

VALLEY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

# Legacy *Matters*



in this issue: Jan./Feb. 2015

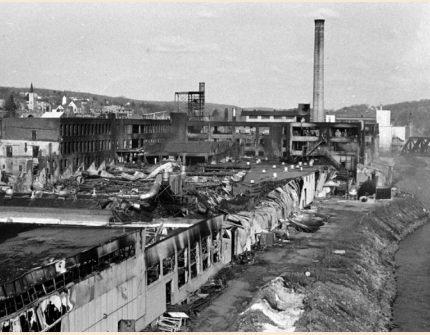
**Smart Investment:  
Economic  
Development**

**Donor Spotlight:  
The Simonetti  
Family**

**Good News:  
Grant Dollars  
at Work**

F O R   G O O D   F O R   E V E R   F O R   T H E   V A L L E Y





*View of Shelton riverfront following the 1975 arson fire at Sponge Rubber Factory*



*The Derby-Shelton Rotary Pavilion, built on the factory's riverfront site in 2012, is now a place for the community to gather.*



*The Paul Pawlak Sr. Bypass Channel and Park is Seymour's newest park located at the Tigue Dam. This \$6.3 million project was designed to eliminate one of the last obstructions to migratory fish on the Naugatuck River. Visitors can see native fish migrating to their spawning points upstream. The site opened in late 2014 and is expected to increase recreation, tourism and improve the local economy with shops and the town's antique district close by.*

## The entrepreneurial spirit has been strong in the Naugatuck Valley since its early days

and the recent flurry of business activity in the region is proving this spirit to be alive and well. From the redevelopment of old industrial sites and large-scale groundbreakings to small business startups, the Valley is abuzz with economic success.

While Shelton's corporate corridor along Bridgeport Avenue has been an economic engine for a generation, an exciting transformation has been happening to the formerly blighted industrial area downtown. Abandoned factory buildings and an old asphalt plant along the riverfront have been converted into a mix of attractive public spaces, residences and office space. Though much of the construction is recent, the redevelopment is rooted in the long-term planning that goes back decades.

Following the devastating Sponge Rubber Factory fire in 1975, a collaborative of stakeholders began the process of developing a vision for rehabilitating the riverfront. The planning process led to the 1997 referendum to buy the site and turn it into a farmers market and greenway trail. A continued planning effort enabled the city to leverage state and federal investments to build infrastructure and reclaim other brownfields along Canal Street. These commitments opened the door to private developments

such as the former Birmingham building, which generates \$300,000 in taxes annually, and the Avalon property, which now has 250 apartments.

"Rather than dig up greenfields, we are taking properties that have lain fallow for years and putting them back to work," said Shelton Economic Development Corporation President Jimmy Ryan. "The whole community made a commitment."

Brownfields redevelopment is also happening in Ansonia, with the demolition of unused buildings at Ansonia Copper & Brass. Meanwhile, local developer Bob Scinto of R.D. Scinto Inc. has restarted development of Ansonia's Fountain Lake Park, where a 60,000 square-foot facility is being planned for the relocation of Farrel Pomini from its longtime Main Street location.

Even more brownfields redevelopment in the Valley is anticipated since the formation of the Connecticut Brownfields Land Bank (CTBLB). Funded in part by a three-year grant from the Valley Community Foundation, CTBLB will aggregate resources on behalf of municipalities that lack the capacity to manage these complicated land deals.

"There is an awful lot going on," said Greater Valley Chamber of Commerce Director Bill Purcell. "Consumer confidence is up. Credit is available for small business. I think we are entering a period of optimism."

In another success, the federal designation of the Naugatuck Valley Corridor as an Economic Development District in 2013 has opened up infrastructure grants to local municipalities. Derby received a \$445,000 grant in early 2015 to develop a comprehensive plan for a redevelopment zone spanning from the Derby-Shelton Bridge to the Route 8 south entrance ramp, which would likely include proposals to widen Route 34. This plan, combined with another \$50,000 grant to analyze how tax credits could be used to redevelop Elizabeth Street's historic properties, are a step towards revitalizing the downtown area, attracting new businesses and significantly improving the city's infrastructure.

The Waterbury-Oxford Airport, located in Oxford, additionally attracted new businesses when the Connecticut Airport Authority unanimously approved a business enterprise zone with tax incentives to foster economic development.

Further cause for optimism is a federal proposal to designate the Naugatuck River Valley as a National Heritage Area. The proposal, which requires approval from Congress, would give local communities access to federal funds for 10 years to increase employment, boost tourism and improve the local economy if approved. Thanks to the many collaborative efforts of Valley businesses, organizations and governments, local indicators are moving in the right direction.

## How You Can Help:

- Support local businesses
- Support organizations that help individuals achieve economic success
- Support local economic development planning efforts

# Donor Spotlight: *The Simonetti Family*



*Tom and Betty Simonetti grew up in Shelton and made a life of helping their community thrive. A fund at VCF was created after Tom's death in 2010.*

## During a time of widespread economic hardship in the Valley,

as factories closed and work was becoming harder to find, Gaeton "Tom" Simonetti provided people with good jobs. The nursing homes he ran for more than four decades with his wife Betty, who kept the books, offered a decent income and career advancement to many.

And for many teenagers in Shelton and in the Valley, he provided that all important first job. For three years in a row, Shelton High School gave him the award for being the Valley employer who hired the most Shelton High School students. He always encouraged them to go further in their education and become a nurse or doctor.

Tom served in the U.S. Army from 1951-53. He married Betty at that time and they lived in Salt Ste. Marie, MI until Tom was discharged and they returned to Shelton. Tom started a dry cleaning plant and they raised five children.

His passion for business led him to research the nursing home industry in the early 60's when it was in its

infancy and later into oil wells during the 1980's.

Never held back by his lack of a college education, Tom Simonetti started in nursing homes in 1964. After spending many a late night studying the regulations, he took a chance and built a 30-bed facility, the Long Hill Nursing Home in Shelton. Within three years, he expanded the facility to 180 beds. He would go on to build or acquire additional nursing homes in Shelton, Derby, North Haven and

*"My dad worked from the day he could walk. He always had a project going and he never retired."*

*- Anthony Simonetti*

Arizona. Simonetti was also recruited to help manage a New Jersey health care company that owned facilities around the country.

Tom purchased a nursing home and a pub in Arizona. At the pub he met a Canadian oil man that led him to Moran, Texas, where he drilled five oil wells, three of which struck oil. They were later purchased by a large oil company. Having Shelton always in his heart, Tom had the drilling company paint orange and black

stripes on the separation and holding tanks in honor of his alma mater, Shelton High School.

"My dad worked from the day he could walk," said son, Anthony. "He always had a project going and he never retired."

Tom and Betty both grew up in Shelton and went to local schools. Both were children of local business owners. The Simonettis owned a shoe repair and dry cleaning business while Betty's family, the Pagliaros, owned Frank's Peoples Market, where Betty learned bookkeeping at a young age.

Upon his passing in 2010, Tom's passion led the Simonetti family to establish the Gaeton and Elizabeth Simonetti Family Fund to assist Shelton High School graduates with continuing their education, particularly in nursing.

Tom and Betty's interest in Shelton, its people, progress and development never diminished.

The Simonetti Family continues to give back to Shelton and the Valley, a community they love and where their family still lives today.

## Grant Deadline Approaching

Applications for the Valley Community Grants Program are considered through a request for proposal process. These grants are responsive to community groups that are volunteer or nonprofit in nature that serve Ansonia, Derby, Oxford, Seymour and/or Shelton and have less than 2 full-time or less than 4 part-time staff.

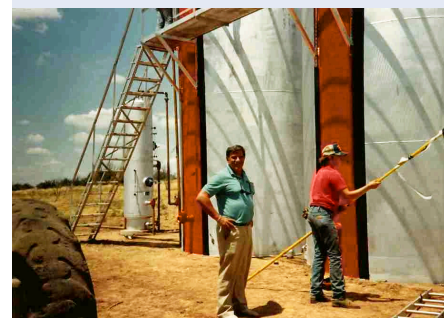
Grants can be for new or recurring programs and will support civic and community engagement efforts. Grants range from \$250 to \$2,500; up to \$40,000 is budgeted for this grant process.

2015 marks the first year that Community Grant Applications are submitted online. Applications are available now and are due March 6, 2015 at 5:00 p.m.

For more information on the Community Grants program and other grants available from VCF, please call 203-751-9162 or visit [www.valleyfoundation.org](http://www.valleyfoundation.org) to apply!

## Save the Date!

Join us on the evening of Thursday, April 30, 2015 at La Sala for VCF's 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting. More information to follow.



*Tom Simonetti struck oil in Moran, Texas in 1986. He painted the separation tanks with orange and black as a symbol of his Shelton Pride.*





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# Good News About the Valley



## Getting Back to Work

Many unemployed young people need job training or certification in order to be considered for a good job, but lack the money to pay for it. The WorkPlace Inc. is offering a scholarship program for individuals who have low incomes and cannot access public training funds.

The job training completion rate is typically around 90%, and placement within 90 days is typically around 75%. Individuals receiving scholarships are enrolled in a WorkPlace program and working with an assigned program manager to ensure that appropriate support services align with training.

According to WorkPlace, there are 30,000 unemployed people throughout southwestern CT (nearly 12% of whom are from the Valley). While the demand for job training in the region is increasing, there are not enough public funds to support training for all the people who need it.

The scholarships, funded in part with a \$15,000 grant from the Valley Community Foundation, are part of The WorkPlace's larger mission to help individuals gain independence from federal and state assistance and achieve long-term stability with marketable job skills.



## Supporting Women Entrepreneurs

In December 2014, at its Holiday Hoopla event, Women in Networking (WIN) presented three Valley women with entrepreneurial grants. The WIN grant-in-aid program provides financial assistance to women 18 years of age or older in the towns of Ansonia, Beacon Falls, Derby, Oxford, Seymour and Shelton.

The grant recipients were: Eileen Robinson, owner of Move Books, Beacon Falls, CT; Meghan Tarby, founder of the Connecticut Partnership for Children, Oxford, CT; and Alyssa DeMatteo, owner of Wildflour Cupcakes & Sweets, Seymour, CT.

Funding for the grant program is made possible through WIN's designated fund at the Valley Community Foundation; a WIN grant can be used for expenses to enhance the recipient's current business or to start a new business.

Since its inception, WIN has given over \$44,000 to 41 grant recipients. WIN is one of three leads groups affiliated with the Greater Valley Chamber of Commerce.