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### Bethel Woods gives star status to struggling Sullivan

By Steve Israel

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BETHEL — No doubt about it. The Dancing Cat Saloon wouldn't exist without the Bethel Woods Center for the Arts. "I'm definitely here because of them," says Stacy Cohen, owner of a restaurant with live music and a distillery that's within walking distance of the arts center.

Take this to the bank, too: The Fosterdale Motor Lodge owes up to 40 percent of its business last summer to blockbuster Bethel Woods shows like Phish and Elton John. "Everybody does better because of it," says Fosterdale owner Joe Tinari, mentioning increased traffic at convenience stores and campgrounds because of the arts center. But perhaps the greatest impact of Bethel Woods is one that can't be measured in the amount of rooms rented, meals served or bags of ice and six-packs of beer sold.



Bethel Woods has finally put the town—and county—where Woodstock was held on the international map, after years of folks thinking the festival was held 60 miles away, in the Town of Woodstock in Ulster County. Callers from Brazil to Germany phone the Bethel Town Hall asking how to get to the six-year-old arts center at the site of the 1969 Woodstock festival.

#### Huge impact on business

"It's all good stuff," says Bethel Supervisor Dan Sturm, mentioning the new restaurants that have opened, and the jobs to build them that have been created because of the arts center. Folks like Cohen, Tinari and Sturm don't need the just-released economic impact study for Bethel Woods to know what Kauneonga Lake restaurateur and small-business developer Judith Maidenbaum of the Fat Lady Cafe calls the "enormous, enormous" impact of the \$100 million arts center and museum built by Liberty cable TV magnate Alan Gerry.

Still, those numbers — from a **new report prepared by the environmental, planning and engineering consulting firm AKRF** — underline what homebuilder Charles Petersheim of Catskill Farms calls "a 100 percent positive thing for the community."

In 2010, Bethel Woods drew more than 224,000 people to its shows, exhibits and educational programs. It generated 467 "direct and indirect" jobs — from the folks who work on the manicured grounds and rolling hills of the arts center to the waiters who wouldn't have jobs if a place like the Dancing Cat wasn't built — waiters who were busy even last week when the arts center hosted a holiday crafts air. All of those jobs — the equivalent of 150 full-time positions, says the report — generated more than \$8 million in salaries. Nearly \$6 million of that stayed in Sullivan County, as did the \$800,000 in taxes produced by the nonprofit center.

#### Visitors discover Sullivan

"This report indicates we're on a positive track in spite of a difficult economy," says Bethel Woods' chief operating officer, Darlene Fedun. She notes that the 2011 numbers will be "even more promising," since they'll include two of the biggest events Bethel Woods has ever produced — Elton John and the three-day Phish concerts — that sold out rooms, convenience stores and campgrounds throughout Sullivan.

In fact, if the folks in Sullivan County who've benefited from Bethel Woods had one wish, they'd like to see more events like last summer's three-day Phish concert. It brought nearly 50,000 folks to Sullivan, and generated record business at places like the new Bakehouse bakery in Kauneonga Lake, and the Dancing Cat and Bubba's BBQ, which both fed at least 500 people each per day.

But even without events like Phish, Bethel Woods has had an impact that extends far beyond its concerts, educational programs or events like its Harvest and holiday markets. It's introduced thousands to the beauty of Sullivan County.

"They're shocked at how beautiful it is; they have no idea we exist," says Ann-Marie Westridge, manager of Bubba's, which overlooks White Lake. "And then they say, 'What else is there to do?'"

That's why some businesses are trying to entice Bethel Woods visitors back. This winter, when much of Sullivan County appears to be hibernating — and Bethel Woods closes — Tinari's Fosterdale Motor Lodge is offering a deal to bring visitors to the Catskills — a package that includes dinner at the Dancing Cat.

That's the same Dancing Cat that wouldn't exist without Bethel Woods.