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SERVING
THE CATSKILLS
AND HUDSON
VALLEY



EXPANDING HORIZONS

**Center for Discovery
plans 400 more hires,
a \$15M kids' hospital**

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Students exercise and get fresh air on a new rail trail that The Center For Discovery made possible in Hurleyville. The trail is among several projects that the Center, a renowned caregiving and research center for individuals with developmental disabilities, has been involved with to help redevelop the hamlet. [JIM SABASTIAN/FOR THE TIMES HERALD-RECORD]



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OUR REGION

Center for Discovery in Sullivan 'c

Renowned organization that helps individuals with developmental disabilities plans more expansion

By Daniel Axelrod
Times Herald-Record

HURLEYVILLE - Danny Abelson still ponders the moment his son reached a social level his parents never dreamed possible.



Dollard

It was three years ago at Tilly's Diner in Monticello.

Danny and his wife, Patti, witnessed their then 31-year-old

son, Tommy, who has a developmental disability, kidding with Jim Sullivan, a Hurleyville fire department member.

Tommy turned to Sullivan, who was walking behind him, and jokingly asked, "Are you following me?" to which Sullivan replied, "As a matter of fact, I am."

With a wry smile, Tommy replied, "OK, I was just checking."

To Tommy's parents, it was magical, the culmination of his time working with Center for Discovery staff since moving to one of its residences in Hurleyville in 2007.

It was a high-level interaction between two equal men, after Tommy had spent life struggling to think and communicate.

"Tommy is moving confidently in a way that's bigger than us," Abelson said.

"He's become a person who counts in the world."

Seventy years after the Center for Discovery's predecessor organization was founded, it's become a renowned caregiver and researcher for individuals with complex developmental disabilities, and it's still expanding after years of growth.

Already Sullivan County's largest employer, with 1,600 employees, the center plans to hire 400 more across its departments by 2020.

Plus, the nonprofit recently received state approval to build a \$15 million pediatric specialty hospital in the Town of Thompson.



The Center for Discovery is negotiating with state officials to potentially buy the former Frontier Insurance Co. building in Rock Hill, to create a hospital for patients with autism and other conditions, local elected leaders said. The State Liquidation Bureau seized the building in the early 2000s. [TIMES HERALD-RECORD FILE PHOTO]



Emberto Rayes, from Hurleyville, gets his hair cut by Lenard Williams in one of several business that have sprung up in Hurleyville. The Center for Discovery has been instrumental in the hamlet's redesign and redevelopment. [JIM SABASTIAN/FOR THE TIMES HERALD-RECORD]

Plans call for an 18-bed sub-acute treatment and research center of up to 30,000 square feet, focused on autism and other complex conditions.

The nonprofit's leaders would not say where it might be.

But Bill Rieber and Steve Vegliante, supervisors of the

towns of Thompson and Fallsburg, and Sullivan County Partnership President and CEO Marc Baez said the center is negotiating with state officials to buy the former Frontier Insurance building in Rock Hill.

The center's leaders said they hope to open the hospital in 2020, with 100 staff members annually

serving 160 patients ages 5 to 21. Each will generally stay 30 to 90 days.

Growth spurt

Begun in 1948 by a few families

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The Center for Discovery's evolution

1948 - A group of Sullivan County parents meet to initiate services for their physically challenged children at Beth Abraham Hospital in New York City.

1950 - United Cerebral Palsy Association of Sullivan County is incorporated. It evolves into The Center for Discovery.

1951 - UCPASC clinic opens in two rooms at Liberty-Loomis Hospital to treat physical, occupational and social problems, attracting children from across Sullivan County.

1980 - Rock Hill native Patrick Dollard, now 68, is hired as the center's director. Dollard says he gives new hires "the opportunity to be innovative and creative," and brings a holistic approach to treatment.

1982 - The center opens its first residential intermediate care facility in Rock Hill and buys 12 acres in Harris for administrative offices, classrooms and treatment rooms. Residences will later be built at the site.

1983 - Farming operations begin with a small vegetable garden at the Rock Hill residence.

1999 - The organization becomes The Center for Discovery.

2002 - The Discovery Health Center opens with primary and specialty care. The building is environmentally friendly. The center employs roughly 1,000.

2004 - The Center and Open Space Institute team up to save Stonewall Preserve Farm in the hamlet of Hurleyville. The Center begins efforts to help redevelop Hurleyville.

2013 - The Center partners with Open Space Institute to buy nine miles of O&W Railway right of way to create the Milk Train Trail. Three miles were paved in 2017.

2018 - The Center employs 1,600 with plans to reach 2,000 by 2020. The Center initiates plan to build a \$15 million 18-bed sub-acute hospital and research facility, with focus on autism and other complex conditions, in Town of Thompson.

OUR REGION

n creates 'architecture of healing'



Speech language therapist Lisa Wagner works with a Center for Discovery student in Harris. [DANIEL AXELROD/TIMES HERALD-RECORD]

CENTER

From Page 4

from the Jeffersonville area as the United Cerebral Palsy Association of Sullivan County, the center now helps 1,200 clients annually.

In recent years, the center has grown to:

- develop 50 residences integrating people with developmental disabilities into communities, while providing a long list of therapy services
- build a cutting-edge, cross-disciplinary research center studying autism, dementia, ADHD and other brain disorders
- buy and harvest 300 acres of organic farmland to feed center residents and staff and create food production facilities including a bakery
- redevelop downtown Hurleyville to help private operators open a variety of businesses
- collaborate with the Open Space Institute and the Town of Fallsburg to purchase and upgrade the nine-mile Milk Train Trail, which connects Ferndale to South Fallsburg.

"It's a living model of what inclusion looks like," said Abelson.

Her son works at the Hurleyville Market, volunteers at the fire department, walks the rail trail and performs at the Hurleyville Arts Centre.



Center for Discovery students often use the Hurleyville Arts Centre for instruction and arts therapy sessions. The Arts Centre is one of several downtown Hurleyville buildings the Center helped redevelop. [JIM SABASTIAN/ FOR THE TIMES HERALD-RECORD]



The Center partnered with the Open Space Institute to buy nine miles of O&W Railway right-of-way to create a rail trail in 2013. Three miles were paved last year. [JIM SABASTIAN/ FOR THE TIMES HERALD-RECORD]

He's even acting as Tevye in the center's upcoming "Fiddler on the Roof" production.

"The center is a gem in our community, and I'm thrilled they're here," said Town of Fallsburg Supervisor Vegliante.

"They've completely redesigned and redeveloped Hurleyville, which has enabled other private investment to follow in this area."

Sullivan County leaders often credit the center and Alan and Sandra Gerry, the philanthropic

forces behind the Bethel Woods Center for the Arts, for showing that positive development was possible even during the county's dark decades.

"Alan likes to say he just helped keep the lights on" following the decline of the county's resorts, said Sandra Gerry, chairwoman of the Gerry Foundation's Sullivan Renaissance program and the Sullivan 180 revitalization organization.

"But one person or entity didn't

do it alone."

"The hospital, the local government stepping to the plate, Sullivan Renaissance, the casino, and a lot of other people have worked together" to rejuvenate the county, Gerry added.

"The center has played a marvelous role in keeping the economy going in this area, too. I don't know what we would've been as a county without them."

Rieber also can't picture Sullivan County without the center.

"I don't think we'd have replaced the jobs we've lost, or we'd have had a higher incidence of unemployment as people (moved) out of the area to get jobs," Rieber said.

In 2016, the center disbursed \$77.14 million in wages, generated \$102 million in direct economic output, and paid \$3.2 million in state and local taxes, according to a recent center-commissioned economic impact study by analytics firm Teconomy Partners.

"When the center's leaders make up their minds to do something, they never go in halfway or three quarters," said Baez of the Sullivan County Partnership, an economic development

Research spotlight

The Center for Discovery is conducting several cutting-edge studies, its leaders said. Among their studies is research examining the autism-gut connection; farming and industrial hemp production techniques; the medicinal properties of healthy food and proper nutrition; the soothing nature of building design; and finding out how brain dysregulation-related conditions work. Perhaps the center's most ambitious study involves its work with data analytics.

The center is uniting specialists across medical fields to create personalized algorithms of care for complex diseases, factoring in thousands of data points from sleep to allergens and weather, said researcher Dr. Kara Margolis, a gastroenterologist and professor at Columbia University Medical Center.

In the future, the center may explore the potential implications of its research for those with Alzheimer's and the therapeutic potential of cannabidiol, which comes from hemp oil.

organization.

"Their outcomes always exceed our expectations."

Hospital on the horizon

A hospital is the center's next big plan, and local elected leaders said the former Frontier Insurance building is a possible location.

The New York Liquidation Bureau took over the insurance business in the early 2000s, following massive losses, wound it down and closed it in 2013, leaving vacant a prime Sullivan County building.

"The goal of our whole organization is to create the architecture of healing," said Patrick Dollard, 68, who attributed the center's success to the creative, open-minded leaders and staff hired since he became president and CEO in 1980.

"We don't treat the disability. We treat the person."

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