

## BERKSHIRE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

# The new collaborative approach to business

**By Jim Therrien**

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**PITTSFIELD »** Small business owners hoping to improve their sales pitches are receiving a boost from one of the Berkshire Chamber of Commerce's partner organizations.

IBerkshire, the county-wide economic development alliance that is affiliated with the chamber, is currently holding a "Pitch Competition," a training session that involves the evaluation of sales pitches by a group of judges.

The competition, which began in early February and continues through May, also includes prizes and feedback for the participants.

The Pitch Competition

is part of Berkshire Starts, a IBerkshire program that encourages entrepreneurship, innovation and economic growth throughout the county, said Economic Development Specialist David Curtis:

Berkshire Starts itself is just one key initiative in an array of programs being rolled out or strengthened by the chamber or its partner organizations.

## Expanding development

Local business organizations are currently expanding their cooperative efforts under the IBerkshire umbrella, according to Berkshire Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Jonathan Butler.

"The future is bright with this type of model," Butler said, referring to the increasingly collaborative approach involving the chamber, the Berkshire Visitors Bureau and Berkshire Creative under the IBerkshire Strategic Alliance brand.

IBerkshire was formed in 2010 to coordinate the region's economic development engine and unify the efforts of the Berkshire Chamber, the Berkshire Economic Development Corp., the Berkshire Creative Economy Council and the Berkshire Visitors Bureau.

The Berkshire Economic Development Corp. no longer exists. Berkshire Creative officially became part of IBerkshire last October. The Chamber of Commerce and the Berkshire Visitors

Bureau still operate as separate entities.

The organizations will "continue doing what they have been doing," Butler said, but they also will be able to access each other's expertise, resources and staff expertise to enhance promotion of the county as a prime area to live, work and play.

Collaboration between these organizations was enhanced when they all moved into the historic central firehouse building on 66 Allen St. in 2012. Previously, the four organizations maintained separate offices in different locations.

That collaborative process will intensify shortly, Butler said, as a new IBerkshire website is rolled out over the next month, fur-

ther linking the organizations and encouraging innovative, collaborative efforts and new strategies to promote the Berkshires.

The website, constructed over the past year by Winstanley Partners of Lenox, will provide information on the organizations and programs, along with links to information on real estate, jobs through BerkshireWorks Career Center, BerkshireJobs.com and other sources, and information for tourists, people considering a move to the area, and for residents.

The Berkshire County Regional Employment Board, which runs BerkshireWorks, is also located at 66 Allen St.

"We are very excited about the website, and we will continue to add to it,"

Butler said, making the site a one-stop, user-friendly place for all things Berkshires.

"Our focus will be to continue getting the IBerkshire brand out there," he said.

The IBerkshire collaborative concept was developed over the past several years, as these separate organizations sought to pool their resources and strengthen the impact of their individual efforts.

"IBerkshire has continued its evolution into the regional economic development organization for the Berkshires," Butler said. "It continues to be served by the staff of its two primary partner organizations — the Berkshire Visitor's Bureau and the Berkshire Chamber of Commerce."

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