

INCITE!

Shopper's Remorse

I spend a lot of time in the grocery store. If that admission sounds like one you would hear at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, perhaps I'm already setting the right tone. I've chosen this topic because I pulled into the parking lot at a local supermarket on my way home from work last week, grabbed a mask from the console and was



Joe Hurd

Blair County Chamber

heading toward the front door when I realized that I had nothing to buy. In the new Covid world, the grocery store has become the safe haven of choice. It is the one place that you can take comfort in knowing that you've been successfully able to keep dementia at arms-length. You may forget your home address from time-to-time but you'll always remember that the kosher dills are in aisle nine.

I do the shopping for my family. The main shopping day is Saturday when I can see all the familiar "half-faces" who are also there to complain that the items that were in short supply six months ago are now there in abundance but in the wrong brands. A shopping list is carefully prepared for me by my wife with additional input from my children who often confuse a shopping list with a wish list. It is not difficult for me to distinguish the items that we need for survival from those which are common fare at Buckingham Palace.

I review the list several times before leaving home, always on the lookout for the occasional ambush. If the item is written with accompanying detail, I know I'm in trouble. This generally pertains to feminine hygiene products which I am likely to grab with the urgency of a burglar rather than standing in front of a display that invariably seems to contain far too many choices. If there is a particular point of contention anywhere in the store that I no longer mention under any circumstances, particularly with my wife and my daughters within earshot, it is the nefarious "Daisy Razor." I have no reason to question the quality of this product. Perhaps my chagrin is the result of having the ten pack of these shaving marvels (at \$10.99) sitting directly next to the generic brand (at \$2.19).

As a slow learner, I do my best to pick my battles only when I'm absolutely certain that I'm on solid footing. Sometimes, even in my safe haven, things can get a little tricky.

Harry Houck confidently defies the odds

It might not be a Horatio Alger story but it's darn close.

Harry Houck, owner of Harry's Construction in Bellwood, has built a successful business, spends much of his off-season in Florida and never hesitates to be thankful for the circumstances that made it all happen.

"In Phillip 4:13 it says that 'I can do all things through Christ who gives me my strength,'" Harry explained. "My faith has been incredibly important to me. Without it, I'm not sure exactly where I'd be."

His story, clearly, did not start well. Harry was one of seven children. When he was in ninth grade, his father was in an accident and was disabled. That changed Harry's educational path.

"I had to drop out of school," he disclosed. "There were a lot of bills. I had to go to work."

Harry ultimately got a good paying job at PPG in Tipton and worked there for thirteen years. He never re-

ally liked factory work and when a construction opportunity came along, he took it. He's never looked back.

"I've been in construction now for 30 years and employ 19 people," Harry pointed out. "I enjoy working with people and we've expanded what we do to cover a wide range of services. We do everything from changing a light bulb to building a complete home from the ground up. We also offer a complete kitchen and bath design center."

One great source of pride for Harry involved a friendship that allowed him to tie-up some loose ends that he never expected to revisit.

"Prior to starting my business, a father-figure named John Tate encouraged me to take the risk of going out on my own," he acknowledged. "Later, he encouraged me to go back and earn my high school diploma." Harry received his diploma from Lincoln Academy in 2012.

Although the pandemic



Harry Houck's love of construction has resulted in more than 30 years of success at Harry's Construction.

caused a temporary closure of Harry's Construction, once the business got the okay to re-open, it made up for lost time.

"We're actually busier than before," Harry noted. "Many people have prioritized home improvement projects and that's caused

an unexpected surge that has kept us on our toes."

As he looks to the future, Harry is confident that his business is moving in the right direction.

"We're optimistic," he emphasized. "Over the next ten years we may build a larger showroom and

carry a larger selection of appliances in stock. I'm hoping to be retired by then. My son Jason will be in charge. He'll do a good job."

He'll have a tough act to follow.

(Harry's Construction has been a member of the Chamber since 2019.)

Veeder-Root takes giant steps to meet its sustainability goals

A little more than a year ago, the Sustainable Blair County Committee of the Chamber created a survey to help businesses to assess their strengths and weaknesses as they pertained to issues of sustainability. The committee set benchmarks and awarded designations of gold, silver and bronze, based on a point system.

Five different businesses qualified for a designation. Among those that didn't was Veeder-Root. That didn't sit well with Stefan Long, the company's Environmental and Facilities Supervisor.

"We got recognition for completely the survey," he remembers. "Anyone really could have accomplished that. So we set a goal to determine what all we needed to do to attain bronze status. It helped that Veeder-Root is doing some general plan updates that will make improvements that fall within the survey guidelines. That, alone, was not enough."

The company has done some lighting updates and opened-up some of its office spaces. It did an energy audit and some electronic recycling.

"We actually lost some survey points because we no longer have a black-tarred roof," Long explained. "Our new roof, over time, should have some energy savings."

As he looks at the improvements that have already been made, Long is encouraged. He credits the survey with making a critical difference.

"The survey gave us the fuel to take a hard look at



Stefan Long of Veeder-Root discusses survey results with Donna Fisher.

where we were," he pointed out. "Suddenly we knew where we ranked. We were doing okay but we knew we could do better."

"There's a multitude of gains in completing this survey. There's employee engagement. There are financial gains. Watching money go out the door is never good. And it's good marketing to show people that things like sustainability are incredibly important to us. It reflects well on our mission."

Chris Foster of Stiffler McGraw, who is vice-chair of the Sustainable Blair County Committee, is impressed with what Veeder-Root has done to gain bronze status.

"They saw the value of addressing areas where they weren't very strong," Foster admitted. "It's great that they were concerned enough to revisit the survey results and take action. That's what successful companies do."

Foster is hoping that Veeder-Root's persistence

will cause other businesses to complete the survey.

"Businesses have so much on their plate, especially from a compliance end," he acknowledged. "This survey is a barometer of things that too many companies claim they don't have time for. Once they recognize that efficiency and cost-savings are a huge part of the equation this usually gets on someone's priority list."

Any business that would like to access the survey can do so by going to the Chamber Website at www.blairchamber.com. There is no cost to access it or submit it for award consideration.

"Our committee has recently identified a number of Blair County businesses that would seem to match many of the criteria contained in the survey," Foster disclosed. "We're in the process of reaching out to them now."

(Veeder-Root has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 1957.)

Brumbaugh to speak on future of farming

October is "Farm-City Month" and the focus of the Chamber's monthly Breakfast Club is on agriculture and what it means to Blair County. This year, due to Covid-19, the Annual Farm-City Dinner is cancelled. So the Agricultural Community Excellence (ACE) Award which has always been presented at that dinner will instead be presented at the Breakfast Club on October 8th beginning at 7:45 a.m. at The Casino at Lakemont Park.

The recipient of that award for 2020 will be Fred Imler, Sr. and Imler's Poultry. Adding to the special tribute at this event will be the guest speaker – Donald Brumbaugh – whose family received the first Farm-City award (then known as the Farm Family Award) in



Donald Brumbaugh

1970. Brumbaugh is a retired dairy farmer who first began farming in 1953. His address to the Chamber will talk about what he envisions as the future of local farming.

The cost to attend is \$20 per person. To register, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at www.blairchamber.com. Sponsor of the Breakfast Club is Evey Black Attorneys, LLC. Sponsor of the ACE Award is Keller Engineers.

AT THE CHAMBER

It's Happening

■ Career Shadowing Week for high school juniors in Blair County, which normally takes place in November, has been moved to the Spring. The program, under the Chamber's BASICS umbrella, usually involves more than 400 students.

■ The Digital Marketing Roundtable's Zoom program this Thursday will focus on "Search Engine Optimization." It begins at 10:00 a.m. and lasts one hour. No cost for Chamber members; \$15 for non-members. To register, go to www.blairchamber.com.

■ Chamber ribbon-cutting is also this Thursday at 2:00 p.m. at NatureWorksPark in Hollidaysburg.

■ The next "Chamber Chat" will be held via Zoom this Friday from 8:30 to 9:00 a.m. The program will focus on how employers can help employees cope with the physical and mental struggles associated with Covid-19. Guest speaker will be Dr. Sean Hampton. No charge to participate. Visit the Chamber Website at www.blairchamber.com to register.

■ Would you like to be a Chamber Ambassador? It's a great networking opportunity and also helps the Chamber to welcome new members. Contact Joe Hurd at (814) 943-8151.

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