

April 28, 2014 8:00AM

## Sustainability event to honor three area businesses

By RUTH HEIL

For the third year, local entrepreneurs, community leaders and area residents have joined together to celebrate efforts made on behalf of the Lehigh Valley's economic, environmental and community health.

Three businesses will be honored at Sustain-A-Ball, a May 3 dinner ceremony at Allentown Brew Works that has ties to the former Sustainable Business Network of the Greater Lehigh Valley. It is modeled after a similar event in Philadelphia and is designed to get people together to exchange information in a fun and relaxing atmosphere.

In keeping with this year's theme – food sustainability – nine related initiatives will be honored for their contribution to a local-food supply chain.

“Those honored are not to be seen necessarily as the ‘best of the best,’ but rather as representative of the exceptional efforts being put forward by many,” said Tom Kerr, the former president of Wildlands Conservancy and a member of the 2014 Sustain-a-Ball committee.

Along with academia, government, a consortium and nonprofits, the following businesses will be acknowledged:

After living in California – a state known for crop-loving sunshine and environmental thinking – Cali Burrito founders Shawn McHugh and Nick Sorrentino wanted to make healthy-but-fast food a key part of their Mexican restaurant. Local organic tofu and produce, trans fat-free vegetable frying oil, organic coffee and sugar cane are used whenever possible.

On Hamilton Boulevard in Allentown, the Cali Burrito menu also includes many vegetarian options.

Urban EcoFish will be recognized before it launches. Richard A. Niesenbaum, professor of biology and the director of an interdisciplinary program in sustainability studies at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, is behind this aquaculture endeavor that emerged from a student project. The opening date is undetermined; new technologies for sustainable fish production in urban Allentown are still being developed.

“In addition to providing healthy food while protecting the environment, a sustainable food system must also offer economic opportunity by creating jobs and supporting communities through sustained income beyond costs,” Niesenbaum said. “In light of this, UrbanEcoFish must be profitable.”

Pure Sprouts delivers organic produce to its customers' doors once a week and soon will be offering workplace delivery.

Preserving farmland and farmer livelihood, lowering the carbon footprint, increasing nutrient value and keeping food dollars in the same community as the product was grown are key components of Pure Sprouts' mission.

“I believe that we should pay well for good food, because we want to support those who grow it,” said its owner, Lori Stansberry. “A successful farmer is a farmer with longevity.

“Because we do not have a storefront, and we only buy what we need to fill customer orders, our waste is much lower than a grocery store. We believe this business model is not only viable, but the only way to fix our broken food system.”

•

The dinner ceremony fee is \$35, with proceeds to benefit Allentown's Community Gardens program.

A networking table will be set up to facilitate future connections. Locally made crafts will be available for purchase through a silent auction. And the evening's menu will be locally sourced.

“Owning a successful food company is about more than the bottom line,” Stansberry said. “It's about building lasting relationships, supporting the community and maintaining integrity through all business decisions made.”

Lindsey Parks is executive director of The Seed Farm – a farmer-training and agricultural-business incubator that is one of the nonprofits being honored.

“For every dollar spent on food grown in the Lehigh Valley, 45 cents will stay in this area compared to approximately 14 at national retailers,” Parks said. “A report from Buy Fresh Buy Local of the Greater Lehigh Valley found that if every household in the Lehigh Valley spent just \$10 a week on locally grown foods just during the growing season, it would generate \$97 million in economic

activity.”

She said her hope is that the region is established as one of the most robust local-food markets in the country.

“Given our proximity to pristine farmland, consumer demand for local food and innovative business leadership, our local food economy is poised to take off,” Parks said.

**[www.LVB.com](http://www.LVB.com)**