



# The IEDC Economic Development Journal

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## Innovation in Bethlehem

By Asher Schiavone

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# innovation in bethlehem

By Asher Schiavone

Throughout its history, the City of Bethlehem, PA, has proven itself a leader in the field of innovation and entrepreneurship. As early as the 1760s, Bethlehem was a community that housed industries of tanning leather, brewing beer, weaving blankets, making soap, and grinding wheat. But the early Moravians may be best remembered for an innovation that satisfied their most basic need – access to water. In 1762, the Moravians (a religious group, members of the Moravian Church originating in Europe, that settled in Bethlehem on a 500-acre tract purchased a year earlier) built the first municipal water pumping system in America. The system pumped spring water 94 vertical feet to a water tower that allowed water to flow directly to homes in the community – innovation at its finest.

In building our nation, the city's Sun Inn Tavern served as one of the staging grounds used by our Founding Fathers and Bethlehem Steel manufactured the steel that built much of our nation's most recognizable infrastructure and that played a crucial role during the World Wars in the early 1900s. We didn't invent steel, but innovative leadership made Bethlehem Steel a national powerhouse. The variations of the I-beam made steel beams stronger and able to support and build the nation's largest structures – innovation at its strongest.

The City of Bethlehem, like most startups, has had to pivot to survive.

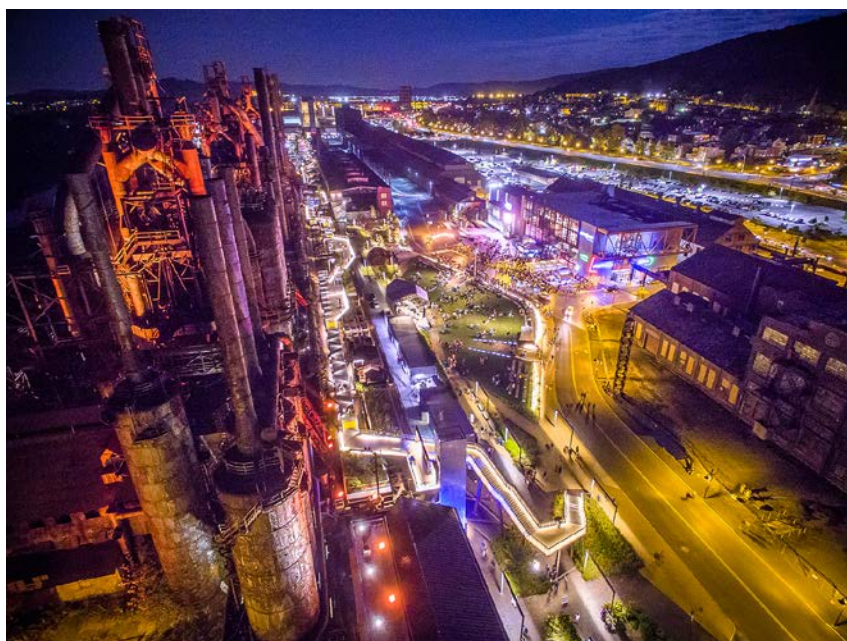
For as long as most can remember, the city revolved around Bethlehem Steel. After 120 years of producing steel in Bethlehem, however, the blast furnaces shut down in 1995 and Bethlehem Steel

filed for bankruptcy in 2001. At one point the second largest steel company in the United States, it employed a peak workforce of 31,523 at its Bethlehem plant during World War II and was the leading employer and tax contributor in the city.

## BANKRUPTCY...WHAT NOW?

The closing of Bethlehem Steel left thousands unemployed and the largest privately-owned brownfield in the country. The question then became...what now? Communications between Bethlehem Steel and the city during the waning years were critical to planning the future of the site. Two things were obvious – 1) the SteelStacks and area immediately surrounding it would make an attractive arts & entertainment venue and 2) Bethlehem needed to diversify its economy.

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SteelStacks, once the home plant of Bethlehem Steel, the site has been reborn through music and art. (Courtesy of WRT)

## ANYTHING BUT RUN OF THE MILL

The Southside Bethlehem Keystone Innovation Zone (KIZ) received the Gold Award from the International Economic Development Council for Partnerships with Educational Institutions for 2018. Since 2004, the KIZ has awarded over \$8 million in over 100 startup companies. Typical investments are made at the company's earliest stages, often when they are pre-revenue and not attractive enough to typical investors. Efforts to date have yielded multiple businesses that generate significant revenue and contribute new jobs to Bethlehem's economy. The KIZ works closely with Lehigh University and Northampton Community College to foster and attract these innovative startup companies that drive economic development in the city and the region.

Powerful economic development incentives play an important role in attracting large amounts of private and public investment that continue to be infused into the 1,800-acre brownfield site. The return of this investment has been reclaimed brownfield, over 9,000 jobs created, and the creation of a more diversified and resilient economy. While an incredible amount of development has occurred on this site, there are still parcels available for development, some of which are currently in the works.

## A NEW INITIATIVE – THE KEYSTONE INNOVATION ZONE (KIZ)

While redevelopment of the Bethlehem Steel site continues to be a focus and priority, it is small businesses that are the backbone of the economy. In 2004, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania announced a new initiative called the Keystone Innovation Zone (KIZ). This program is administered locally by the City of Bethlehem and the Bethlehem Economic Development Corporation, a private non-profit economic development corporation.



Southside Bethlehem KIZ Logo

It is the mission of the KIZ to foster innovation and create entrepreneurial opportunities by aligning the combined resources of educational institutions, the public sector, and the private sector. Furthermore, the program seeks to combat “brain drain” and help communities to retain the talent and technologies being generated on college campuses.

The KIZ program fills an important niche in the entrepreneurial ecosystem that often goes unmet and unnoticed. Companies that are less than eight years old, located in the KIZ, operate within one of the targeted industry clusters, and developing innovative and proprietary technology are eligible for the program. Startups at this stage often are pre-revenue and too early for investors. Once qualified for the program, companies can apply for the following resources:

- **Technology Transfer Grants (\$15,000)**
  - The KIZ awards Technology Transfer Grants up to \$15,000 to assist eligible companies in the commercialization of innovative technologies that possess promise for technology transfer into the marketplace.
- **Student Internship Grants (\$2,500-\$3,750)**
  - The KIZ awards Student Internship Grants up to \$2,500 for undergraduate-level students and up to \$3,750 for graduate-level students.

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- **NCC Fab Lab Access (\$1,000)**
  - The KIZ may allocate up to \$1,000 in expenses accrued at the Northampton Community College Fab Lab in order to assist eligible applicants in the commercialization of innovative technologies that possess promise for technology transfer into the marketplace.
- **Lehigh TE Capstone Grants (\$2,500)**
  - The KIZ awards Lehigh Technical Entrepreneurship (TE) Capstone Program Grants up to \$5,000 to assist eligible companies interested in sponsoring a TE Capstone team for an entire year.
- **KIZ Tax Credit Program (\$100,000)**
  - The KIZ, through the Pennsylvania Dept. of Community & Economic Development, awards annual KIZ Tax Credits up to \$100,000 to assist eligible companies.
  - The KIZ Tax Credit Program is based on increased revenue, are sellable, and can be used in conjunction with Federal R&D and Pennsylvania R&D Tax Credit Programs.

The funding for these programs (with the exception of the KIZ Tax Credits) is privately funded by the program’s Primary Partners.


Bethlehem was awarded the first KIZ in 2004 due in large part to its history, ripe economic climate, and relationship with Lehigh University and Northampton Community College (NCC). Over the years, a total of 28 KIZs have been designated and have helped to create almost 10,000 jobs across the state. The Southside Bethlehem



Grand opening of the Follett Family Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship & Fab Lab at Northampton Community College. (provided by NCC)



## KIZ OVERVIEW

	Technology Transfer Grants	Student Internship Grants	Student Interns Placed	Lehigh TE Grants	NCC Fab Lab	Total Grants	Tax Credits	Total Investment
<b>Program Total</b>	<b>\$1,243,767</b>	<b>\$385,943</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>\$10,000</b>	<b>\$685</b>	<b>\$1,640,395</b>	<b>\$6,132,533</b>	<b>\$7,772,928</b>
Year 1 (2005)	\$126,892	\$23,610	10	\$0		\$150,502	\$0	\$150,502
Year 2 (2006)	\$117,556	\$31,645	13	\$0		\$149,201	\$0	\$149,201
Year 3 (2007)	\$119,477	\$22,491	8	\$0		\$141,968	\$497,568	\$639,536
Year 4 (2008)	\$98,744	\$26,820	10	\$0		\$125,564	\$558,111	\$683,675
Year 5 (2009)	\$88,170	\$52,392	22	\$0		\$140,562	\$664,660	\$805,222
Year 6 (2010)	\$73,019	\$28,983	14	\$0		\$102,002	\$459,931	\$561,933
Year 7 (2011)	\$62,897	\$40,493	21	\$0		\$103,390	\$557,645	\$661,035
Year 8 (2012)	\$107,489	\$34,381	16	\$0		\$141,870	\$683,660	\$825,530
Year 9 (2013)	\$48,243	\$31,831	13	\$0		\$80,074	\$750,065	\$830,139
Year 10 (2014)	\$97,099	\$27,916	11	\$0		\$125,015	\$578,427	\$703,442
Year 11 (2015)	\$76,682	\$31,182	12	\$0		\$107,864	\$403,016	\$510,880
Year 12 (2016)	\$92,500	\$7,450	3	\$2,500		\$102,450	\$537,292	\$639,742
Year 13 (2017)	\$60,000	\$13,000	8	\$2,500		\$75,500	\$442,158	\$517,658
Year 14 (2018)	<i>\$75,000</i>	<i>\$13,750</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>\$5,000</i>	<i>\$685</i>	<i>\$93,750</i>	<i>\$0</i>	<i>\$93,750</i>

The figure for "Tax Credits" and "Total Investment" for 2018 does not account for the KIZ Tax Credits that will be awarded by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development in December, 2018. All italicized figures are likely to increase based on anticipated investments.

KIZ has invested over \$8 million in 100 startup companies that has resulted in over 450 jobs created, 258 patents filed, and over \$70 million in additional funding leveraged. A detailed breakdown can be found in the KIZ Overview chart. History has proven time and time again that the strength of our community and our ability to innovate resides in our partnerships. Here in Bethlehem, we are fortunate to have community partners that are focused on supporting entrepreneurs who are motivated to realize the American Dream. From entrepreneurial development, to business planning, prototyping, financial assistance, available space, mentorship, and much...much more, the city is as well-positioned as any to foster the growth and success of startup companies.

### OUTREACH EFFORTS FOR THE KIZ

Outreach efforts for the KIZ are primarily focused on students in the Lehigh Valley, especially those attending Lehigh University or Northampton Community College. There are examples throughout history of students with brilliant and innovative ideas who drop out or graduate and then pursue their dream. It is incredibly important to get the message to these students that funding is available here in Bethlehem that can help to launch the company.

Lehigh University has the Baker Institute for Entrepreneurship, Creativity and Innovation that aims to foster the entrepreneurial mindset that leads to creating value in the world. It provides the Lehigh community with access to the skills, resources, and connections needed to enable both for-profit and non-profit entrepreneurial ventures to launch and prosper. Similarly, Northampton Community College recently launched its new Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship. This space is focused

on entrepreneurial programming and includes the Fab Lab, which provides community access to state-of-the-art technologies. These range from a full metal and woodshop, spray booth, 3D printers, laser cutters, a sound lab, guitar-making and repair studio, cold casting, and more.

In a sense, these students create the recipe for a startup and the KIZ provides them with the ingredients needed in order to make it happen. We want to give the students an opportunity to succeed not in New York, not in Boston, but here in Bethlehem where a start-up culture and "knowledge neighborhood" is establishing itself.

### BECOMING MORE SUSTAINABLE

The most challenging moment for the KIZ came when state funding dried up for the grant programs that were being offered for KIZ companies. Due to this, most KIZs



Lehigh University Students. (provided by Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation)

## KIZ'S PRIMARY PARTNERS

- Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development
- City of Bethlehem
- Bethlehem Economic Development Corporation
- Lehigh University
- Northampton Community College
- Northampton County
- BB&T Bank
- St. Luke's University Health Network
- PNC Bank
- Merchants Bank
- Lehigh Valley Health Network
- Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation
- Ben Franklin Technology Partners
- PPL Corporation
- EcoTech Marine, Inc.

(with the exception of the Southside Bethlehem KIZ) primarily exist to allow startups to apply for the KIZ Tax Credits. The Southside Bethlehem KIZ has 15 “Primary Partners,” which include Lehigh University, NCC, and local community stakeholders that annually fund the KIZ. These Primary Partners form the KIZ Board that allows the KIZ to manage a budget exclusively set aside for investment in KIZ companies. Bethlehem is fortunate to have forward-thinking community stakeholders that continue to invest because they have seen the impact of the program.

Recently, our KIZ fundamentally altered the way the \$15,000 Technology Transfer Grant program will be managed. For the first time, companies awarded grants would be required to repay if certain benchmarks are met, mainly increased revenue. Through a 1x return, an additional \$30,000-\$40,000 is expected to be generated annually. With this change, the KIZ has become more sustainable and current companies will essentially be “paying it forward” by investing in future startups. This change has been favorably received by those companies that have successfully graduated from the program, those companies interested in applying in the future, and from the community as a whole.

An often overlooked aspect of attracting and retaining entrepreneurs is the livability and “cool factor” of the community in which they work, live, and play. The city offers a vibrant community, a pool of talented employees, low-cost of living, and close proximity to customers and suppliers.

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## ATTRACTING AND RETAINING ENTREPRENEURS

Innovation and entrepreneurship are foundational traits of our city and will continue to lead us in this new economy. It is through programs like the KIZ that we are able to retain and attract bright minds, technology, and products in our city. We recently received an Honorable Mention for the 2017 City Livability Award for Small Cities in support of the Southside Bethlehem KIZ during the U.S. Conference of Mayors’ 85th Annual Meeting. This national award, received by cities such as Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Phoenix, in addition to the IEDC Partnerships with Educational Institutions award, further validates our efforts and confirms our own innovative approach to supporting startup companies. By supporting these new ventures, we are helping to facilitate the job creators of tomorrow through this homegrown economic development effort.

An often overlooked aspect of attracting and retaining entrepreneurs is the livability and “cool factor” of the community in which they work, live, and play. The city offers a vibrant community, a pool of talented employees, low-cost of living, and close proximity to customers and suppliers. With multiple downtown settings, Bethlehem has something to offer all residents and visitors in the form of gaming, dining, shopping, history, athletics, and cultural events. With these attributes, Bethlehem provides entrepreneurs with the resources and the lifestyle that they seek and is considered as a haven for young, bright, tech-savvy entrepreneurs.

Bethlehem provides entrepreneurs not only with essential resources to develop new technologies, but provides an affordable quality of life that rivals anywhere else in the country. Looking forward we are hopeful that some of the companies that are established in our KIZ will become the new leaders of their industries in the future. With new infrastructure currently being developed, existing buildings being rehabbed and repurposed, new and exciting retail establishments, streetscape improvements, and regular festivals and events, the City of Bethlehem is primed for success.

## ADVISORY PARTNERS

- Rising Tide Community Loan Fund
- Lehigh Small Business Development Center

Following is an overview of how participants in our ecosystem work together. It highlights a typical process for a startup story and three case examples.

### A Startup Story

An entrepreneur has the perfect idea for a widget. He is enrolled at Lehigh University where the widget is refined under the guidance of the Baker Institute and prototyped using equipment at the Wilbur Powerhouse. During a networking event held at Lehigh, the KIZ learns about the widget and informs the student of opportunities available through the KIZ program. The student then graduates from Lehigh and decides to register his company, officially becoming a startup.

As a true startup, the company is low on cash and cannot seek much in terms of an investment or traditional loan. The entrepreneur remembers that financial resources are available through the KIZ and applies for a \$15,000 Technology Transfer Grant that will enable him to purchase equipment to manufacture the widgets. However, because he doesn't have the required business plan or financial projections, he is directed to Lehigh's Small Business Development Center (SBDC) (an advisory partner) where assistance is free of charge.

To further understand how to actually run a business, he attends Start Your Own Business classes offered by Community Action Development Corporation of Bethlehem or the Lehigh SBDC's seminars to learn about managing inventory, tax issues, marketing, and more. At the same time, he knows the widget needs to be refined since the Wilbur Powerhouse is no longer accessible after graduating from Lehigh. He is able to utilize Northampton Community College's Fab Lab where he can modify the widget design and experiment with various prototypes.

With a widget ready for commercialization and business plan developed, a proposal for the \$15,000 Technology Transfer Grant is submitted to the KIZ Board for consideration. After a successful pitch the entrepreneur receives the grant and proceeds to build an initial inventory of widgets using the purchased machinery and equipment. This eventually leads to revenue which is re-invested back into the business. Based on the sales numbers and demand for its widget, the company reaches out to the Rising Tide Community Loan Fund (an advisory partner) to inquire about the Bethlehem Small Business Loan Fund as well as the Lehigh Northampton County Revolving Loan Fund, Ben Franklin Technology Partners, and Lehigh Valley Angel Investors in order to access capital with the goal of growing their company. The growing success of the business forces it to expand rapidly, eventually to the point where it can find larger space within Bethlehem.

### Bonn Place Brewing Company

Sam and Gina Masotto, the owners and operators of Bonn Place Brewing Company, were probably better known for their role in the comedy show Tony N' Tina's Wedding. They enjoyed performing at venues all across the country and their schedule eventually brought them to Yuengling Café at SteelStacks. "When Gina and I first came to Bethlehem to do Tony N' Tina's Wedding, in whatever year that was, we were like, where the heck has this been our whole lives," Sam said. "A great city, in the middle of everything, with tons of activity."

While Sam and Gina were succeeding on the stage, another passion was brewing. Literally...that passion WAS brewing. Their dream to start a brewery ultimately led them to move to Bethlehem, where they leased a small commercial space on the Southside. After extensive renovations, Bonn opened its doors on August 1, 2016. This made it the first brewery to be located on the Southside in over 60 years since the closing of the South Bethlehem Brewing Co. in 1954.

The interior of their 49-seat brewery features a welcoming combination of exposed brick, wood, and tile. There are nods to the local industrial economy and Bethlehem Steel in many of the furnishings and décor, and the entire project used only materials sourced in the United States. Bonn prides itself on having a wide variety of styles on tap that are sure to offer something for everyone. Sam also likes to experiment and tinker with innovative new recipes that will have you constantly checking their website for what they will have on tap next. Since opening, Bonn has already established a tremendous reputation within the community in large part due to their character, personality, work-ethic, and of course... a great product.

Bonn Place Brewing is eligible for the KIZ program and has been applying for and receiving KIZ Tax Credits. These have allowed them to modernize their equipment, hire new employees, provide raises to their current employees, and to purchase a new location that will expand their operations and manufacturing capability.

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Briana Gardell, CEO of Goblies, in Michaels Stores Day of Goblies Launch. (from Goblies Facebook Page)

Historically, companies eligible and supported through the KIZ have consisted primarily of technology or life science companies. Supporting Bonn Place Brewing through this program represents a commitment to manufacturing and innovative processes that align with the goals of the program.

### Goblies

Mezzimatic LLC and its flagship product Goblies® Throwable Paintballs, which is a hybrid between a water balloon and paintball, along with its new Play Paint® that is designed to be used in water guns, are currently selling in Michaels Stores and Walmarts across the country and online! The company was founded by Briana Gardell, who developed the concept during her enrollment in Lehigh University's Technical Entrepreneurship program and graduated from Lehigh with her master's degree in 2015. "Twenty-six prototypes later, I finally got something working," said Gardell, CEO of Mezzimatic LLC. "Making it into a commercial product, that's another story that took many, many more prototypes. But I did finally get it to function." She would end up refining her prototype, launching a successful Kickstarter campaign, and continued making Goblies in her apartment kitchen.

Gardell knew that to seriously pursue this as a business she would need space and seed funding to launch the business. She knew about the City of Bethlehem's Department of Community and Economic Development from interactions at various Lehigh events and reached out to it to discuss needs for space and capital. Gardell eventually located at SoBeCoWorks at 1349 Lynn Ave., the same location previously used by EcoTech Marine, which is another successful startup that spun out of Lehigh University. She was able to take advantage of the Southside Bethlehem Keystone Innovation Zone by receiving two Technology Transfer Grants totaling \$30,000

and will be able to take advantage of up to \$100,000 in KIZ Tax Credits annually. "Before I started the business, I don't think I fully grasped the importance of being in an entrepreneurial ecosystem like Bethlehem," said Gardell. "Now I wouldn't want to build my business anywhere else. I feel like I know who to call for any project, from Arduino development to financing, through the local networking events and I find that to be extremely valuable as I continue to grow."

"There is no doubt that Goblies is one of the biggest economic development stories of the year," stated Bethlehem's Mayor Bob Donchez. "As a former educator, it's encouraging to see what essentially started out as a class project evolve into a real world application. I'm excited for Briana and looking forward to the future success of Goblies."

"Briana Gardell's success speaks to the power of collaboration between Lehigh University, the KIZ, and the City of Bethlehem" said Adrienne Washington, Assistant Vice-President, Community & Regional Affairs at Lehigh University and KIZ Board member. "Lehigh University is committed to support innovation and entrepreneurship in South Bethlehem and the Lehigh Valley."

There are many other organizations that Gardell was able to work with to bring Goblies to fruition, but most of the success can be attributed to her personality, work ethic, and determination. With Goblies in Michaels and now Walmart, there is no doubt that the future is bright (and colorful) for Goblies. "I feel like I'm on a new playground," said Gardell. "I am enjoying tackling the new challenges and opportunities that this stage of the business presents."

### Soltech Solutions

Soltech Solutions LLC was founded to develop and provide the highest standards of energy efficient products. The company's founders, who received degrees from Temple University and Penn State University, decided to establish their headquarters in Bethlehem after




Soltech Solutions LLC Team Meeting in Pi: Partnership for Innovation. (provided by Soltech Solutions)

going through an exhaustive search. Part of the reason that Bethlehem was considered was that a CNNMoney article ranked the city as one of the Top 100 places to “Live and Launch.” Paul Hodges, CEO of Soltech Solutions, stated “Between the beautiful office spaces and the friendly businesses within the Pi building, we couldn’t ask for a better work environment. Since locating to Southside Bethlehem, we’ve also felt a significant spike in business activity and can’t help but think we have the KIZ to thank. It’s been a wonderful experience so far and we’re looking forward to continue growing here.”

Soltech Solutions main product is the Aspect, which is a revolutionary LED pendant light that grows plants using the photosynthetic spectrum while displaying them with museum quality light. “With our unique light and design,” Hodges said, “homeowners looking to add life into their houses can grow everything from beans and eggplants to pineapple, coffee, and avocados.”

The Aspect comes in a 20 and 40 watt version. The company secured a \$15,000 Technology Transfer Grant through the Southside Bethlehem KIZ Board. This funding enabled the company to build up product inventory. Soltech Solutions is currently selling its product direct

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through its website and online marketplaces like Amazon. The Aspect is sold in over 30 states, plus Puerto Rico as well as globally. Soltech Solutions has received bulk purchases from the Portland Nursery, Rooftopia, Sprout Home Brooklyn, and other plant-based businesses and experts in the industry. The company was also featured by both the Philadelphia Business Journal and the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development during Pennsylvania Manufacturing Week. 

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