

# Slate Belt Takes Pride in Past as it Looks to the Future

By LVEDC

SLATE BELT - There's a 22-square-mile area in northeastern Lehigh Valley that was once the greatest slate-producing region in the world. But as storied as its history may be, its best days are still ahead.

Nestled just south of Blue Mountain between the Delaware and Lehigh Rivers, quarries first opened there in the 1830s. The slate was of such superior quality that by the early 20th century, this area accounted for half the slate produced in the United States and was the largest slate-producing region in the entire world.

This area, appropriately known as "The Slate Belt," includes the boroughs of Wind Gap, Pen Argyl, Bangor, and Portland, as well as other surrounding Northampton County municipalities. The quarries have long since closed, but the shared heritage and traditions, as well as the natural beauty of the Slate Belt, are still alive and well more than a century later.

"The Slate Belt is bound together through its common heritage and shared past, and a pride among its people in where they came from," said Vincent Behe. "I think what makes the Slate Belt special is an ethos of hard work, a small town and community feel, and the knowledge that they're all bound together as we move into the future."

Behe is the director of Slate Belt Rising, a neighborhood revitalization initiative that seeks to leverage the unique history, architecture, and culture of the Slate Belt municipalities into a regional approach to foster comprehensive community and economic development in the area, and lift the overall quality of life for the region.

"I think this is a really important time of change and transition for the Slate Belt, and that's really exciting," said Behe, who became the director of Slate Belt Rising this year after having spent two years as planner for the program. "There are questions of identity and who we are going to be in future, and how we can improve the lives of the residents while still keeping the history, the heritage, and the rural character that makes the Slate Belt special."



"The Lehigh Valley and the Slate Belt have always placed as strong emphasis on regionalism, which I think has been the key to our success and growth over the past decades," said Andrew Kleiner, Director of Regional Partnerships for the Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation, and a member of the Slate Belt Rising steering committee. "By working together, we are stronger, more effective, and bring out the best in each of us."

Slate Belt Rising is currently finalizing a new six-year plan that will guide the organization through 2028. While preserving many of the programs that have proven successful and popular with the area's residents, the new plan will particularly focus on such areas as quality affordable housing, creating a vibrant economic climate, regional cooperation and community engagement.

Slate Belt Rising is a program of the Community Action Lehigh Valley, an anti-poverty nonprofit organization that seeks to improve quality of life by building a community in which all people have access to economic opportunity, the ability to pursue that opportunity, and a voice in the decisions that affect their lives.

"We currently have the opportunity to leverage six years of data from Slate Belt Rising that we didn't have previously when we were just starting out, to ask ourselves, 'OK, what about the last plan and our approach to addressing community problems

was good, and what can be improved upon," Behe said. "From my perspective, one of the things I would like to emphasize even more over the course of the next six years is creating partnerships."

Visit the Slate Belt Rising website to learn more about the organization and the Slate Belt community in general.



## Ken Field

Owner of Slate Belt Energy Services

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### Living the American Dream

I know several young people who are embarking on the journey of owning and operating a small business. I guess "small business" means under 100 employees but very many small businesses are really small. Like mom and pop and maybe an employee or two. The red tape and governmental hurdles are not to be taken lightly. While there are computers now and programs to help with accounting that I did not have the benefit of when I got started, the cost for these programs is quite high. And no longer do you just buy them and run them, now they must be connected to the internet the whole time you run them and there are unreasonably expensive annual subscriptions. If you use the same program for payroll, there is an expensive annual cost for that as well as a weekly 'per check' fee that is charged before you can actually print the checks. Then there is the requirement to deposit the taxes withheld from employees pay. We used to be able to take those deposits to the bank but now they must be deposited online from a bank account directly to the government. You will need an account with a verified PIN and all kinds of other nonsense before you can deposit. If you work in the residential market you will also need a PA Home Improvement Contractor license. Register and pay online for that and you get.... a piece of paper. Oh, and you have to display that number on your vehicles. But of course they don't send you stickers. Just go pay for them at a sign shop. The number of discouragements far outweigh the incentives to operate a business today. I missed an unemployment tax deposit deadline by 3 days for a quarterly tax that was under \$10. Immediately I had to pay a \$25 penalty. But when one of my customers comes up short and takes 3 months to pay, if I add a finance charge I'm a bully. I could go on for days with stories but suffice it to say that small business people are not done when the sun sets; far from it.

You might keep these 'behind the scenes' thoughts in your mind before you ask for something for free or a price reduction from a small business because the government already has a hand deep in one pocket and that kind of organized crime is hard to say NO to. If I wasn't already entrenched I would likely not start a business today. Certainly not one that requires hazardous materials registration along with everything else.

Ken Field is the owner of Slate Belt Energy and Field's Service, Inc. As a certified energy rater and contractor, he is qualified to assess every aspect of energy usage and prescribe solutions to save energy. He can be reached at 610-759-6306 or email [Ken@FieldsService.com](mailto:Ken@FieldsService.com)