's community-owned grocery bringing local farm and artisan products, classes, and events to Ithaca and beyond." Bessemer continued saying, "Being a democratically-owned consumer co-op means over 13,000 of our neighbors own this vibrant nexus of the local food system with locations Downtown, in Collegetown, and in the West End on Route 13."

### BEST COMMUNITY EVENT/BEST FAMILY-FRIENDLY EVENT: Ithaca Festival

(Photo: Provided)

This year, the festival celebrating all of the art, music, comedy, and community spirit that make up Ithaca took home two Best of Ithaca titles. Board President of Ithaca Festival Allison DeDominic thanked the Ithaca community for their support and votes.

"Being voted Best Community and Best Family Friendly Event means the world to us," DeDominic said. "We're fully community-supported, and your love fuels our mission to celebrate the artist in everyone. See you at the 2025 festival!"

### BEST NONPROFIT: Yoga Farm Ithaca

Yoga Farm is a new addition to Ithaca, but that hasn't stopped it from winning the Best Non-Profit category in the 2024 Best of Ithaca contest. In response to the victory, Yoga Farm Ithaca Director of Operations Jeannie O'Neill said, "All of us at Yoga Farm Ithaca feel honored to receive the recognition of "best nonprofit" in this year's Best of Ithaca contest. This news comes with feelings of so much appreciation for our community and the ways you all have shown up to support our mission, over the last year as a physical space in the West End." O'Neill continued saying, "We bow in gratitude, and believe that winning this award will help to inform more people locally what Yoga Farm Ithaca is about. What we have to offer is so much more than a yoga studio space, we are a community that heals and thrives together."

### BEST PLUMBER: Halco

While Halco won the Best Plumber category in the 2024 Best of Ithaca contest, they do much more than just plumbing. They're also Ithaca's expert HVAC company with speciality and expertise in services ranging from air conditioning repairs, tune-ups installations to boiler replacement and furnace repair. They even install renewable energy HVAC systems such as solar panels and geothermal energy and their headquarters are located right here in Ithaca.

## BEST NOODLE RESTAURANT: Maru Ramen

(Photo: Provided)

Specializing in asian cuisine — but especially ramen — Maru serves up slow-cooked, home-cooked soul food at their location on West State St.

"We are honored to be named the Best Noodle Restaurant in Ithaca for a second time!," Owner Soyong Lee said. "Recently, we had our 6th year anniversary, and it's a joy to see that our community continues to enjoy dining with us. Our head chef has been with us since the grand opening and has maintained our original recipe ever since — including our house-made bone broth, which takes us over 24 hours from prep to table. It's very meaningful for our efforts to be recognized, and we hope to serve our diners for many more years to come. Thank you to our supporters!"

## BEST TAKEOUT: Taste of Thai Express

Since Taste of Thai Express opened back in 2003, Ying Balakula's Meadow Street restaurant has carved out a top spot in Ithaca's crowded collection of Asian dining spots. Once again, the establishment has won the Best of Ithaca in the Best Takeout category.

## BEST FOOD TRUCK: Silo

The Silo Food Truck has taken Ithaca by storm since its arrival on the city's food scene. The beloved mobile eatery can be found at most local festivals and has a permanent residence in the parking lot of Liquid State Brewery.

In response to winning the Best Food Truck category in the 2024 Best of Ithaca contest Silo Co-Owner Katie Foley said, "I think this marks the 8th time we have received this award in our 10 years of service and each time feels just as exciting and rewarding as the next." Foley added, "We are in great company with so many other trucks and trailers that have popped up on the scene over the last 5 years. We owe a huge thanks to our staff who help ensure that both food and service is consistent day in and day out! Many thanks to the people of Ithaca for the continued patronage and for voting us the best once again!"

## BEST BRUNCH: MIX

Although served only on weekends from 9am to 3 p.m., brunch at MIX was iconic enough to take home the win in this year's Best Brunch category. MIX offers a diverse range of offerings on their extensive brunch menu, including vegan plates.

In response to the recognition, part-owner Shayne Johnson said, "We really appreciate the recognition from the community for becoming the best brunch offering in town. We take great pride in our creativity, uniqueness, and consistently delivering the highest quality to our valued customers."

## BEST BUDGET RESTAURANT
### Viva Taqueria and Cantina

(Photo: Mark Syvertson)

Viva, a staple in Ithaca's Mexican food scene since 1995, aims to serve fresh and healthy food at affordable prices, winning Best Cheap Night Out in last year's Best of Ithaca. After relocating last year, the restaurant has seen continued success at their new location on the commons at 215 East State Street.

## BEST PIZZA:
### Franco's

Franco's Pizzeria made a big move this year by relocating their storefront to the former location of Cornell Laundry, at 529 W. State St. However, that move didn't stop Franco's from winning the Best of Ithaca Best Pizza category for the sixth year in a row, marking its place as the dominant force in Ithaca's pizza scene. It might be time to permanently name this award after the local pizzeria.

"Being voted Best Community and Best Family Friendly Event means the world to us," DeDominic said. "We're fully community-supported, and your love fuels our mission to celebrate the artist in everyone. See you at the 2025 festival!"

## BEST DOWNTOWN RESTAURANT
### Simeons

Located at 224 East State Street, the busiest corner in Ithaca and a location steeped in history Simeons delivers what most Ithacans consider as the best place in town to eat, drink, and relax on what locals call restaurant row.

In response to winning the Best Downtown Restaurant category in the 2024 Best of Ithaca contest, Simeons owners said, "We are excited to hear that we received the Best Downtown Restaurant award. We love being part of the downtown community and have always tried to support and participate in as many Downtown Ithaca events as possible. 17 years ago, when we purchased Simeon's, we decided to keep the name primarily because Simeon's had such a wonderful reputation in the community that we wanted to continue."

## BEST COFFEE SHOP
### Gimme! Coffee

With multiple locations across Ithaca, Gimme! Coffee, Ithaca's only employee-owned cooperative coffee company, won Best Coffee Shop in this year's Best of Ithaca poll. Co-Managing Director Colleen PK Anunu, expressed thanks to Ithaca Times readers for voting for Gimme!, and emphasized the uniqueness of the business.

"We are the only coffee company certified under a national living wage standard and are home to Ithaca's only barista union," Anunu said. "We take so much pride in sourcing specialty coffee from fair trade cooperatives and serving a simple, quality-focused menu on the daily. Our cooperative is founded on the idea that we can incrementally change how food service and manufacturing is done in the area."

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## BEST BURGER: The Ithaca Ale House

Ithaca Ale House owner John O'Leary. (Photo: Provided)

After a delayed move to their new location in the City Centre building on the corner of Aurora St. and E. State St in 2021, The Ithaca Ale House offers 20 tap craft beers and a menu including appetizers, salads, sandwiches, burgers, flatbreads, and entrees. Although the Ale House serves many signature dishes, what they are perhaps most known for are their signature burgers. They offer six unique burgers, so there's guaranteed to be something for everyone.

## BEST TACOS: Tacos CDMX

Eduardo Acevedo, owner of Tacos CDMX, celebrates his Best of Ithaca victory with co-workers. (Photo: Mark Syvertson)

The winner of Best Taco category in the 2024 Best of Ithaca contest goes to Tacos CDMX. The popularity of Tacos CDMX took off like a rocketship when they first opened a pop-up shop outside of the Ithaca Reuse Center. The local taco shop only increased in popularity after moving into a permanent residence in Ithaca's Press Bay Alley.

## BEST NEW RESTAURANT: The Lotus

Since Viva Taqueria moved out of its long-time location on the corner of East State Street and North Aurora Street in April of 2023, this prime corner location has been renovated into a traditional Korean restaurant. With its classic brick walls and gorgeous interior design, the Lotus promises familiar rice and noodle dishes emphasizing authentic Korean flavor. The new destination also offers Korean-style fried chicken, a crispy delicacy in various sweet or savory sauces.

## BEST LATE-NIGHT FOOD: Shortstop Deli

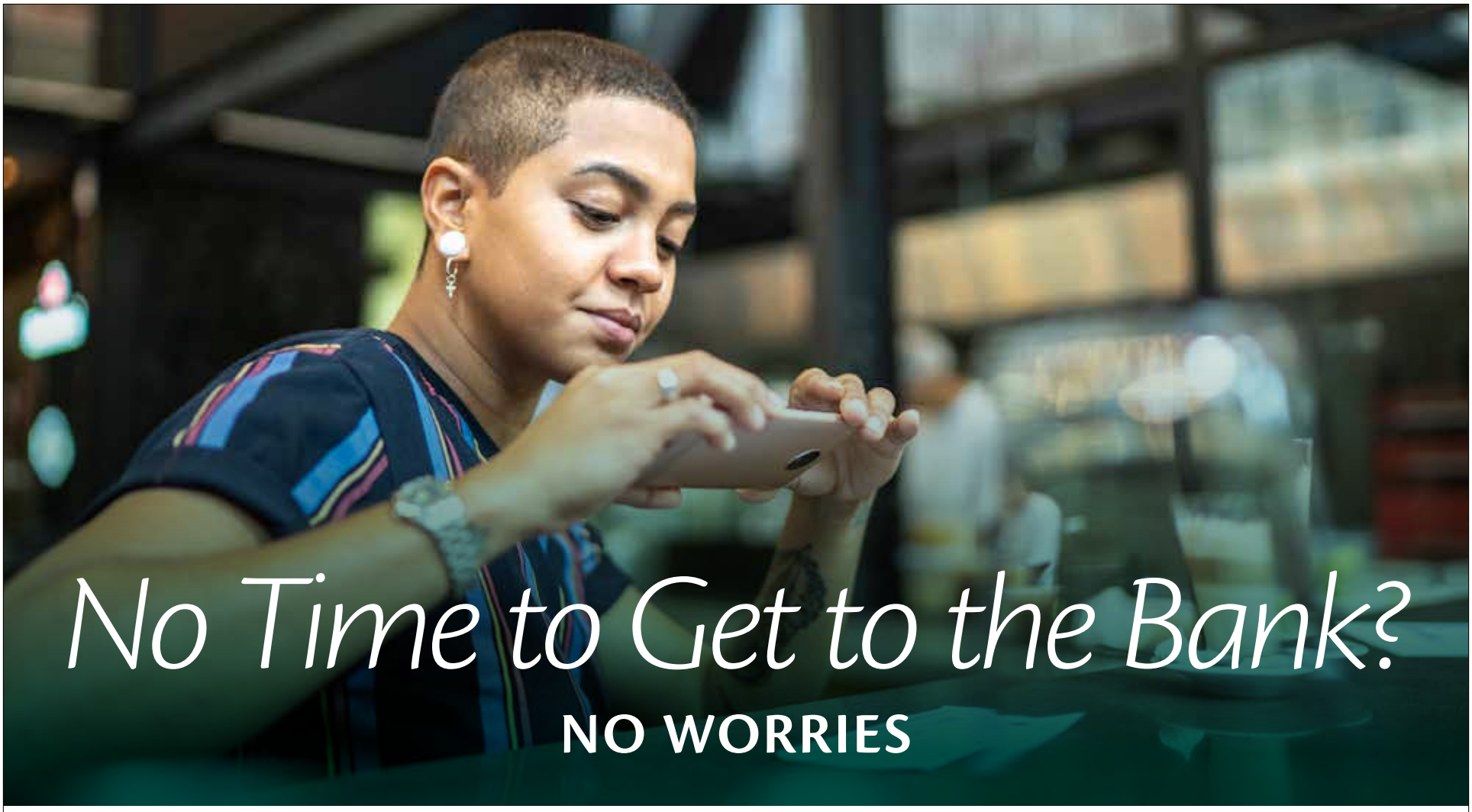
Shortstop Deli owner Chuck Dong. (Photo: Provided)

Open until 10 p.m. everyday except Sunday, Shortstop has been serving up subs out of their distinctive location on West Seneca Street Since 1978. Although the deli had to slash their once 24/7 hours after losses in the COVID-19 pandemic, their recognition as serving the best late-night food shows they still have their place in Ithaca's nighttime dining scene.

## BEST BAR: The Watershed

Owner of The Watershed, Ashley Cake. (Photo: Mark Syvertson)

Located at 121 West Martin Luther King Jr. Street in downtown Ithaca about one block from the Ithaca Commons, The Watershed provides locals with a relaxing spot to have a fun night out with friends, family and co-workers. The popular bar is open from 4 p.m. to 1 a.m. Tuesdays through Saturday, and 5 p.m. to 11 p.m. Sunday and Monday.

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## BEST LOCAL OFFICEHOLDER:
## Anna Kelles

Born in Trumansburg, Anna Kelles is the current Assemblymember for district 125, encompassing Tompkins and parts of Cortland Counties. Previously, Kelles has served on the Tompkins County Legislature and created legislation involving public health, affordable housing, immigrants' rights and more. As an assembly member, Kelles has championed policies that focus on clean energy, affordable healthcare and education equity.

"The day I heard about this vote it filled me with so much gratitude," Kelles wrote to the Times. "It was one of those crazy days running from event to meeting to event and back again. It reminded me to stop and appreciate the privilege I have to serve. I let it sink in and quietly appreciate the relationship I have with our community; one I love and cherish. Thank you to everyone who took a break from their crazy busy days to vote and I'm honored to serve you all to the best of my ability."

## BEST FINGER LAKES DAY TRIP:
## Watkins Glen State Park

Although Ithaca has some wondrous waterfalls, one of the Finger Lakes most famous State Parks in Watkins Glen, located less than an hour drive west of Ithaca, offers similarly spectacular views. Within two miles, visitors can see 200-foot cliffs and 19 waterfalls. Make sure to bring comfortable shoes, as the gorge trail has over 800 stone steps and a somewhat hilly rim trail that offers views that overlook the falls.

## BEST LOCAL AUTHOR:
## Aaron Arm

(Photo: Provided)

Local author Arron Arm has been named Best Local Author in the 2024 Best of Ithaca contest. Known for his captivating storytelling and throwback style inspired by classic sci-fi authors, Arm expressed gratitude for the community's support. "I'm honored to receive this award, as the community has been incredibly supportive of me (and all local artists, for that matter)," he shared. Arm's 2023 novel, *The Artifice of Eternity*, was celebrated with a launch event at Buffalo Street Books, and Odyssey Bookstore continues to stock it regularly. Reflecting on his recent talk with fellow sci-fi author Debbie Urbanski at the Ithaca Is Books festival, Arm called the award a "lovely capstone to the year since my book's release." This recognition highlights his contributions to Ithaca's literary scene and the enduring appeal of his work.

## BEST VET:
## Cornerstone Veterinary Hospital

(Photo: Provided)

Cornerstone has been providing veterinary care to Ithaca-area patients since opening their doors in 2006 with a strong emphasis on access to preventative care. Dawn Tornusciolo, DVM has purchased the practice in 2021 and told the Times that it was a wonderful surprise and honor to be named Best Vet in this year's Best of Ithaca.

"As the owner of the practice I am fortunate to have such dedicated and kind colleagues," Tornuschiolo said. "We really care about our clients and patients and I am so happy that our clients recognize and appreciate that. As a practice we are grateful to work with such terrific community members who really care about their beloved companions. Thanks to all who have made our practice so very special."

## BEST HAIR SALON:
## Hair•Color•Art

(Photo: Mark Syvertson)

Located on the South Hill Business Campus, Hair•Color•Art is a unique combination of a hair salon and an art gallery which encompasses their unique space. The salon also holds shows, parties and events at their space. Founder Kristin Dutcher hopes to foster a symbiotic relationship between business and creativity through programming at the space. The salon has a focus on inclusivity, creativity and self-expression.

## BEST PERSONAL TRAINER:
## Dusty Paul

(Photo: Provided)

Dusty Paul is a Exercise Physiologist and Personal Trainer at Island Fitness. He specializes in sports conditioning and injury prevention, youth weight loss and physical education, sports specific training and testing and injury prevention and rehabilitation. Paul has his Bachelors of Science in health and wellness and athletic coaching from Buffalo State College and his Masters of Science in physical education from Canisius College.

## BEST BAR BAND:
## Scuba Jerry

(Photo: Provided)

Scuba Jerry bwrtandmates Mark Maynard, Cooper Casterline, Kenny Christianson and Russ Rriedel have earned their victory as the Best Bar Band in the 2024 Best of Ithaca Contest. You don't have to dive deep into Ithaca's vibrant and eclectic music scene to find out that Scuba Jerry is a local favorite among Ithaca locals. The band can be seen performing at venues all around the city, and specializes in covering songs from the catalog of the iconic Jerry Garcia Band. Photo provided

## BEST VISUAL ARTIST:
## Yen Ospina

(Photo: Provided)

Self-taught Indigenous Colombian-American artist and illustrator Yen Ospina's uses earth tones and ornamental layouts in her ten murals that can be seen across Ithaca, among her other artwork. Ospina's work has been guided by her exposure to antique art.

"This recognition is not just a personal achievement but a reflection of the beautiful connections I've been able to foster within our community," Osina said of her recognition as Best Visual Artist. "It inspires me to continue curating spaces for BIPOC artists, organizing meaningful events, and serving as president of the Latino Civic Association. My hope is that through art, we can all come together, share our stories, and build a stronger, more vibrant community. Thank you for this incredible encouragement to keep pushing forward!"

## BEST LOCAL BAND:
## Maddy Walsh & The Blind Spots

(Photo: Provided)

Maddy Walsh and The Blind Spots have been awarded Best Local Band in the 2024 Best of Ithaca contest. Known for their high-energy performances and dynamic blend of indie rock and soulful pop, the band, led by powerhouse vocalist Maddy Walsh, has become a fixture in Ithaca's music scene. Their original sound, magnetic stage presence, and dedication to crafting memorable live shows have earned them a loyal local following and widespread acclaim

## BEST PRIMARY CARE DOCTOR:
## Carol Berlin, MD, Cayuga Health

(Photo: Provided)

Berlin is a board-certified family medicine physician who serves as a Doctor of Medicine (MD) at the Primary Care Women's Health division at Cayuga Medical Associates.

"I truly enjoy collaborating with each of my patients to achieve their optimal health," Berlin wrote, thanking the Times readers for the recognition. "It's an honor to be able to provide care for our community."

"Dr. Carol Berlin sets an excellent example for everyone on the Cayuga Health primary care team," wrote Dr. Elizabeth Smith, Chief Medical Officer at Cayuga Medical Associates. "She is an exceptional clinician, who builds meaningful relationships with her patients that truly enhance her ability to provide them with the very best care."

## BEST MUSICAL CONCERT:
## Grassroots

Ithaca's GrassRoots Festival of Music and Dance has been named the Best Music Festival in the 2024 Best of Ithaca contest. This beloved annual event, held at the Trumansburg Fairgrounds, showcases a diverse lineup of local, national, and international musicians, blending genres from folk and rock to reggae and world music. Celebrating its community spirit, grassroots activism, and cultural inclusivity, the festival has become a cherished tradition in the Finger Lakes, drawing attendees for its vibrant music, art, and sense of connection. Winning this category highlights its lasting impact and wide appeal.

## BEST OUTDOOR ADVENTURE:
## Taughannock Falls

Taughannock Falls State Park's namesake waterfall is one of the outstanding natural attractions of the Northeast. Taughannock Falls plunges 215 feet past rocky cliffs that tower nearly 400 feet above the gorge. Gorge and rim trails offer spectacular views from above the falls and from below at the end of the gorge trail. Campsites and cabins overlook Cayuga Lake, with marina, boat launch and beach nearby. A multi-use trail—hiking, cross-country skiing—winds past sledding slopes and natural skating ponds.

## BEST STAGE PRODUCTION:
## Ride the Cyclone at Hangar

(Photo: Provided)

The Hangar Theatre celebrated its 50th year this year, and when Barbara Adams reviewed their production of Ride the Cyclone for the Times, she said that Producing Artistic Director Shirley Serotsky captured the comic absurdity perfectly. Serotsky said she was thrilled to hear that the show was named Best Stage Production.

"The show was a joy to work on, from start to finish, and allowed us to bring together many wonderful, creative, kind and generous artists with deep roots in this community—including connections to Ithaca College, Cornell University, local theatre group Running 2 Places, and several performers who grew up right here in Ithaca," Serotsky wrote. "We're so honored to have had the chance to share this beautiful show with our community, and also acknowledge that making art right now is also not a game, but truly a strange and beautiful ride. And with that—we'd love to give a shout out to all of the area artists and arts organizations that have stayed on the ride and keep dreaming, creating, inspiring and sharing with all of us."

## BEST PLACE TO SEE A SUNSET:
## Sunset Park

It's hard to beat the view of a sunset from a park that is so aptly named. Located on the Western Slope of Cayuga Heights, Sunset Park offers stunning views of the City and Cayuga Lake, particularly when the sun meets the water each evening.

## BEST NEIGHBORHOOD TO RENT IN:
## Fall Creek

This charming neighborhood offers the best combination of Ithaca's most popular traits: a vibrant college town feel paired with the quaint and eccentric personality that is perfect for students and families alike. Strolling around Fall Creek, you can't help but be charmed by the welcoming atmosphere created by the creek running through the neighborhood, the sidewalks lined with lush trees, and the cozy hometown aura. If you're someone who likes cookie-cutter neighborhoods, search elsewhere! The Fall Creek houses all burst with individuality with their distinctive structures, colors, and characters.

## BEST PLACE TO VOLUNTEER:

### Loaves & Fishes

Loaves & Fishes volunteers gather for a group photo. (Photo: Provided)

For more than 40 years Loaves & Fishes has provided hundreds of thousands of meals to community members in need at no cost at all. It's no surprise that the beloved local volunteer driven organization has won the Best Place to Volunteer category in the 2024 Best of Ithaca contest.

"Volunteers at Loaves & Fishes possess giant hearts! Their various backgrounds and multi- generational talents add to the congeniality felt in the kitchen, over the dish pit washing pans, and in the dining hall serving our guests," said Mary Webber, Loaves & Fishes Community Relations Manager. "Lending their time and special gifts of service enable us to provide 300 free meals each day…Whether our volunteer is 94 years young, has volunteered for decades, or are high school or university students exploring the meaningful work of volunteering, the collective feeling of partaking in our caring community and giving to others is palpable." Webber added, "We are honored to be the Best Place to Volunteer and so grateful to have the hearts and hands of our volunteers amongst us each day — they are vital to our operations and deeply appreciated by our guests and employees."

## BEST FARMERS MARKET VENDOR:

### Silver Spoon

Specializing in locally-inspired comfort food, Silver Spoon at the Ithaca Farmers Market delights visitors with their savory grilled cheese and a weekly rotation of other offerings. Husband and wife team Christian and Allison Meyer partnered with The Silver Spoon's founder, Robert Berkeley, to bring back the beloved booth to the market in 2018.

"We want to thank all of our fans and friends, our customers at the Farmers Market for voting for us," the Meyers wrote to the Times. "To be named "the best" among so many greats is a tremendous honor!"

## BEST OVERLOOKED TOURIST SPOT:

### Cascadilla Gorge

Known for connecting Cornell's Campus to Downtown, the three-quarters of a mile-long Cascadilla Gorge trail features eight waterfalls that reach up to 80 feet tall along Cascadilla Creek. The trail offers a peaceful nature hideaway right in the heart of the city.

## BEST RAINY DAY SPOT:

### Cinemapolis

General Manager Kate Donohue. (Photo: Provided)

Since their grand opening in downtown Ithaca in 1986, Cinemapois has cemented itself at the go-to movie spot among Ithaca locals who appreciate independent, foreign and locally produced films.

In response to winning the Best Rainy Day Spot category in the 2024 Best of Ithaca contest, Cinemapolis General Manager Kate Donohue said, "We do want to remind everyone that movies and popcorn are a great way to spend any kind of day. Cinemapolis shows local and international films, blockbusters, independent movies, and documentaries. We also host a wide range of community events." Donohue added, "With five screens, we are one of the largest independent theaters in the country. We've been a part of this community for almost 40 years, and we're grateful to everyone who has helped us along the way including all the folks who voted for us this year. Cinemapolis is open every day, and we'll see you at the movies."

## BEST PLACE TO MEET SOMEONE:

### Ithaca Farmers Market

The Farmers Market is a long-time Ithaca staple and serves up weekly fresh produce, food and local artisan goods to hundreds of visitors each week at their enchanting pavilion on the shore of the Cayuga Lake inlet.

"Since coming to Steamboat Landing in the mid 80's we have always considered the Market to be a place for joyful commerce — a place to shop for local goods and deepen community connections," Kelly Sauve, organizational manager for the Farmers Market said. "When you come to market you may be meeting up with friends, family or neighbors; you may happen upon someone you know; or you may meet a vendor you didn't know before."

## BEST PEDIATRICIAN:

### Wellbeing Pediatrics

Since opening in 2021 Wellbeing Pediatrics has worked to foster growth in their patients through appreciating their individual needs. Located at 402 Third Street in Ithaca near Route 13, Wellbeing Pediatrics has won the Best Pediatrician

## BEST KIDS PROGRAM/ CAMP:

### Primitive Pursuits

(Photo: Provided)

Primitive Pursuits is honored to be the winner of the Best Kids Program category of the Ithaca Times Best of Ithaca contest for 2024. The organization works hard to create engaging, welcoming, curious-inspiring and nature-centered programs that allow children to fully immerse in the gifts of the natural world all year-round. Through activities such as friction fire, shelter building, outdoor cooking, archery, crafting, and more, children have the opportunity to practice skills that may not be present in their everyday lives.

"Thank you to everyone who voted for us, we feel extremely fortunate to be a part of the Ithaca community for over 20 years. This recognition means we are making the type of impact we strive for every day. We hope to continue to make you proud!"

## BEST VENUE FOR KIDS:

### Sciencenter

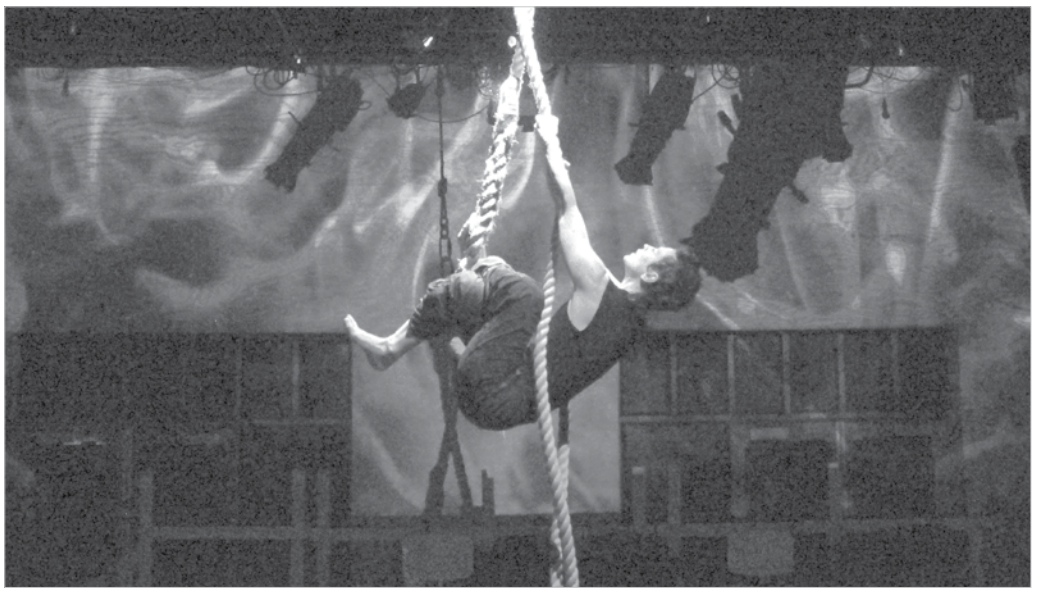
Ever since the Sciencecenter began operating out of donated storefronts in 1984 it has been providing the community with entertaining and interactive science education. Since then it has grown to permanently occupy a 32,000 square foot facility, constructed with the help of Cornell alumni Bill Nye. Over the years the Sciencecenter has only grown in popularity, so its no surprise that they won Best Venue for Kids Category in the 2024 Best of Ithaca contest.

Sciencecenter's Marketing and Communications Manager Cydney Wixon responded saying, "The Sciencenter is a hands-on museum where curious explorers of all ages can learn science through 250 interactive exhibits and daily educational programming, meet live animals up close and personal and play a round of mini-golf. Winning the Best Venue for Kids category in this year's Best of Ithaca is an honor that celebrates our commitment to inspiring young minds and fostering a love for science in our community. We are so proud to be a place where families come to learn, explore, and play together!

category in the 2024 Best of Ithaca contest. In response to winning the award, L.P.N. Trudy Brenchley said, "Our goal is for every child to be safe, healthy, loved, and appreciated, and for none to suffer. We love our vibrant and accepting community, and work every day to add to it by taking care of its families. We're here for you and because of you. Thank you for this recognition of our work and your partnership in our goals. It means everything to us."

# "In The Fire" At The Cherry Arts

*By Barbara Adams*



*"In The Fire," created and performed by Holly Benedetti, is an emotional tribute to firefighters, blending aerial performance, dance, and storytelling to honor their courage. (Photo: Provided)*

With its high ceiling and towering walls, the Cherry Arts venue is an ideal space for vertical and outsized productions, as we've seen here in previous shows like "Air Heart" and performances by Circus Culture. "In the Fire," the Cherry's current offering, lives up to the theater's goals of "collaborating and experimenting across artistic and cultural boundaries."

Canadian Holly Benedetti is the creator and chief performer of this tribute to all fire fighters but in particular her father. As artistic director of Femmes du Feu Creations, Benedetti has trained in and draws on a myriad of forms — the circus and aerialist arts, including fire performance, dance, storytelling, and masked clowning.

This intense one-hour performance piece blends multiple elements in successive scenes, opening with the suggestion of smoke: five figures floating in, covered in dusky grey translucent fabric. This is the chorus, who gather at one side and sing or hum to the transfixing music of John Gzowski. Their near-continuous sound is a compelling complement to Benedetti's movement, mixing musical moods from mournful and elegiac to buoyant and even hopeful.

The Cherry's seating set-up, tennis-court style, allows audiences on both sides to see every aspect of Benedetti's twists and turns. She performs on a steel A-frame "ladder" to one side, and in the central space, from three dangling features: a heavy fire fighter's jacket and boots; a thick noose-like rope; and an enormous snaking fire hose.

*Holly Benedetti performs daring aerial movements in "In The Fire," using a fire hose as one of the central props. The performance is a tribute to firefighters and her late father, a fire department captain. (Photo: Provided)*

The entire environment is sculpted by Peter Benedetti's lighting, video, and set design.

Apart from his dramatic illumination, extra touches reinforce the ambience: One wall is lined with fire equipment, like helmets and nozzles, both current and vintage; that wall is also hung with a screen of heavy fire hoses. And behind both audience seating tiers hangs a string of delicate silkscreened panels, like prayer flags, faintly presenting firefighting scenes.

Supplementing all this is an excellent program booklet, with not only bios and credits, but also song lyrics, poems, and information about the inspiration for "In the Fire," Benedetti's father. George Treddenick, a 36-year fire department veteran and captain, helped found the Winnipeg Fire Fighters Museum. Before he passed two years ago at 80, he was able to see the premiere of his daughter's work.

The man himself speaks briefly in a projected video interview, punctuated unnecessarily by question slides. But this device seems far too literal and unrevealing in a visceral performance that's so highly emotional and abstract. More effective are the moments in a fiery projection where we see his figure darkly moving in the background.

Treddenick's recorded voice accompanies some scenes from a loudspeaker, but it's so loud and scratchy that almost nothing reaches us (I gleaned "so hot" a few times). Likewise, the choral songs are stirring, but the words are all indistinguishable. Only when we read the program later do we have some sense of what might have been said.

This effectively leaves music and movement alone — both impressive — to carry the piece. Benedetti, clad mostly in form-fitting bluish overalls, engages with each of the hanging supports in turn. Her strength and stamina are remarkable, and her focused effort powerfully alludes to the physical and mental demands on fire fighters.

That said, Benedetti's motion is sui generis; it doesn't replicate its firefighting subject but rather responds to it. Movement styles mix frequently; it's difficult to grasp a pattern in the choreography. The sections are, I later learned, based on specific stories, but these are not knowable to the audience, so the effect is one of watching subjective personal expression. We comprehend danger, risk, persistence, and anguish — all striking, but for me the meaning was ultimately too private.

Others didn't share my view: parents of a firefighting son were deeply moved; one woman was reminded of her own father's very different sort of courage. Determined and strong, Benedetti offers a "fusion of flame, form, and flight" that touches each of us differently.

"In the Fire," created and performed by Holly Benedetti. Choir: Gabriella da Silva Carr, Lisa Frank, Carley Robinson, Geoffrey Royall, and Tamar Shapiro-Tamir. Score by John Gzowski. At the Cherry Arts, 102 Cherry St., Ithaca. Sept. 27-28 at 7:30 p.m., Sept. 29 at 2 p.m. Tickets at https://thecherry.org/tickets/.

*Barbara Adams is a regional theatre and arts journalist and retired professor of writing, Ithaca College.*

# Thai Basil's Extensive Menu Aims to Impress

*By Henry Stark*

If The Ithaca Times was to add a new category to their Best of Ithaca issue, Smallest Restaurant Frontage with the Most Extensive Menu Selections, I would, without hesitation, cast my vote for Thai Basil to be in the top three. The menu has eleven pages in a spiral notebook format.

Located on State Street, opposite The State Theater, it's easy to miss as it's tucked between several other retail establishments.

Of the sixteen appetizers, ($10.95-$14.95), I enjoy Summer Rolls. (I'd probably like the other 15 too but don't have the time or energy to try them all.)

When I order the Summer Rolls, I receive four thick pieces of rice paper surrounding lettuce, cucumber, cilantro, sliced carrots, tofu, and basil served with a peanut dipping sauce. It's a substantial vegetarian portion that's crunchy and fun to eat. Incidentally there are five more truly vegetarian appetizers.

I like duck and I'm happy to have seven possibilities to choose from. ($24.95). Unfortunately, for my personal preference, all are boneless. I like to work my way through a half duck on the bone. I enjoy the process and have always believed that meat on the bone is tastier than when it's cut off. However, the duck meat is beautifully cooked and juicy. Since three of the offerings are "hot and spicy" I have opted for one of the other four, Thai Fried Rice Duck. Strangely, it's served on a fish shaped plate also used for serving their red snapper dishes. It's a reasonably sized portion served sliced over Thai fried rice. The pieces are not always sliced clear through, so I often ask for a knife. (In Thailand, knives are not used as the locals like to tear food apart with their fingers). It comes with a small, attached dish with dipping sauce which is never enough for me. When I ask for more sauce, the only waiter takes my plate, with all the food on it, to the kitchen to fill the small dish on the plate. I have wondered why they don't offer separate ramekins.

I mentioned red snapper and there are four on offer, all whole fish, meaning you'll receive a fish with head and tail intact. This might be off putting to some. Once, a dining companion confessed, "I am totally uncomfortable with a fish staring at me while I eat it." Of course, the fish has already passed on and presumably not watching us as we eat it. The snappers are $29.95 and two of the offerings are quite spicy. Other diners could be put off by learning that all these fish are deep fried.

Speaking of fried, there are more than a dozen stir fried entrées served with Jasmin rice and a choice of a dozen proteins, ($16.99-$24.99). I think it's fun to select one of the entrées and then pick out a matching sauce. If you like this idea, you could eat there many times and, ordering from the same page, never have the same meal twice.

Recently I ordered Chicken Pra-ram. The chicken was sauteed and sliced into thin pieces and placed atop a circle of steamed broccoli with a peanut dipping sauce. I usually spread the sauce over the chicken because it enhances the flavor. As with many Thai dishes, this one is accompanied with a large portion of Jasmin rice.

There's a whole page devoted to curries, again with a dozen add-on proteins, ($16.99-$24.99). All the curries are spicy ranging from relatively mild Massaman, red, Panang, yellow, and pineapple curry to hot green and really hot Jungle curry. Once again, if you like curries, the possible combinations seem endless.

There are other categories available including soups, salads, fried rice selections, fried noodles offerings," Chef's Creations", and combination dinners, (one entrée plus Thai tea for $22.95 and one entrée, spring rolls, and Thai tea, $24.95).

Eight interesting desserts are available, ($8.95-$9.95).

BEVERAGES: There are more teas, coffees, juices, and sodas than wines. The wine list is minimal but adequate for Thai food. The seven offerings are $9-$10 by the glass and $36-$40 by the bottle. There's a very good selection of a dozen beers in bottles, ($6.50-$7.75).

*Located on State Street across from The State Theater, Thai Basil offers an extensive menu that delivers authentic thai-style eats that are sure to impress. (Photo: Mark Syvertson)*

## Tid Bits:

A dozen offerings, ($14.95-$15.95) are available at weekday lunches, 11:00 AM- 3:30 PM.

There's a "kids' menu" with eight somewhat basic Asian possibilities, ($10.95-$16.95). The portion sizes are the same as for adults however no spices are used in cooking.

My companions and I have had difficulty communicating with, and being understood by, the small Thai staff. The Thai owner often had to come out of the kitchen to help the one Thai waiter however we still had the same language difficulties.

There's metered parking on State Street.

## TAX BREAKS FOR SOUTH WORKS?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

will take the time to have the report revised in a way that better reflects reality and truly serves the decision-making process. The SouthWorks project is in many ways most promising, and we would like to see it get off to a strong start and succeed with the help of a tax abatement if justified and appropriate. But the IDA should do the right thing for the right reasons. The IDA should proceed more cautiously and deliberately with the approval process and assemble more accurate data and more realistic characterizations of the project's implementation before voting on whether to approve the abatements. And the public should be given similar information before it is asked to make a judgement on foregoing this much tax money. We urge our fellow citizens to attend the public hearing on Monday, September 30th at the Town of Ithaca town hall to express their views on the issue. The hearing begins at 4:30. We hope to see you there.