

The Progress Fund is still growing West Newton businesses. Meet our newest borrower, Performance Kayak.



## Paddling Under the Bridge:

### Where Pedal met Paddle

"I love the setting," the white-haired man says as he drags a kayak from the Youghiogheny River in West Newton.

"Yes, this is a special place," answers Kim Lucas, of Performance Kayak, Inc.

It's a busy day at Performance Kayak – customer demonstrations in the morning, a dozen-woman tour of the Yough in the afternoon, followed by a photo shoot for Stellar Kayaks. It won't be a surprise, Kim says, if cyclists stop by to ask about the sleek, colorful boats in the yard and in the new shop.

"You just get a totally different idea," she says, "from the water's edge, of what this community is all about."

She's an accountant from Chicago. Her husband, Hansel Lucas Jr., is an electronics and robotics technician from Pittsburgh who turned his love of kayak racing into a second career. They are among the people transforming West Newton into a gathering place for those who like to travel on the power of their legs, arms and hearts.

They have "the Great Allegheny Passage bike trail, from Pittsburgh to Washington, D.C., in our front yard and the Youghiogheny River in our back yard," says Kim.

Where river and trail meet, they've created opportunity. They often host "just people bicycling by and they'll see the boats and stop



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Performance Kayak

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to check it out,” and later come back to buy, says Hansel, who owns Performance Kayak.

“Bike riders are typically sporting people,” says Kim. “They’re always looking for the next race.”

In addition to racing kayaks, they sell touring and fishing varieties – just not the plastic-hulled kind found in big box stores. “We’re more of a specialty retail kayak shop,” featuring Stellar, Evoke and Eddyline boats with durable laminate hulls, plus great service, says Hansel.



“If you go to a big retailer, there might be somebody knowledgeable, but they don’t have the time to spend two or three hours with you.” Most big boxes also lack docks.

“For a kayak shop, you need to be in a location where you have easy access to water,” says Hansel. He’ll let you try multiple kayaks.

He’ll invite you to stop back for clinics with some of America’s top paddlers, or tours like today’s involving women ages 15 to 74 – the eldest a racing champ. Live up north? He’ll refer you to Hansel III’s shop, in Brookville, near the Allegheny River. Heck, he’ll even install the rack on your car.

When Performance Kayak outgrew the Lucas family garage, they didn’t need to look far for financing. “I know some of the other businesses in town that had used The Progress Fund,” says Hansel. “That’s why we kind of reached out to The Progress Fund for putting up a new building, buying new inventory.”

The Progress Fund loaned \$60,000 to Performance Kayak, helping to finance a solar-lit, 32-by-40 foot showroom with space to display dozens of kayaks. Performance Kayak is The Progress Fund’s tenth investment in West Newton.

Hansel and Kim have brought to the area visitors from as far away as Alaska, referred customers to many other area businesses, and organized or volunteered for events in the nearby Laurel Highlands. “West Newton is growing,” says Hansel, “and businesses are going to be coming in because of the trail and because of the area itself.”

## The Progress Fund

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A Community Development Financial Institution

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