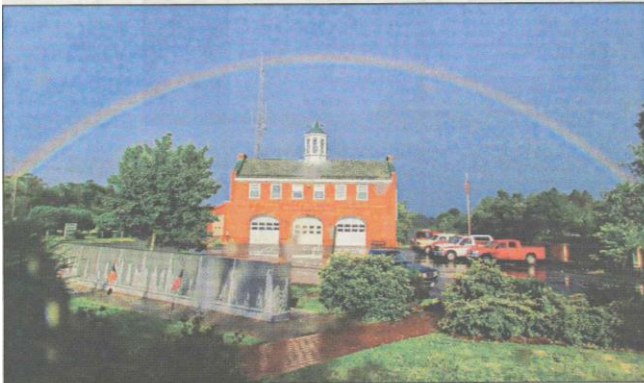


## HOPEFUL SIGNS



Orange officials are hoping new ideas they are following will restore the cash-strapped town's fortunes by encouraging eco-tourism and creative economy businesses. Recorder/Mike Phillips

## Orange charts path to green future

By LINDA ENERSON  
Recorder Correspondent

ORANGE — As a teenager in the 1990s, Brian Eno was one of hundreds of Orange Revitalization Program volunteers spending afternoons and weekends upgrading bridges, downtown areas and parks to attract new businesses and residents to town.

But when the grants funding the program dried up, volunteers dwindled to a handful, and were forced to abandon many of their plans.

The old mill buildings the group wanted to revitalize stood vacant, roads slowly deteriorated, and the glassy waters of the Millers River flowed largely undisturbed through town.

Problems escalated several years ago when Orange was rocked by one economic blow after the next — declining state aid, run-away costs for fuel, utilities and insurance, and a level tax base.

Now president of ORP Eno gathered members together at the Millers River Café several weeks ago to meet two new community leaders he hopes to partner with to make some big and lasting changes in Orange.



Recorder graphic/Linda Enerson

### ORANGE GOES FOR THE GREEN

For years, Orange has been chronically short of money. Today, the town's leaders want to move Orange into the green, by planting trees, updating parks, encouraging outdoor recreation and revitalizing old buildings — to attract new businesses and new revenue.

Town Administrator Diana Schindler and Community Development Director Kevin Kennedy shared their plans for the town.

Kennedy sat in front of a large aerial map of Orange, describing his ideas for promoting Orange as a great place to start environmentally friendly businesses that draw eco- and cultural tourism to town.

He also wants to update parks and plant saplings that will mature into stately elms gracing roadways to welcome tourists and shoppers.

He calls the overall big plan, "Going from Orange to Green."

Community leaders and ORP members munched sandwiches as they strained to

see what was written in the "little black bubbles" on the aerial map that contained Kennedy's ideas for bringing new business into town.

While the printed schematic reflected a significant amount of work and planning, it was for Kennedy "all in pencil" — a way to inspire residents and leaders to brainstorm new and better ideas.

"I love that people give us feedback about the map" on the town's Facebook page, he said. As Kennedy pointed to one of the little black bubbles, he said, "It's no big deal if that's a dumb idea."

Some of the bubbles represent enterprises already under way, such as paddling tours and boat rentals at the new town boathouse on the Millers River.

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## GROWING LOCALLY

The North Quabbin Community Cooperative in the Orange Innovation Center is currently housed in a 250-square-foot corner of the Orange Innovation Center, east of town. At right are co-op members Mary-Ann Palmieri of New Salem, George Rolix of Athol, Ben Feldman of Athol and Tom Dean of Orange.



Recorder/Paul Franz

## Can small food co-op sprout into downtown centerpiece?

By LINDA ENERSON  
Recorder Correspondent

ORANGE — Carol Hillman of New Salem Preserves sells more of her heirloom apples, cider vinegar and jellies and apple butter from her 153-tree orchard at the Garlic and Arts Festival than she does on any other two days throughout the year.

She's not alone. According to organizers, many local farmers and craftspeople selling at the festival haul in a major portion of, if not the majority of, their business income that weekend.

That's why a group of festival organizers and other residents want to expand the North Quabbin Community Cooperative as a year-round venue for local producers.

The project is an integral part of the plan of moving the town "from Orange to green," by encouraging the growth of small, environmentally friendly businesses in the downtown area.

According to co-op board member Rachel Scherer, the group is negotiating to buy the old Workers' Credit Union building at 12 North Main St. across from Town Hall.



Recorder graphic/Linda Enerson

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Scherer said the landlord of that building, which has stood vacant for the past eight years, "is very supportive of what we're trying to do."

She said it will take about \$100,000 to fully fund the project. Organizers are hoping to raise about a third of that locally, and already have about \$15,000.

The group expects sweat equity and material donations will account for another third. They plan to borrow the rest.

The cooperative is currently housed in a 250-square-foot corner of the Orange Innovation Center, east of town.

Plans for the expansion include building

out the entire first floor of the credit union (1,500 square feet) to house a full line of groceries and produce, including locally grown fruits and vegetables, organic and natural foods, dairy foods, local cheeses and frozen meats.

"We'll be right in the heart of downtown — we can help build a cultural center that will help other small businesses make a go of it here," said Scherer.

Community Development Director Kevin Kennedy agreed a cooperative located downtown will support the eco- and cultural tourism he hopes to bring in through a variety of economic development projects.

He envisions people coming in to town

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## PADDLING UPSTREAM



Recorder/Paul Franz

Outdoor adventure company Peak Expedition is fostering greater use of the Millers River by recreational paddlers, a piece of Orange's effort to encourage eco-tourism and economic development in general. Sean Ashcraft and Michael Kappenman demonstrate paddleboards at Peak Paddlesports at the boathouse in Orange Center on the Millers River.

## Ecotourism natural fit for Orange

By LINDA ENERSON  
Recorder Correspondent

ORANGE — As the full moon rose over the town, it lit a two-mile path along the Millers River for several dozen people paddling on boards, in kayaks and canoes from the town's new boathouse to Cook's Cove.

According to the Peak Expedition's principal tour leader Sean Ashcraft, this was no ordinary moon, but a rare "blue moon," often defined as a second full moon in a month. The site was unusual enough to match the revival of a town that has slowly declined for the past 40 years, and more recently been besieged by financial crises.

Paddling through water made silvery in the moonlight, Dave MacClean recalled a time when he was a kid in the 1970s when the river wasn't so clean.

"There used to be big brown chunks of stuff floating down it ... the water changed color depending on what they were making that day" at area riverfront factories. But those days of heavy industry are long gone, and the state and federal governments have poured millions of dollars into monitoring and cleaning its waterways.



Recorder graphic/Linda Enerson

### ORANGE GOES FOR THE GREEN

For years, Orange has been chronically short of money. Today, the town's leaders want to move Orange into the green, by planting trees, updating parks, encouraging outdoor recreation, and revitalizing old buildings — to attract new businesses and new revenue.

And after years of economic stagnation, Orange is now on a path to attract new, environmentally friendly small businesses to town — like Peak Expeditions, an outdoor adventure company that is based in Greenfield but operates trips throughout the world.

Community Development Director Kevin Kennedy points to the boathouse activities as one of the first big successes of the town's recent new economic development plan to "move Orange to green."

According to Kennedy, Orange residents aren't going to believe that "good things can come to Orange and the town can prosper unless they see concrete things getting done."

Many Orange residents donated materials and labor to finish off the boathouse, a project that had been years in the making. A three-year contract was signed this spring with Peak Expeditions to operate programs and rent boats to the public in the town-owned structure.

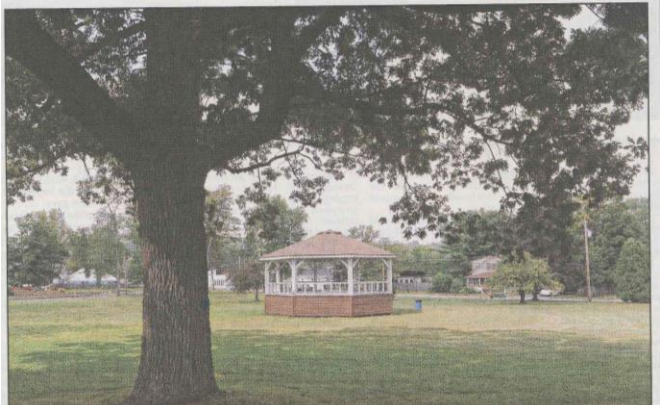
"Peak is great," Kennedy said. "They are local, they are experienced working with a wide population of kids and adults, and they are into connecting people to nature."

The paddle tour attracted people of all ages from all over western and central Massachusetts as well as a familiar cadre of residents who frequent the boathouse, like MacClean.

Ashcraft said the boathouse has been

See ECOTOURISM Page A5

## IF YOU BUILD IT...



Recorder/Paul Franz

The upgrades to Butterfield Park in Orange will include building a professional-level ball field attracting leagues from outside the area for games and tournaments.

## Would nicer Butterfield Park bring business downtown?

By LINDA ENERSON  
Recorder Correspondent

ORANGE — "The greening of Orange" is how town officials talk about their ambitious plans to bring more ecologically sustainable businesses into town. But that's more than just a slogan.

Orange will literally be turning greener as part of its new economic development plan.

Community Development Director Kevin Kennedy has applied for \$300,000 from the state to upgrade Butterfield Park, refashioning it as a central place for outdoor community activity in the downtown area.

"Residents and people from out of town can come to the park and we can create a sense of community there that's not happening now," he said.



Recorder graphic/Linda Enerson

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Cemetery and Parks Superintendent Josh Knechtel said he is "very excited about Kevin's plans for the park. I'm on board and I'm really looking forward to the future and fixing up all the parks so that they are really nice places for people to enjoy."

Kennedy said that a group of volunteers has already planted a dozen or more

disease-resistant elm trees in Butterfield and other parks throughout town, replacing some venerable old shade trees that were destroyed in the ice storm two years ago.

The upgrades to Butterfield Park will include building a professional-level ball field attracting leagues from outside the area for games and tournaments.

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