



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BRIDGE 73 REOPENING BENEFITS FAYETTE COUNTY BUSINESSES, COMMUNITIES

Uniontown, PA – For nearly nine years, Bridge 73 served as a literal roadblock to everyday life in several Fayette County communities.

Known locally as Miedel's Bridge, Bridge 73 connects Bullskin to Connellsville township as it carries Buttermore Boulevard over White's Run. Built in 1918, the 39-foot, single-span, concrete arch bridge closed in late 2014, due to evidence of structural movement and advanced deterioration.

Now, local businesses and residents are starting the new year by celebrating the many positives that have come from the bridge's restoration.

"For years, just getting deliveries was a challenge, because GPS would take drivers to the other side of the bridge. It was a nightmare not having signage telling people how to get around," said Cecilia Driscoll. "We'd get so frustrated; so terribly frustrated. The day they opened the bridge, I turned onto the road and was so shocked by how easy and quick it was to get to us - two turns and you're there."

Cecilia owns Driscoll's Potting Shed, a woman-owned, family-run small business located just off of state Route 119, next to Bridge 73. Cecilia's daughter and daughter-in-law, DeAnn and Renee Driscoll, manage the greenhouse's day-to-day operations.

DeAnn said they've seen a significant increase in customer traffic since the bridge reopened November 15 and hope the trend continues.

"Anyone coming from the Uniontown side of 119 would call and ask how to get across. The closure took away so much of our local traffic," she said. "As people are traveling the bridge, they're seeing us more. This, first and foremost, offers an easier and safer means to get to our facility, but it also means more people are stopping in."

The Driscolls purchased the 1920s greenhouse in 2019 from the grandson of its original owners, the Grasso family. Cecilia said they've worked hard to "bring it back to life."

"It's such a special place that was, at one time, one of the largest employers in the county, but we've had people who live within just a few blocks of us say they didn't know we were here before the bridge opened," Cecilia said. "The Grassos had a really unique story, and there's so much history here, so it's kind of neat to see the locals realize we're doing something big here."

Bridge 73 gets its nickname from another local business, Miedel's Restaurant, which closed in 2020 after many years in business. Miedel's closed briefly in 2016, following historic flooding in Bullskin Township and Connellsville's Dutch Bottom neighborhood. Several properties near the restaurant were left isolated when roads were washed out, on top of the existing bridge closure.

“Miedel’s never made it back after COVID, and I’m sure the bridge was part of it. Then there was the flood,” Cecilia said. “If we had a flood like that again and the bridge was out, people could die. They couldn’t get an ambulance in there or anything, so it’s nice to have another possible point of access for our emergencies.”

“I think that the bridge is going to be a key component in the community, and especially to our business and future success,” DeAnn said.

Angela Saunders, Transportation Planning Manager for Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) District 12, said the project involved demolishing the existing bridge; replacing it with a single-span, concrete spread box beam with integral abutments; and reconstructing the roadway on both sides of the structure.

“The project began preliminary engineering in late 2017. Typically, it takes three to four years to get through the entire design process, due to the laws and regulations that need to be adhered to,” Saunders said. “Seeing this project bid for construction and the actual construction start was exciting for us. Though we only had a minimal role in the design phase, we were proud of the project that went out and the finished product.”

Saunders said the Bridge 73 project was managed by Fayette County, with the support of District 12’s Local Project Delivery Unit. PennDOT served as funding stewards through the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), overseeing the project’s \$1.3 million in federal funds. The EADS Group, Inc. designed the project, while J.F. Shea Construction, Inc. was awarded the project’s construction bid in early 2022.

“The bridge connects communities to 119, as well as local businesses,” Saunders said. “Now that the bridge is open and fully functional, we hope that it will better serve the needs of local communities and promote improved access to businesses.”

Fayette County Commissioner Vince Vicites said Bridge 73’s reopening will have a “major impact” on transportation for both Connellsville and Bullskin townships, as well as many surrounding communities.

“I’m relieved that the bridge is finally open to traffic. This project is long overdue,” Vicites said. “There were many setbacks, but the other commissioners and I kept pushing to get this done. It’s going to make a huge difference for the people who live and work in these communities.”

Commissioner Scott Dunn said the importance of the Bridge 73 project “cannot be understated.”

“For too long, the people living in Connellsville and Bullskin Township have been operating without one of their main thoroughfares. Everyone - from local business owners to first responders - were impacted by lack of access to the Miedel’s Bridge,” Dunn said. “Despite the project’s many setbacks, we’re thrilled to see everything finally come together after all these years and look forward to how these communities will grow from this.”

Commissioner Chairman Dave Lohr said locals have been “hard-hit” since the bridge closed, and its reopening will “only help to revitalize” surrounding communities.

“When traffic flow to an area is disrupted; when it’s no longer convenient to get to a business; that business suffers. Those living in the area have been inconvenienced, to say the least. For example, if the bridge had been open when Connellsville was crippled by significant flooding several years ago, the people living on the hill behind Miedel’s Restaurant would not have been landlocked,” Lohr said. “After

years of trying to convince PennDOT that the project was necessary, the situation created by the flood made it clear to all concerned that this was not just a transportation issue, but a safety issue, as well. These are the challenges residents and businesses in the vicinity of Bridge 73 have fought for years. While the locals welcome the completion of Bridge 73 with a triumphant cheer, it is tempered with a huge sigh of relief. Hopefully, all those businesses that have struggled to survive in the absence of Bridge 73 will come back strong.”

For more information about Driscoll’s Potting Shed, visit www.driscollspottingshed.com.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

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