



Altoona Mirror

Making It Happen For You

# Business Insight

The content for this page is coordinated by the Blair County Chamber of Commerce in cooperation with the Altoona Mirror

## GUEST COLUMN

### Cyber security awareness

"You clicked on what?!"

An all too common phrase that employees will hear from the company's technology team. The mistakes that we make by clicking on links sent in emails is growing even more prevalent by this new, "work from home" era. Although the United States began recognizing October as National Cyber Security Awareness Month (NCSAM) in 2003, we still have vast challenges with securing our private information from identity thieves.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the National Cyber Security Alliance joined in a collaborative effort to make NCSAM a reality. Its purpose is to ensure that every individual remains safe and secure online.

While there are many unknowns ahead, the one sure thing is that conflict and disruption make for a tremendous cyber-attack environment. Whether it be an election, natural disaster, or the current pandemic, cybercriminals leverage and exploit this type of disorder.

There are three main cyber threats that we need to pay attention to and safeguard against as we continue to work from home. Malware is software that is specifically designed to disrupt, damage, and/or gain unauthorized access to your computer system. Examples of common malware include viruses, worms, trojan viruses, spyware, adware, and ransomware.

Phishing is another method used by cybercriminals to send emails, pretending to be from a reputable organization, to obtain personal information. Today, phishing emails promise financial relief due to the coronavirus pandemic, but they steal credentials, payment card data, and much more.

Finally, ransomware usually encrypts the files on an affected computer, making them inaccessible; taking your computer and your files as a hostage. It's times like the present when your computer is most vulnerable.

So, what can you do? Stop, think, and act. Stop scrolling and clicking through work or personal email and read with a skeptical eye. Think about whether what is being offered or requested is for real. When in doubt, take action by reporting the suspicious email to your IT team or at home make sure that your computer's anti-virus is up to date. With every holiday, catastrophe, or significant world event, identity thieves are waiting to lure you in to surrender the most important currency of the 21st century, your data.

## Lamar Advertising marks 99 years as a member of the Blair County Chamber

One year away. The irony was not lost on George Foster, General Manager of Lamar Advertising's Altoona-Johnstown Office, when told that the Blair County Chamber would be featuring his company's 99-years as a member on today's Business Insight page.

"With all the uncertainty in the world today," Foster acknowledged, "it's better not to take anything for granted."

As a company, Lamar Advertising has been in business for 118 years. The company purchased Penn Advertising in 1997. Like most businesses, Lamar felt the sting of the pandemic.

"We experienced severe cutbacks followed by a surge of growth," Foster pointed out. "Luckily, be-

cause we're a media company, we were able to provide information and resources through the toughest times."

Lamar Advertising's long affiliation with the Chamber is not hard to understand, according to Foster.

"The Chamber affords us the opportunity to see the pulse of the community. We have an idea of the problems, concerns and the future growth of other businesses. The business community is an environment where everyone helps each other."

Foster believes that businesses that aren't Chamber members are missing a significant number of opportunities.

"Sometimes people underestimate the value of the Chamber," he noted. "It creates valuable networking events. It not only allows



Mike Letscher, an installer at Lamar Advertising for 40 years, does a poster prep for a client. Lamar Advertising credits much of its success to its long history with the Chamber.

you to bring your products or services to the community but it allows your business

to grow through educational programs and events with vendors who can help your

bottom line. "Particularly as a small business, you're never alone.

## Maddie Cakes the end-product of creativity meeting opportunity



Kira McCall, owner of Maddie Cakes, built her business from home using her background in art and knowledge of social media. Maddie Cakes got its name from Kira's daughter Madison.

The advantages of being a stay-at-home-mom can sometime have some pretty incredible long-term effects. Just ask Kira McCall.

In 2011, after earning a Master's Degree in Art Therapy and Counseling, Kira and her husband Brinn welcomed their first child – a little girl named Madison. Kira decided to stay home with "Maddie" for six months before starting on a job search. That six months became a full year as the job market offered little in her field. She decided to take her talents in a different direction instead.

"I was making cakes for family and friends using my artistic background and of course the baking skills I got from my mom and grandparents," Kira pointed out. "Social media was really taking off and carried my cake work along with it. Soon I was receiving inquiries from many people I didn't know. I wondered if this could be a possible career option so I made a Facebook page for my business.



"I chose the name Maddie Cakes after my daughter. I kept making cakes and specialty items for about three years from my home kitchen until an opportunity arose to open a retail bakery in my hometown. With lots of prayer and family support, I chose to step through and give it a shot. We remodeled the space and opened the doors in December of 2014."

Since that time, Maddie Cakes has been located in the Roaring Spring Plaza. What has emerged from Kira McCall's creativity is a specialty bakery and café offering a variety of from-scratch baked goods daily as well as homemade soups, paninis, salads and flatbreads. There is also an espresso bar menu.

"We've had an opportunity to add a lot to what we

offer," Kira explained. "I think the most surprising thing for people who walk in and are unfamiliar with us is that we have a lunch menu, a catering menu and so much more than just cake. We are also a family business. My mom and my mother-in-law both work with me."

Maddie Cakes currently has a staff of eight. Some bake and decorate cupcakes, others focus on customer service, food prep and cleaning duties. Kira does the majority of custom and cake work. It's been a recipe for success so far and future growth has at least made it to Kira's mental drawing-board.

"I would love to work on the breakfast menu I created and open our shop earlier," she admitted. "Breakfast is actually one of my favorite meals to cook. There's something special about it."

There's something special about Maddie Cakes as well!

(Maddie Cakes has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 2018.)

## Chamber to expand newsletter coverage



Each Monday, the Blair County Chamber sends its email newsletter (Networks Digital News) to nearly 4,000 of its members. It is planning to allow non-members to receive that publication as well.

"It carries a twofold benefit," believes Chamber President Joe Hurd. "It

keeps people in the community apprised of programs and events in which they might have an interest. And it's a great recruiting tool for us as non-members get an up-close look at the many benefits to Chamber membership."

Details about how to receive the email newsletter will be made available in a few weeks.

## Gwen Querry hired as Chamber staff member

Gwen Querry appreciates that she has a tough act to follow. As the Blair County Chamber's new Vice-President of Programming and Membership Education, Gwen is replacing Judy Juda, who is retiring after nearly three decades of overseeing a variety of Chamber programs and events.

"What Judy has accomplished is incredible," Gwen noted. "Having her remain in an advisory role over the next few months will be invaluable to me."

Gwen's experience in previous positions bodes well for her new challenges at the Chamber. She worked for three years as the Assistant Manager/ Farmer's Market Manager at Downtown Bedford and for the last three has been Business Development and Marketing Manager at Bedford Candies.



Gwen Querry

"There were several aspects of the Chamber position that interested me," she disclosed. "One of the most appealing is the opportunity to work with the youth and young adults in the community as part of the Youth Leadership and Young Professionals programs. I also look forward to once again coordinating events such as the Business Excellence Dinner."

Gwen lives in Bedford with her husband Walt and has two daughters Jessica and Kaitlyn.

## WELCOME TO THE CHAMBER

**CBD American Shaman of Altoona**  
540 3rd Avenue  
Duncansville, PA 16635

**PHN-Altoona Behavioral Health**  
PO Box 716  
Sharon, PA 16146

**Slingers Throw House**  
2324 N. Branch Avenue  
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