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SUNY Geneseo president Denise Battles is an upstate native who savors small-town flavor. **Page 6**

Special Report
For some local executives, a law degree was a steppingstone to a career outside a law firm. **Page 9**

Snap Poll
A majority of readers want Congress to keep Obamacare, with changes. **Page 31**

Retirement at risk

Many women nearing retirement age find they have not done enough to ensure sufficient savings.



Pamela Blake's divorce drained her retirement fund of close to \$500,000.

By **VELVET SPICER**

Pamela Blake was raised in a home where mom took care of the finances and dad taught the value of a dollar. Putting money away is second nature to her. "My father raised me to be careful with money, to save money and to prepare for a future," said the 57-year-old

mother of three. "And I did." But when Blake and her husband divorced eight years ago, she was left with no income, a \$77,000 attorney bill and a depleted 401(k).

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\$9.9M project underway

Building to have lofts, retail and office space

By **ANDREA DECKERT**

Work is underway on a nearly \$9.9 million renovation project for a mixed-use building in the city's Culver University East neighborhood.

The work at 1255 University Ave. is being done by Park Grove Realty LLC, a Rochester-based real estate management and development firm.

The company started in September 2015 and is led by Andrew Crossed, managing partner, and Andrew Bodewes, partner, both of whom worked at Conifer Realty LLC before deciding to start their own firm.

The project is to include 39,000 square feet of office and retail space and create 17 loft-style apartments and indoor parking. The original structure, built in 1918, was expanded in the 1930s and 1940s to the current 105,000 square feet.

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Photo by Kimberly Simpson

Former CEO of bagel firm seeks \$18M debt relief

By **WILL ASTOR**

The fate of the bankrupt 28-store chain of Bruegger's Bagel Bakery eateries Kenneth Greene founded and ran until a lender ousted him last year remains unclear.

Greene this week faced an examination by a Chapter 7 trustee in the personal bankruptcy he filed a little over a month ago.

If Greene's personal bankruptcy—filed as a no-asset case—stands, it will wipe out some \$18 million in business-related debt he personally guaranteed. Almost all of that amount traces to sums borrowed by Flour City Bagels LLC, the corporate parent of the Bruegger's chain.

Two out-of-town lenders account for more than half of the \$18 million:

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Greentopia seeks millions for projects

Its future in High Falls will depend on funding, desires of the community

By **KERRY FELTNER**

Hoping to capitalize on the momentum of its first project, Greentopia is seeking \$55 million to \$70 million in private funding to embark on its next proposal.

Greentopia's vision spans three areas.

First, there is GardenAerial, a project centered on building a 21st century greenway and park in the High Falls District.

GardenAerial is a capital-intensive place-making initiative. Place-making refers to using a location's assets to create public spaces where people want to be.

Within GardenAerial there are five projects in various stages of develop-

ment, starting with the newly completed FlourGarden. The other projects include updating the existing Pont de Rennes Bridge, creating an overlook, building a new bridge and creating a park near the falls.

Preliminary estimates put the cost at \$8 million to \$15 million for the Pont de Rennes Bridge of Flowers Project; \$3 million to \$6 million for the High Falls Viewing Platform Project; and \$8 million to \$15 million for a new over-the-falls pedestrian bridge.

Actual costs are expected to change depending on details of construction at the edge of the gorge, officials said. Greentopia assesses and reviews the funding and political and community aspects of each project on an ongoing basis.

"We're really looking at this from all

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Photo by Michael Philipson

Tiani Jennings is site manager of Greentopia's Green Visions program.



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Leader likes small-town flavor



As president of SUNY Geneseo, upstate native Denise Battles oversees a \$150 million budget

Photo by Kimberly Simpson

By LORI GABLE

When other children were organizing lemonade stands, Denise Battles was manning a rock-selling stand. Her love for rocks and fossils began as a young girl growing up in Oswego County, gathering stones along the shores of Lake Ontario.

That early passion for geology led Battles to build a 25-year career in academia where she has risen from faculty to dean, provost and now president, serving in positions at Georgia Southern University, the University of Northern Colorado and at the University of North Carolina Wilmington.

Battles, 53, began as president of SUNY College at Geneseo in July 2015, marking a return to Upstate New York from her previous post at the North Carolina school where she was provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs.

She described her move to Geneseo as like coming home, because the small village in Livingston County is so similar to her hometown of Central Square. Her parents, James Battles, a retired graphic artist who worked in marketing for General Electric Co., and Margaret, a retired library assistant, still live in the home where they raised her and her three younger brothers.

"I'm delighted that I now live within driving distance of them and my seven New York-based nieces and nephews," Battles says.

She and her husband, Michael Mills, also an academician, live in the presiden-

tial residence on Main Street in Geneseo. "We have no children, which makes it particularly gratifying to be located near my extended family," she says.

It was a connection to a small community that appealed to Battles and drew her to the president's position at SUNY Geneseo when recruiters asked her to consider the post. Having worked the larger campus of University of North Carolina Wilmington and learned the responsibilities the role of a provost carries, she decided she was ready to take the next step and advance to the ultimate leadership role at a college.

Challenging start

No one could have predicted the challenges she would face in her first months as president.

In January, three students died in what police ruled a murder-suicide following the stabbing deaths of two students by an ex-boyfriend who then took his own life.

"It was a horrific experience for the entire campus and community, and she had to handle it just six months after she started here," said Robert Wayland-Smith, chairman of the Geneseo College Council, an advisory board appointed by Gov. Andrew Cuomo. "She certainly had a baptism by fire and she handled it very well."

He has served on the college council since 1995. Under the SUNY system, each of the 64 campuses is obligated to have a 10-member panel drawn from the community as an advisory board avail-

able to the senior administration at the college. A primary role is to lead the search for new leaders, which Wayland-Smith did when Christopher Dahl retired in June 2014 after serving as president for 18 years.

No sitting presidents applied for the post, which meant the new leader would be learning on the job, he notes.

"Nothing prepares you for how incredibly difficult the president's job is. Even though the provost is academic, the president position is probably more difficult than they anticipate," Wayland-Smith says, noting the importance of learning to delegate.

"That change from number two to number one is not easy. On your way up, you feel if you want something done right, you do it yourself. When you become president, if you want something done right, you find the right person to do it."

Battles has done that well, he says, noting she has filled major posts, with campus and community input, and is "more available to do what only a president can do."

Three cabinet level positions have been filled, including vice president for college advancement, chief communications and marketing officer, and senior associate to the president.

There is a total workforce on campus of 738 full-time and 183 part-time employees. Faculty comprise 369 of that total. Battles oversees a total campus budget of just over \$150 million, of which \$93.7 million is used to operate the college. The school receives slightly

more than \$50 million in annual state support.

Enrollment stands at 5,430, which is down from 5,520 in fall 2015 and 5,501 the year before that. As a public college, SUNY Geneseo is dependent on tuition, which is \$6,470 a year. Fees and room and board are additional.

Top priorities

Battles names broadening access to an education at SUNY Geneseo as one of her top priorities. She also believes in increasing the opportunities for applied learning, including study abroad, undergraduate research, internships and service-learning. She also is working to gain more national exposure for the college.

SUNY Geneseo consistently ranks on national surveys as one of the country's best values in education, she points out. *Forbes* 2016 America's Top Colleges survey ranked it ranked No. 63 among public colleges, No. 100 among Northeast colleges and No. 175 in America's Best Value colleges.

"However, maintaining an affordable tuition translates to having fewer resources at our disposal than our more costly higher education peers," Battles says. "Thus, our biggest challenge is to ensure access to, and the provision of, an exemplary Geneseo education within our available resources."

That challenge is addressed, she says, in the newly developed strategic plan, Geneseo 2021. It was created in collaboration with campus and community

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stakeholders, and includes a roadmap that identifies four key initiatives for action: learning, access and success, advancing the public good, and resilience and sustainability.

The next step is implementation, which she hopes to do by drawing on what she calls her greatest resource: the people around her, including faculty and staff and the community beyond the campus.

"A key responsibility in my position as president is to ensure that the individuals who compose our community have the resources, information and structures available so that they can be

"A key responsibility in my position as president is to ensure that the individuals who compose our community have the resources, information and structures available so that they can be effective in their roles."

effective in their roles," Battles says.

She has worked to contribute to causes that are important to her through service on several boards of higher education associations. Battles is on the executive board of the American Council on Education's Council of Fellows. She is also on the board of the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges, of which SUNY Geneseo is a member. And she recently was elected to the board of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, an organization that plays an advocacy role for public higher education.

Locally, Battles serves as co-chair of the Higher Education and Research Work Team of the Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council with William Destler, president of Rochester Institute of Technology.

Town-gown

She also works closely with leadership within the Geneseo community, recently leading to a renewed Village-College Relations Compact, a collaboration that seeks to foster a high quality of life for all who work, live and study in Geneseo.

Her ability to lead while also considering the input of others has earned her the respect of many who work with her, says Richard Hatheway, village mayor.

He admires the way Battles coordinates community chats, at which citizens are welcome to raise concerns, ask questions or talk face-to-face with the president. In Geneseo, there are more students than there are year-round residents, Hatheway notes, and he sees Bat-

ties as an important leader for the entire community.

"There is a major impact 5,000 students have on a community of 3,000 to 4,000 residents, and President Battles is uniquely aware of the role students play here," Hatheway says.

He praised Battles for the way she handled residents' concerns about non-owner-occupied housing and an upswing in police activity associated with them. Incidents were not all attributed to students, but Battles was proactive, Hatheway says, in reaching out to student groups about the responsibilities students have when living in off-campus housing.

"President Battles comes from a small town. That's in our favor," Hatheway says, noting her civic tendencies may have been fostered by her mother, who served on her town's planning board.

Hatheway has much in common with Battles. He too has a background in geology, starting as a geology professor at SUNY Geneseo in 1968. He was chairman of the department for his last 21 years there, retiring in 2007. At the same time he was mayor of the village, a post he has held for 30 years.

"She is the fifth president I have worked with, and she's been great," he says. "She lives right on Main Street, next door to rental housing. We see her and Michael walking their dog all the time. Of course everybody wants a piece of the president when they see her, and she carries that really well."

Battles enjoys being part of a close-knit community. It was part of what drew her to take the position. She knew she had made the right decision when she saw how people responded during the tragedy that shook the peaceful community at the beginning of her presidency.

"As difficult as it was to experience that tragedy, the support helped us navigate those difficult times," Battles says. "That was the draw I originally felt, the power of that community. Through all the outpouring of support, it was reaffirmed."

She has seen the community rally together again during two recent incidents of racist graffiti scrawled on campus. In response, she immediately denounced the acts, declared Geneseo a diverse and compassionate community and announced that the college would be adding educational programming to enhance its inclusive culture.

Battles continues to be accessible to the community, both on campus and at large.

"I enjoy engaging in public-oriented events," she says, explaining some of her favorite pastimes.

She also enjoys nature and walks with her husband.

While the first year brought challenges, Battles feels it also brought opportunities for bringing the campus and community together. Through open communication, she has built connections and looks forward to an even stronger campus moving forward.

"It is part of the life of a college campus," she says. "There are many wonderful things to celebrate, but sometimes it comes with loss as well. It is important we move forward, and do that together as a community."

Denise Battles

Position: President, SUNY College at Geneseo

Age: 53

Education: A.B. in geology, Colgate University, Hamilton, Madison County, 1984; Ph.D. in geology, University of California, Los Angeles, 1990; management development program, Harvard Institutes for Higher Education, Harvard University, 1999

Family: Husband Michael Mills

Residence: Geneseo

Activities: Enjoying nature, taking walks, public events

Quote: "It is part of the life of a college campus. There are many wonderful things to celebrate but sometimes it comes with loss as well. It is important we move forward, and do that together as a community."

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