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Strong nonprofits good for business

A NEW CHAPTER AT NPC

There is a scene in “It’s a Wonderful Life” that has stayed with me for years, not for its sentimentality, but for its surprisingly sharp business logic.

George Bailey, making the case for why his family’s building and loan must survive to help the town’s working people, turns to face the ruthless Mr. Potter, and says: “You’re all businessmen here. Doesn’t it make them better citizens? Doesn’t it make them better customers?”

Bailey wasn’t just making a moral argument. He was making an economic one. When working people have decent homes, stable lives and a community that invests in them, everyone benefits, including business.

That speech is over 80 years old, and yet I find myself returning to it now. It feels especially apt as I step into my new role as executive director of the Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires taking the baton from founder Liana Toscanini, who built this organization into a vital regional hub over the past decade. I’m honored to continue that work and eager to deepen NPC’s relationship with the business community in particular.

My husband and I moved full-time to the Berkshires five years ago and settled in West Stockbridge. What struck me first wasn’t just the landscape; it was the way people here show up for one another.

Neighbors rally around schools, arts organizations, health and human service agencies, and quiet grassroots efforts that keep this region humming. That’s an asset worth protecting. And it’s exactly the kind of community infrastructure that makes the Berkshires an attractive place not just to visit, but to locate a business, attract talent, and build a career.

My background spans three decades at the intersection of business, nonprofit management and philanthropy. I’ve founded business initiatives, worked at major foundations, and supported nonprofit organizations as they scale. I’ve seen what becomes possible



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

In Frank Capra’s 1946 film, “It’s a Wonderful Life,” James Stewart portrays George Bailey, whose family business and loan goes toe to toe with the ruthless Henry Potter’s corporate bank. Bailey’s stance — that stable, supported communities drive commerce — resonates some 80 years later.

when nonprofits are well-resourced and connected, and I’ve seen the cost, to communities and ultimately to local economies, when they aren’t.

WHAT NPC DOES AND WHY IT MATTERS TO YOU

The Nonprofit Center exists to make life easier and more effective for the more than 1,000 charitable organizations that call Berkshire County home. Think of us as a backbone organization. We are not delivering services ourselves, but strengthening the capacity of those who do. We provide workshops and peer learning, operational support, fiscal sponsorship for emerging projects, expert referrals, and connection to partners, funders, and volunteers.

The nonprofit sector is not a charity case for the local economy. Nonprofits keep your workforce healthy, educate the children who will become your future employees, stabilize housing for your workers and neighbors, and sustain the cultural institutions and natural landscapes that make the Berkshires a place people want to move to. All of these organizations are

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stronger because NPC is here.

The nonprofit sector is a significant contributor to the local economy employing 25 percent of Berkshire County residents and generating approximately 25 percent of the local GDP. With one nonprofit for every six residents, Berkshire County ranks among the top 30 in the country for nonprofit density, a remarkable concentration of mission-driven organizations.

They attract philanthropic investment in our communities from outside the region.

They anchor neighborhoods, fuel tourism, and provide the social infrastructure that turns a beautiful place into a livable, thriving one.

THE GEORGE BAILEY PRINCIPLE

When George Bailey asks Mr. Potter, “Doesn’t it make them better customers?”, he is articulating something that community development economists have spent decades documenting: stable, supported communities drive commerce. When people have access to healthcare, decent housing, mental health support, arts enrichment, and strong schools, they participate more fully in the local economy. They shop locally, they stay, they build.

The inverse is equally true. When those systems erode, when nonprofits are underfunded, understaffed and isolated, communities become fragile. Workforce pipelines thin. Talented people leave, and businesses feel it.

Bailey’s words, spoken in 1946 by a fictional small-town banker, could just as easily be said at a Berkshire County economic development meeting in 2026.

WHAT NPC IS BUILDING AND HOW YOU FIT IN

One of my first priorities as executive director of NPC is to lead a new Berkshire County State of the Nonprofit Sector report. The last such report was conducted in 2012, and this countywide research effort will give us fresh data on how nonprofits contribute to our regional economy, how community needs have shifted over the past decade, and where the most promising opportunities for collaboration lie.

It will be a practical tool for nonprofit leaders, and also for businesses, planners and civic partners who want to make informed decisions about where to invest, partner, and engage.

I want the business community to see this report, and NPC, as a resource, not just a cause to support. If you’re wondering where corporate giving will have the most leverage, we can help you find it.

If you’re looking for board service opportunities that match your skills, we offer a matchmaking service to connect you with organizations where your expertise is genuinely needed. If you’re interested in workforce pipelines, early childhood, housing stability or arts vitality, we can connect you with the organizations doing that work now.

AN INVITATION

George Bailey’s building and loan was, at its core, a community infrastructure play. It wasn’t glamorous or profit-making, but it was essential. The Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires occupies a similar position in this region’s ecosystem. We are the connective tissue, the operational support, the strategic sounding board that helps more than 1,000 organizations do their work better.

This region works because people and businesses invest in it. NPC is here to help make that investment smarter, more connected, and more impactful.

I look forward to meeting many of you at upcoming NPC events and around the county. If you’re curious about how your business can engage more strategically with the Berkshire nonprofit sector, I’d love to start that conversation.

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Samantha Anderson
Nonprofit Notes