



Why Bellefonte? What's Behind the Small Town's Rise in Popularity

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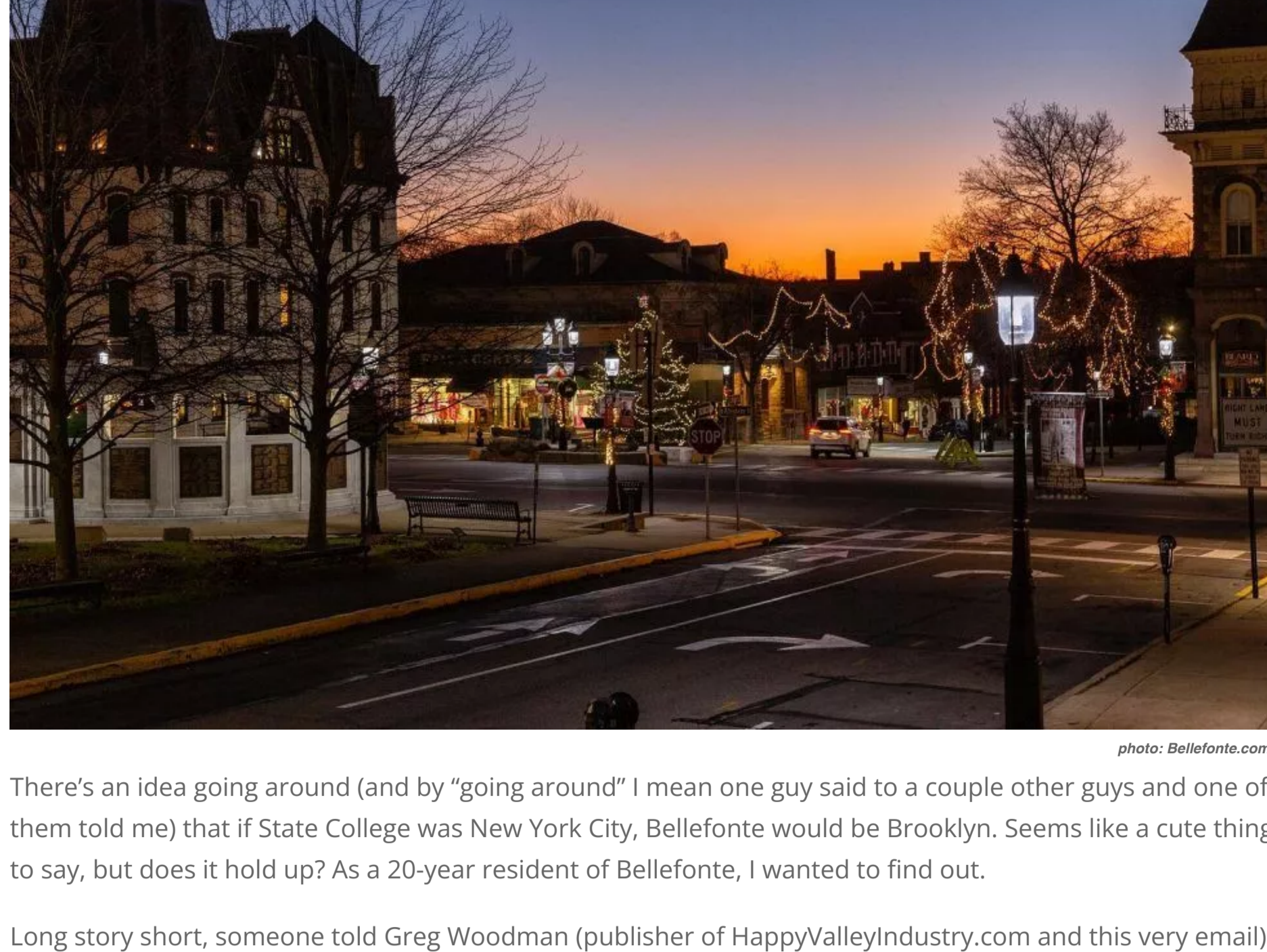


photo: Bellefonte.com

There's an idea going around (and by "going around" I mean one guy said to a couple other guys and one of them told me) that if State College was New York City, Bellefonte would be Brooklyn. Seems like a cute thing to say, but does it hold up? As a 20-year resident of Bellefonte, I wanted to find out.

Long story short, someone told Greg Woodman (publisher of HappyValleyIndustry.com and this very email) that Bellefonte is hot right now. Not news, right? Waterfront development, newly renovated Gamble Mill, the Axemann Brewery. More specifically though, he said if State College was New York City, Bellefonte is its Brooklyn. Greg loved the sentiment and this assignment was born.

"Communities aren't pre-made, they're built from the ground up."

I could have whipped up something quick based on this idea and all the good things happening here, but as a long-time Bellefonte resident, it felt disingenuous. I'm sure the comparison was meant in general terms, but I was curious about its accuracy. I didn't know much about Brooklyn, but after some Googling, I got the comparison. Even in today's real estate market, Bellefonte is still affordable, especially compared to State College. It's attracting "creative" types, young professionals and families, much like Brooklyn did when those groups were priced out of Manhattan. But like almost all stories of revitalization/gentrification (depending on your perspective) Brooklyn's rising popularity has had its pros and cons, i.e. investment, innovation, industry and an influx of new people bring rising costs that push long-time residents out. Fortunately, this description doesn't fit Bellefonte and I don't expect it ever will, even as projects like the Waterfront development come to fruition.

"Residents support businesses, businesses support schools and local non-profits and youth programs, neighbors give their time to improve quality of life for everyone."

Here's why: Brooklyn and Bellefonte DO share a notable similarity, which I came across in this October 2013 Brooklyn Magazine piece by Kristin Iversen: people who are dedicated to community. She asks, "What are the Real Reasons Behind Brooklyn's Popularity?" While some local politicians were taking credit for lower crime rates, refurbished parks and a bike program, she dug a little deeper. What she said rings true to me about Bellefonte, where our family has lived for 20 years and our neighbors' family has lived for 60:

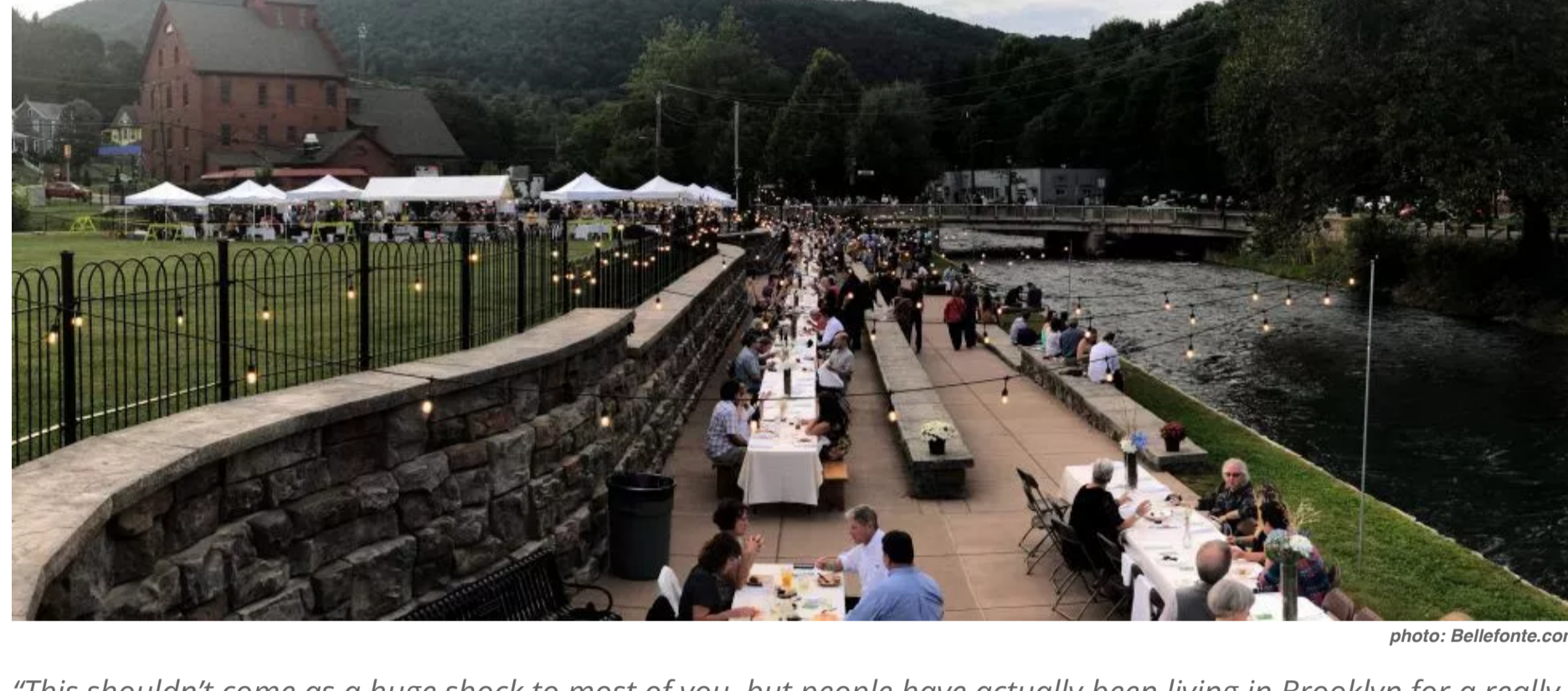


photo: Bellefonte.com

"This shouldn't come as a huge shock to most of you, but people have actually been living in Brooklyn for a really long time, giving character to different neighborhoods and working to build vibrant communities... It would be ridiculous for me to outright dismiss all the changes (many of them positive, many negative) that have happened in Brooklyn... The revitalization of public parks, the increase in public safety, and the introduction of alternate forms of transportation are all great things. But many of the reasons why Brooklyn has developed into the place it is today started to happen decades ago, and were the products of the people who moved here and the people who already lived here and wanted to make this borough as great of a place to live as possible... The reason that Brooklyn is what it is today is not because of the multi-million dollar condos in DUMBO or the perfect-for-wedding-photographers Brooklyn Bridge Park. It's the people who opened small businesses and refurbished run-down buildings so that they could build a life here. And those are the kind of people who will keep things good. Communities aren't pre-made, they're built from the ground up."

Bellefonte, like Brooklyn, has a lot going for it (and this is just a partial list):

A thriving downtown

In addition to the reopening of the Gamble Mill downtown Bellefonte has a distillery, a cidery and several great bars (plus Happy Valley's coolest brewery just minutes away); cafes and restaurants serving local menus; boutiques for clothing, jewelry and accessories; a newly opened record store; and, one of my favorite new places for locally made items, Belle Mercantile. Businesses are investing in making downtown vibrant for residents and visitors alike.

More than small business

Companies like Restek, SilcoTek, Actuated Medical and others have committed their headquarters to Bellefonte in the Penn Eagle Business Park or Benner Commerce Park. The Bellefonte SpringBoard, located downtown, provides low or no-cost resources, support and workshops, plus a coworking space to the business community. My husband's company, Pittsburgh-based Blink, a creative marketing agency, recently purchased space downtown to continue growing its client base in central Pennsylvania.

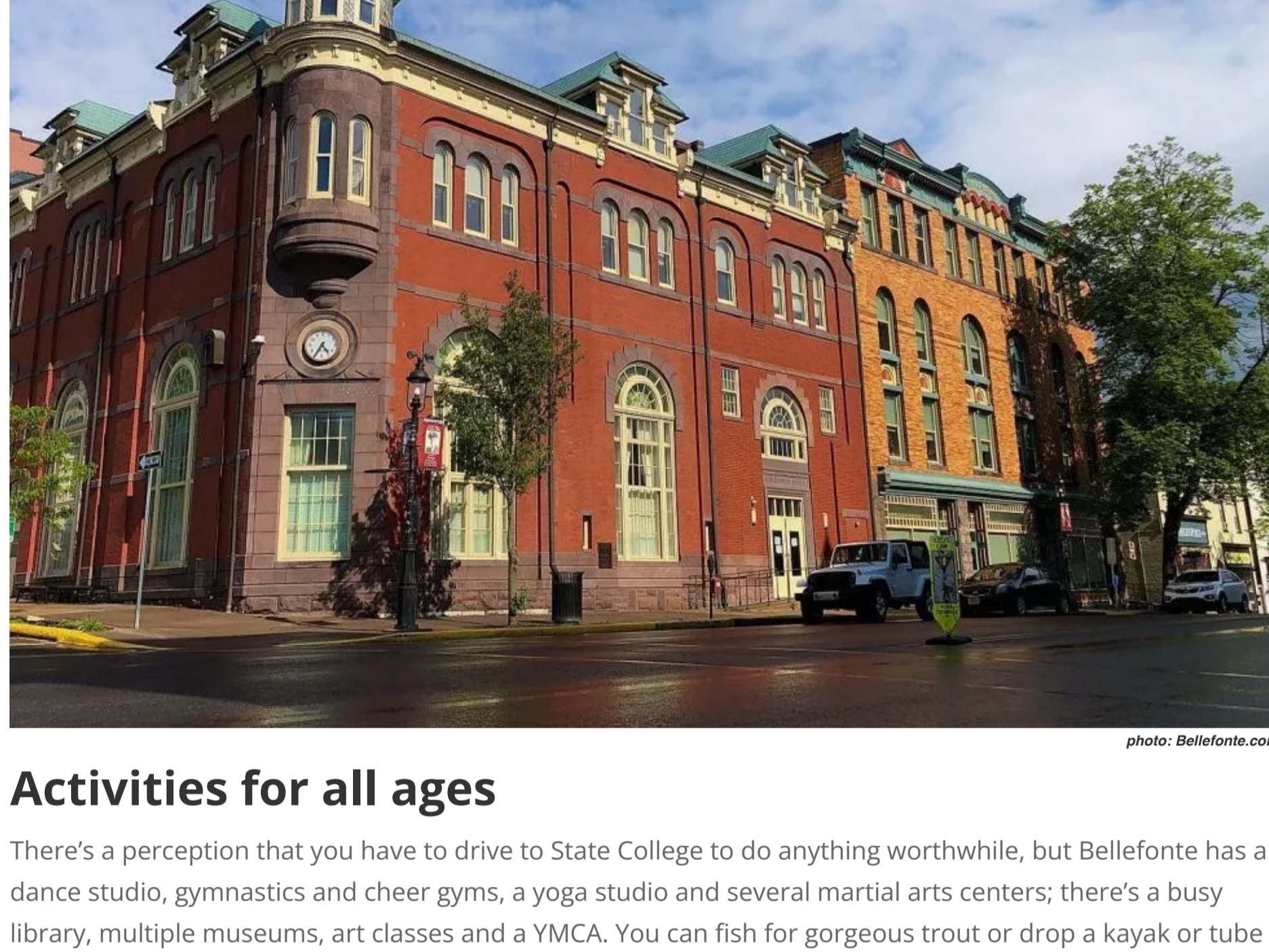


photo: Bellefonte.com

Activities for all ages

There's a perception that you have to drive to State College to do anything worthwhile, but Bellefonte has a dance studio, gymnastics and cheer gyms, a yoga studio and several martial arts centers; there's a busy library, multiple museums, art classes and a YMCA. You can fish for gorgeous trout or drop a kayak or tube in Spring Creek. Talleyrand is the most well-known Bellefonte park, but it isn't the only one: Governor's Park has a public pool, basketball and tennis courts, playgrounds and a baseball field. Bald Eagle State Park is a short drive (or float) from downtown.

Community events

For its size, Bellefonte is big on events, thanks to a strong culture of volunteerism led by non-profits like Historic Bellefonte Inc, Downtown Bellefonte Inc and other groups, and individuals on their boards and committees. From summer's Bellefonte Cruise and Arts & Crafts Fair to winter's Victorian Christmas and Outdoor Winter Market, from spring's Big Spring Festival to fall's Under the Lights Outdoor Dinner, every season has something unique to attend. In between, Bellefonte also hosts the Craft Beverage Fair, the Outdoor Adventure Expo, Fridays in the Fonte, Summer Sounds music performances in the park, and train rides for Halloween and Christmas.

Convenience, variety & affordability

Easy access to interstates 80 and 99 make Bellefonte convenient to State College, Lock Haven and beyond. From homes in Benner Township's Grove Park you can be in downtown Bellefonte in 6 minutes or at Wegmans/Target in 10. From Zion's Springfield neighborhood, it's barely 5 minutes to I-99. Perhaps one of Bellefonte's biggest draws: whether you like a walkable downtown neighborhood, suburban development living or a more secluded or rural environment, there's a home you can afford. And from downtown's historic beauty to farm fields and mountain sunsets, there's hardly a bad view from anywhere.

"These are just a few examples of everyday actions that, over years and generations, have built the character of our small town."

None of the above would be possible without Bellefonte's most important characteristic: a powerful community spirit. Residents support businesses, businesses support schools and local non-profits and youth programs, neighbors give their time to improve quality of life for everyone.

- The Bellefonte Garden Club plants seasonal flowers and gardens across town. The Bellefonte Art Museum offers regular family programming. There's a robust growers-only farmers market from April through November.
- Young professionals—including business owners—give their time and talent for projects and events.
- Major events are planned and executed by volunteers with support from local businesses.
- Local businesses give generously to sponsor little leagues, school athletics and arts programs, dance and cheer teams, and more.

This winter a group of business owners purchased and donated an ice rink to the borough for use in Talleyrand Park with the goal of attracting people to downtown during the winter. While the borough will manage the project, landscaping, walkways, lighting and maintenance support are also being donated by local businesses. A group of local volunteers and businesses are working to raise funds for a major renovation at Kepler Pool in Governor's Park. The Jennings Family, owners of Pizza Mia, has seven kids of their own but regularly feeds hundreds more through donations to local schools. When vandals desecrated the St. John's Catholic Church cemetery, Bonfatto's owners, the Letterman family, raised more than \$6,000 for repairs with a pasta dinner sale. **These are just a few examples of everyday actions that, over years and generations, have built the character of our small town.**



photo: Bellefonte.com

Bellefonte is home to many families who have lived here for generations and has attracted lots of transplants like us. In our experience, once you find your home in Bellefonte, it's not long before you find a way to make your own contribution to the community. Nearly everyone we know in our community is invested in Bellefonte in some significant way, no matter how long they've lived here. And while we all want to make Bellefonte (even) better, with more opportunities for businesses to grow and residents to thrive, we want to preserve the things that brought us here in the first place: the beauty, the charm, and the people who have been here for decades, building what we're all enjoying now.

"Once you find your home in Bellefonte, it's not long before you find a way to make your own contribution to the community."

Considering a Move to Happy Valley?

Looking to settle down, relocate or experience all that Happy Valley has to offer without living in downtown State College? Bellefonte may be the perfect place for your next move. For more information about everything going on in Bellefonte, check out some of the great resources like [Bellefonte.com](#), the [Bellefonte Intervalley Area Chamber of Commerce](#) and [Downtown Bellefonte Inc](#).

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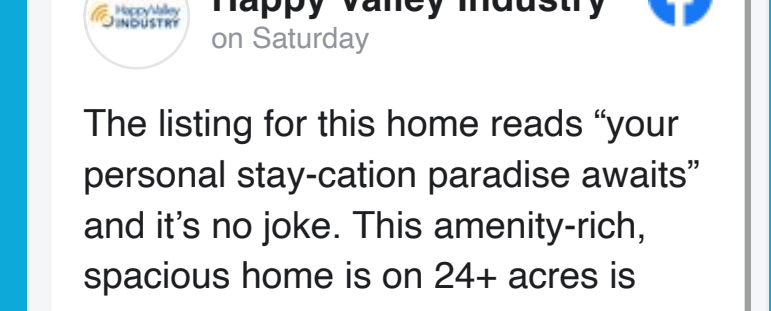
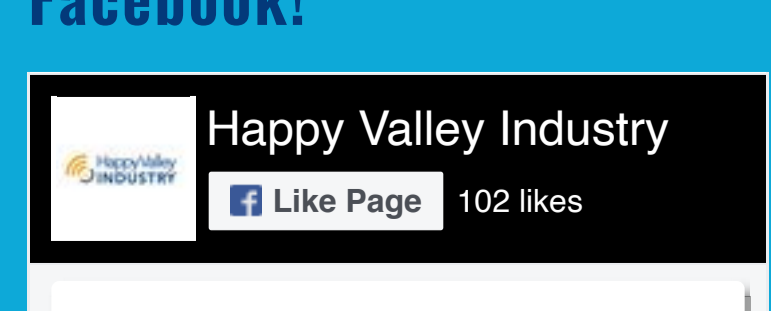
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The listing for this home reads "your personal stay-cation paradise awaits" and it's no joke. This amenity-rich, spacious home is on 24+ acres is only 30 minutes from campus.