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BUILDING A COMMUNITY

FOOD&WINE

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for cookies,
and that's
good enough

ARTS&CULTURE

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photography
celebrated at
Fitchburg Art Museum

Evy Duck
Founder
19 Carter



Evy Dueck, founder and executive director at 19 Carter in Berlin.

TELEGRAM & GAZETTE

‘AN ANTIDOTE TO THE epidemic of loneliness’

19 Carter a haven for
arts and community

Story by Carol L. Costello
Photos by Allan Jung

It was a Wednesday morning at 19 Carter in Berlin. The guests, who had come by for the weekly coffee hour, were gathered around two large wooden tables enjoying a warm beverage and fresh baked goods with their conversations.

In another section of the room, two friends were huddled together on a couch planning an upcoming event, while in a cozy nook across the room, a lone woman worked contentedly on an intricate jigsaw puzzle. From downstairs, the blended sounds of string instruments could be heard from close to a dozen musicians who had come together in the weekly Old Time Music Jam. It was a typical scene at 19 Carter and one that Executive Director Evy Dueck

gave gentle affirmation to, saying, “The root of what we do here is to create conditions for connecting.”

19 Carter flourishes as a living and breathing testament to the meaning of those words in action. It provides a communal space to live out its authentic purpose, opening its arms to artists, musicians and generations of neighbors from near and far to learn and visit with one another. In what was once the home of a Methodist Episcopal church, its participants continue to celebrate and enjoy one another’s company with that same intangible spirit of its past purpose that seems to linger and play host to all those who enter through its doors.

'An antidote to the epidemic of loneliness'

According to Dueck, 19 Carter strives as a gathering place to overcome the cultural norms of isolation within our society, recognizing the need for humans to feel a sense of belonging. Dueck cited the Surgeon General's 2023 Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community as evidence for promoting 19 Carter as a place where friendship and a sense of community are fostered. "We are an antidote to the epidemic of loneliness," she said. In doing so, 19 Carter offers a variety of events and activities from which people of all ages can choose to join. "We find a place for everyone who comes through the door by talking to newcomers who are figuring out what we're about and thinking about how we can connect them with others," she said.

After moving to Berlin in 1994, and more than a decade of serving on various town boards, the dream of creating a gathering place started to germinate for Dueck.

"This is exactly what I had in my head," she said, referring to her vision of 19 Carter today. "I saw the need for a place that is open all the time and open for everyone. I looked all over but could not find anything like it."

When she heard that the old Methodist Episcopal Church in the center of town might be going up for sale, her sights were set on it. Long gone into disrepair and past its original purpose, the Victorian Gothic church, built in 1887, possessed enough decorative charm to attract the attention of potential buyers and townspeople who hoped it would one day be restored.

With a background and experience in marketing, fundraising and project management, Dueck was a natural choice to promote the vision and lead the efforts in doing so. "It felt easy. I began to ask the people in the community their thoughts about this idea and described all the things we could do," she said.

The response at the time was mixed and some doubted that a gathering place could be sustained in the town. "A lot of people questioned who was going to come," Dueck said. "It was possible that no one would come, but I wasn't worried."

'It appealed to my interest in music'

In 2008, several Berlin town residents, including Dueck, committed their energies to moving



19 Carter in Berlin was once the home of a Methodist Episcopal church.



The lower level at 19 Carter in Berlin serves as a sort of rec room.

forward with the project. 19 Carter was incorporated as a nonprofit public charity and granted 501(c) (3) status on Sept. 16, 2008.



Marty Miller of Berlin works on a model boat and trailer at 19 Carter.

This created the opportunity needed by the core group to freely make decisions on the renovation and restoration of the church without public or historic restrictions. They met with the building's owner, the local Board of Health, civil engineers, donors, architects, tradespeople and contractors to determine the scope of the restoration project and to obtain confirmation that it could meet code requirements.

The group moved on to having a feasibility study completed and approved and then began fundraising for the purchase of the building. Funds were raised in stages to facilitate the various phases of work that would need to take place. With 50% (\$75,000) of the purchase price raised, 19 Carter was sold to the nonprofit organization in January 2011, opening the gates for the renovation and restoration to begin. More than 600 people, including donors, business partners and volunteers, participated in the restoration

during that period.

Patrick Redington, one of the individuals who, with his wife, Mary, have been involved since the inception of 19 Carter, recalled that he was initially intrigued by Dueck's proposal and the potential use of the building. Redington, who serves on the 19 Carter Board of Directors, said, "It appealed to my interest in music, as a place for musicians to listen and play music together. When she came looking for help, I was glad to offer it".

In addition to financial autonomy, Redington also recognized 19 Carter's "all-inclusiveness and open-mindedness" and what he refers to as "a third space" in the community.

He said, "At times, people are afraid to enter a place like this, but there is no pretense here. People can just enter. There is always someone at the front desk with a smile. You feel when you walk in that you're wanted. You can't put any numbers to that — it's a feeling. If you come, you feel



Landscape designer Paul Mikelk, who designed the center's gardens and served as construction supervisor during the building's renovations from 2012 to 2017, sits by the donated original pot-bellied stove.

invited to come back." He, too, spoke to the sense of isolation being experienced in the world today, and said, "It's human nature to get out and look for that third space. So many communities are broken up and people are isolated, who want to identify and be a part of something."

‘I feel blessed to have been a part of it’

The structural and architectural restorations became the initial priority, and several local tradespeople lent their skills and expertise to the project. Paul Mikelk was among those volunteers who dedicated his time to spearhead the restoration work with Dueck. He was also



From left, Becky Pulito, Joanne Nyczkowski, Donna Morrisson, Joan Wash and Bonnie Fallon enjoy Monday Tea Time at 19 Carter in Berlin.

responsible for creating the landscape design surrounding the site.

Mikelk's talent and interest in repurposing building materials contributed to the renovation and restoration work in as authentic a manner to the original church as possible. "I just like old buildings," he said. "It was easy for me to get involved in this. I feel blessed to have been a part of it."

Since that time, Mikelk has been responsible for repurposing local granite to build the curbing as well as an amphitheater that is used regularly in summer for outdoor music concerts. "For the amphitheater, I used stones

collected around the site as well as those I had salvaged," he said. Mikelk also used Goshen stone from Goshen in Western

Massachusetts to create the paths. Mark Smith, another regular volunteer at 19 Carter, carved numerous nature-themed

Pieces created by artists at 19 Carter are for sale.



sculptures that complement the landscape with a natural and ethereal feel. In 2021, 19 Carter received a Community Greening Award by the New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill in recognition of the improvement to its community through gardening and planting.

‘You need someone with drive and vision’

When 19 Carter officially opened its doors in October 2017, folks came to see what had been created. And they kept coming back. Since that time, it has welcomed thousands of visitors who come to socialize, play music and games together, or to use the gathering space to meet as families. Others enjoy the variety of entertainment that takes place throughout the year, including live music events, comedy nights, open mics and workshops. With permission, local artists bring their paintings, pottery, glasswork and jewelry to put on display and

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Cindy Geldart of Berlin works on a puzzle of birds in a garden at 19 Carter.

sell. There are even open arts and fiber arts studios and a variety of specialty workshops from which to choose.

19 Carter is open 65 hours a week. In 2024, there were 214 events and only 15 days when the building was not in use. With four individuals on staff, 60





The lower level at 19 Carter in Berlin serves as a sort of rec room.

volunteers and Dueck at the helm, 19 Carter has continuously evolved through the energy of the people who walk through the doors. Kate Bliss, who serves as the community outreach coordinator, said, “Evy has created space where people can come in and allow creativity to flow, to try new things, and to alter them as needed.”

19 Carter is funded through the generosity of private and corporate donations, fundraising and grants, as well as income generated through performances and rental fees among other resources for support. In 2024, for example, 19 Carter received a community grant from the Greater Worcester Community Foundation for its “Making Music Accessible” program.

Looking toward the future, Dueck said she is happy to spend time continuing to manage 19 Carter and to supporting other town and city officials and volunteers who are interested in building similar types of gathering places. “People have to come in, sit down and experience it,” she said.

As a reminder, she pointed to the “Welcome” statement hanging beside the entrance door. The statement reflects all that 19 Carter represents in embracing and holding space for all people, regardless of their background, intentions or beliefs. At the end of the statement are the words, “We’re glad you came!” It is a sentiment felt and echoed often for all those who come through the doors.

19 Carter is open Monday-Friday, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. and Saturday mornings, as well as many evenings each week and for performances. More information can be found at: 19carter.org or, on Facebook and Instagram: @19cartercommunity.



19 Carter volunteer Joanna Nyczkowski cuts up a marble coffee cake for Monday Tea Time.

The Background of the Methodist Episcopal Church

The Victorian Gothic architectural style of the church is exemplified in the steeply gabled tower, applied molding, elaborate corner posts, gable verge boards, copper peak ornaments and elongated windows with peaked lintel trim. There are three courses of wall cladding, with toothed shingles that slope outward to clapboards at mid-section, and fish scale shingles continue at the lower section. The remains of a multicolored paint scheme still survive from 1976, with body colors of white and yellow, red and white trim and green shutters. The building was inventoried for the Massachusetts Historical Commission along with many other buildings in the late 1960s by the Berlin Art and Historical Society.

Two decorative windows, one triangular and the other tripartite, are located above the gabled north and south entrances. The original stained-glass window on the eastern end of the building was replaced by the work of local stained-glass artist Jeanne Kowal, who was commissioned to create a window to represent the vision of the new 19 Carter that was installed in November 2017. Kowal incorporated the logo, the four seasons and images of activities held in the building into the piece.

(Information obtained with permission from "Creating 19 Carter, A Guide to How It Happened," by Evy Dueck)



A custom-created stained-glass window at 19 Carter in Berlin.