



# NEW ENERGY, NEW CUMBERLAND

*Revitalization efforts are creating  
a buzz in the riverside borough.*

BY KAREN HENDRICKS



Valerie Copenhaver & Nate Dysard



West Shore Theatre

New Cumberland has a new identity.

A brightly colored logo proclaiming, “New Cumberland Borough: Old Town, New Energy” is coming to banners and flags, signs, borough newsletters and “everywhere we can put it,” said Valerie Copenhaver, the Cumberland County borough’s first-ever director of community and economic development.

Like a mosaic, each color and shape on the new logo represents a fresh look at the town’s longtime landmarks: frontage along the Susquehanna River and meandering Yellow Breeches Creek, the beloved New Cumberland Borough Park, and uniquely shaped intersections radiating out to neighboring communities like rays of sunlight.

Branding the borough is just the beginning. There’s an explosion of projects underway, sparked by borough officials, business leaders, residents and community volunteers alike.

“This community is engaged—they’re excited,” Copenhaver said. “One of the reasons why I chose to accept this position is there was so much excitement and energy and such an engaged volunteer base. People just love this community.”

She’s been on the job for about a year, but her economic development roots were planted in the county more than a dozen years ago.

“Back in 2019, the borough realized—in order to continue from a sustainability perspective—they needed to invest in a full-time position to focus on revitalization,” said Copenhaver, who previously worked at the Cumberland Area Economic Development Corporation.

Her first two projects are big ones—overseeing borough branding and creation of a master plan—following a plethora of community input, via a series of surveys and community meetings.

“What can New Cumberland do to revitalize?” That was the question put to residents, community leaders and business owners.

They had inspiration, seeing the recent successful rehabilitation of their beloved downtown West Shore Theatre by the nonprofit Friends of the West Shore Theatre—and they had plenty of ideas.

One that rose to the top: the creation of a new annual festival in the borough, the Iron Bridge Music Festival. Launched in June 2021, the two-day music festival is coordinated by the New Cumberland Olde Towne Association, which has also organized the borough’s most iconic event, the New Cumberland Apple Festival, every September for 34 years.

“We’re building on the framework of arts and culture that’s already thriving here,” said Nate Dysard, New Cumberland’s borough manager, referencing what he calls a “strong artist community” within the population of 7,500.

Outdoor recreation is also a priority. In 2021, the borough began leasing land from railway company Norfolk Southern to create Riverside Park. As a result, two additional projects are underway: improving Third Avenue—leading to the river—with a pocket park, string lights and benches, and adding a pedestrian and bike path.





Drew Lawrence



New Cumberland Collective event signage and swag



Big picture borough planning is expected to launch in early 2023, when the master plan is unveiled.

“The complete master plan will provide architectural guidelines, some catalyst projects, facade recommendations,” Copenhaver said. “It will touch on floodplain and parking issues, the entire downtown footprint, and as we continue to grow and revitalize, how our downtown should shape itself.”

#### A FLURRY OF ACTIVITY

As the town’s revitalization efforts were kicking off in 2019, borough council member and lifelong resident Chad Wilson became “enthralled” with traditional Christmas markets—inspired by a trip to Germany.

“I came back home and said, ‘We have to have this in New Cumberland,’” Wilson said. “It’s an experience—handmade crafts, phenomenal food, the smells and sights, the crisp air, people getting along—setting aside their differences and having a great time together.”

Under his leadership, New Cumberland’s Christmas Market is set to debut on Dec. 3 from 3 to 8 p.m. on Market Square.

“It’s going to be lit up as brightly as we can, with live Christmas music,” Wilson said. “I would like this to become a marquee event for the borough. What we’re trying to do is bring residents together to have a greater sense of community. But I also think it will bring people in and showcase New Cumberland’s positive changes that are happening—not that we were depressed—but that there are some pretty cool things happening here.”

Another cool thing is the creation of a new nonprofit—The New Cumberland Collective—in 2022. Founder and borough resident, Drew Lawrence, said that it all started when he and his wife noticed the borough’s public parks didn’t allow dogs.

“We asked borough council members if we could change that, and when we were successful, that’s what hooked us—knowing we could have an impact in our community and bring about changes,” Lawrence said. “We just kept looking for things we could do to fill gaps, to make things happen.”

Those things included partnering with the Olde Towne Association to bring outdoor summer movies to borough parks.

“One of the first big things we wanted to make happen was a pride festival. We pulled that together

in 80 days, and it was a beautiful event on July 23,” Lawrence said.

The Collective’s latest event was the Merry Merchants Holiday Market on Nov. 20, showcasing about 30 local arts and crafts vendors in the Neato Burrito parking lot.

And there’s so much more in the works, across New Cumberland.

The membership-based New Cumberland Business & Professional Group organizes the New Cumberland Food Truck & Restaurant Rally on Market Square, on the second Thursday of every month, March through December. The Block on Bridge is a collective marketing initiative that freely promotes borough businesses and events.

Whether you call it good vibes or positive energy—it seems to be contagious.

“Each group has their strengths,” Copenhaver said. “I’m just so happy we have so many people that want to give their time to do good things for New Cumberland.” **B**

*For more information, visit New Cumberland’s borough website, [newcumberlandborough.com](http://newcumberlandborough.com) and the New Cumberland Collective’s website, [newcumberland.co](http://newcumberland.co). Photos courtesy of Source Creative House.*