GREENFIELD

Franklin County CDC celebrates 45 years

By ADA DENENFELD KELLY
For the Recorder

GREENFIELD — The success of small businesses took the spotlight last week as part of a block party in honor of the Franklin County Community Development Corporation's 45th anniversary.

"We've worked with thousands of people over 45 years, so we're just excited to celebrate that," commented Kate Lawless, communications director with the Franklin County CDC. "Because entrepreneurship is a really hard job and it's not something that's for the faint of heart."

"We're so happy that so many people have come out to celebrate entrepreneurs, and that's what we try to do," added John Waite, the Franklin County CDC's executive director.

The block party, held Thursday in partnership with the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce, included music, food and booths highlighting local businesses.

Waite said the Franklin County CDC began when several large manufacturing employers were going out of business and a group of volunteers wanted to support Greenfield in creating a local economy made up of many small businesses, rather than a few large corporations.

Since then, the operation has grown. It now supports historically disenfranchised community members in developing small businesses through planning assistance, grants and loans.

"Our clients are low- to moderate-income people without the means necessary to go to their family for a loan for their business, so that's what we're here for: to back them up," Lawless said.

There is also a food processing center on Wells Street for local farmers who want to start food businesses, but may not have the means to buy all the equipment necessary to begin on their own.

Emma Febo, owner of Mexirico, a Mexican and Puerto Rican restaurant in Springfield, handed out cups of limber, a Puerto Rican dessert. She said the Franklin County CDC has helped her in the past with her business, and the organization is now helping her get the licenses she needs to expand.

Andrew Ritchey runs Massive Bookshop out of an office space he rents from the Franklin County CDC.

"It's a local online bookstore, so there's no storefront, and I run it on a totally volunteer basis," Ritchey explained. "All the money that's generated by the book sales is donated to various bail funds, including locally, to the Decarcerate Western Mass bail fund. It's kind of a different idea about how a bookstore can relate to the community."

While Massive Bookshop was originally run out of his basement, Ritchey said as the business grew, he was looking for a new space that could also receive shipments. The Franklin County CDC provided the solution.

"It's a hassle getting a bunch of books delivered to your house everyday, so this has been great for that," he said. "It's totally secure and the staff are really awesome at supporting it."

The Franklin County CDC also emphasizes its commitment to racial justice.

"We are working to try and undo some of the white dominance that has been a part of our community for a long time," Waite told the crowd.

Lawless echoed Waite's sentiment.

"We are always accepting new clients and people who have historically been excluded from government and financial assistance," Lawless noted. "We have a strong commitment to racial justice, and so Black and Brown entrepreneurs — we want to invite them to come get our services."

STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ

Ericka Almeida of Stout Pigeon Coffee serves an iced coffee to Giorgia Nicolini at the Franklin County Community Development Corporation's 45th anniversary block party in Greenfield on Thursday.

STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ

John Waite, executive director of the Franklin County Community Development Corporation, speaks at the organization's 45th anniversary block party in Greenfield on Thursday.

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Xavier Garcia of Ginger Love Cafe serves up noodles with vegetables and chicken with rice at the Franklin County Community Development Corporation's 45th anniversary block party in Greenfield on Thursday.