

Burke helps clear a path for businesswomen

Liz Burke is a quiet person who is making a loud impact on the Blair County business community. As President of Burke & Company, Liz has extensive experience in operations, accounting, risk management, human resources and information technology. Her business will ultimately be the successor company to S.P. McCarl & Co. A graduate of St. Francis University, Liz and her husband Josh have four children.

The Chamber: How would you describe Burke & Company to someone unfamiliar with it?

Liz: We are a union mechanical contracting company that specializes in HVAC, plumbing, piping, process piping and ASME welding with our base of operations in Altoona, PA. We are nationally certified as a Women's Business Enterprise by WBCEAST. We, along with our predecessor company, have been in Altoona since 1973. We also maintain an office in State College. Our sheet metal and pipe fabrication

Chamber Q&A

shops located in Altoona help us save our customers time and money with quality outcomes.

The Chamber: There are not many women in Blair County who function as President/CEO/Owner of a company like McCarl's. Does it provide additional incentive to you to be successful to clear a path for other women? Why or why not?

Liz: Yes, with two girls of my own and many nieces, I am driven to succeed to make this world a better place for them. It does help for them to see that life doesn't have to follow what the world sees as a typical path for a woman. I have always been motivated to do the right thing and put in the work without concern for ensuring I get the reward or recognition. I do believe in rewarding others just the same for applying themselves. In doing that, I believe it has cleared my path and will help with

how others see women in non-traditional roles.

The Chamber: What would people in Blair County be surprised to know about Liz Burke?

Liz: I am by nature a quiet, introspective person, even shy. In business there are many tough situations we face daily, I enjoy spending time with my coworkers whenever possible outside of our daily work. We have done some fun group team building activities including a carwash, snowshoeing, hiking and even put a team in the Mud on the Mountain just to develop relationships beyond our day to day roles.

The Chamber: Who are your personal and professional role models and what makes them special?

Liz: One of the things that I have cherished the most in my career was that even though I worked in mostly male dominated fields with a strong accounting/finance background, I was not pigeonholed and was able to move up and engage in the operational aspects of the business(es). I was fortunate enough to work for su-



Liz Burke has successfully risen to the top of a male-dominated field. Much of her inspiration has come from her grandmother who valued her personal relationships and had an incredible work ethic.

pervisors/owners who do not see gender or age but rather ability, drive, and ethics. The professional role model that had the greatest impact on me was Art Tate, GM for Suburban Propane, he not only saw me for the individual that I was but was an inspiring, thoughtful, hardworking,

and equitable leader. Personally, my Grandmother was an inspiration to me. She made time for everyone and everything that was important to her. She raised her children mostly on her own while working full time as a nurse and had a farmette with chickens, honeybees, and beau-

tiful gardens. She was an avid runner and animal lover.

The Chamber: What's still on Liz Burke's "bucket list?"

Liz: Personally, taking an extended vacation to Ireland and Scotland with my family to discover our roots and sightsee.

New affiliation with Boutique Air expected to have impact on business travel

The effectiveness of a business community can be measured in a number of ways. Access is high on that list. No one understands that any better than Tracy Plessinger.

As Manager of the Altoona-Blair County Airport, Plessinger oversees the one travel-related entity in the county whose reputation fluctuates between hidden gem and albatross. He knows that there are those who recognize the critical role that the airport plays in day-to-day commerce. He is also aware that there is a faction who regards the airport as an unnecessary expense.

"We need to continue to look for ways that increase our value, not only as it pertains to business travel but for leisure travel as well," Plessinger acknowledges. "We play a key role in bringing people into our county and we provide ways for people from here to get where they need to go in the most expedient manner possible. It's not an easy task."

It might be getting easier. A few months ago, the Airport Authority decided to contract with Boutique Air to provide air service. On the surface at least, the move from Southern Air-



Tracy Plessinger, Manager of the Altoona-Blair County Airport, understands the importance of having reliable and available air service in a growing business community.

ways Express seems to be an upgrade.

"All the new things that Boutique Air provides help the business traveler," Plessinger pointed out. "There wasn't dissatisfaction with Southern. They did a lot of good things. What Boutique offers addresses more of the concerns that we have in offering services that travelers demand."

Among those features is a change in aircraft to a Pilatus 12, a higher class than the Caravan and one

which handles better in bad weather. There is also a code-share agreement with United Airlines that allows travelers to connect with both United and American Airlines.

Perhaps the biggest addition that Boutique Air offers, however, is a rental car service that will correct an ongoing problem at the airport.

"Not having that service here has been a real drag on inbound business traffic," Plessinger explained. "We have had people

stranded here. At 9:00 at night in Martinsburg, you can't just call an Uber. Since Boutique Air will own the rental car service, any later flight will still have staff here to accommodate passengers."

Plessinger is looking forward to helping the airport transition at a time when transition can be difficult.

"There are no shortage of challenges," he admitted. "But we're excited because there are many good things to look forward to."

Mega Basket Giveaway salutes small businesses



Deb Scully of Altoona was one of the lucky winners of a Mega Basket, put together by the Chamber to recognize the importance of Small Business.

Small Business Saturday came and went a little more than a week ago. The Blair County Chamber is determined to make sure that small businesses don't need to wait until next November to get the attention they deserve.

"Under ordinary circumstances, small businesses are underappreciated," Chamber President Joe Hurd explained. "Covid-19 and the subsequent restrictions associated with it have been devastating to these businesses. Many haven't survived."

To create greater awareness of the importance of small businesses, the Chamber designated November as "Small Business Month." Included in that observance was the creation of four Mega Baskets which contained products donated by dozens of busi-

nesses. To qualify to win one of the baskets required that a person submit a selfie taken at a Chamber-member small business. Drawings for the four baskets took place each Monday.

"We had an incredible number of people take part in this promotion," reported Linda Stotler, the Chamber's VP of Communication and Marketing. "A number of those people went to multiple businesses to be able to submit multiple selfies. It was a lot of fun and it made people more aware of the really great small businesses that we have here."

It was a way to send a message, according to Hurd. "We need to support our small businesses in as many ways as possible," he emphasized, "for no better reason than because they deserve it."

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Encompass Health Rehabilitation Hospital of Nittany Valley
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