

INCITE

Missing Marilyn

“Press #1 for Joe Hurd.”

Call the Blair County Chamber number and that is the first instruction you receive on our voicemail message. Our office closed nearly two weeks ago. How long we stay closed is anybody’s guess. It already feels like we’ve lost some of our mojo.

When you base your first line of verbal communication on a voicemail message, you better be prepared

to suffer the consequences. As the first option, the ability to plan your day is an exercise in futility. Just when you think you have enough time allocated

to complete a project, the calls come fast and furious. Too few of them, unfortunately, are from Chamber members.

At least twice a day, I get calls reminding me that the warranty on my car is expiring and I can extend it for a low, low price. Sometimes I just hang up. If I’m in more of a rambunctious mood I’ll explain that my car has been stolen and they’ll need to check with the person who stole it about extending the warranty.

At least once a day, I’m contacted by a representative of a national hotel chain congratulating me on being selected to enjoy a five-day, four night stay in Orlando. When I explain that I was also selected the previous day as well as the three days prior to that, they apologize and agree to take my name off the lucky person list. Today, they hung-up before I had a chance to thank them for their offer. I’ve added that to my to-do list when they call back tomorrow.

Is there a simple way for me to avoid these nuisance calls? Of course there is. Her name is Marilyn and she is the Chamber’s receptionist. Since our office is closed, I’ve had to temporarily furlough Marilyn. I felt bad about doing that. Needless to say, I feel really bad about it now.

As a receptionist, Marilyn is the very best. She has a sweet voice and always treats callers in a professional manner. But her real strength is her ability as a call-screener. She intercepts more nuisance calls than Minka Fitzpatrick intercepts footballs. I never realized how effective she was until the first time she went on vacation for an entire week.

At some time soon, the Chamber Office will reopen and all will be well. In the meantime, if you have a warranty to extend or a vacation to peddle, call the Chamber and dial #2. (Joe Hurd is the President/CEO of the Blair County Chamber.)

Mamie’s Cafe a popular destination

They come from everywhere. No matter the time of day or the day of the week, the trip to Martinsburg, PA is well worth the gas money. There are so many reasons why.

Karen Wyland knows why they come. When she opened Mamie’s Café and Bakery in 2007, she simply drew on the experiences of her past. In 1995, Wyland began operating The Clubhouse Bed and Breakfast in Williamsburg. One day each week, she sold homemade breads, pies, apple dumplings and sticky buns from the back porch of The Clubhouse. Her reputation as a baker spread quickly.

“Porch sales were pretty brisk,” she remembers. It made her think about operating an additional location. As luck would have it, an opportunity became available at a building on East Allegheny Street in Martinsburg. Wyland knew the building well. Her great-grandmother, Mamie Teeter, had operated Teeter’s Hotel and Restaurant there many years before. Mamie’s Café was born.

“It was a busy time for sure,” Wyland acknowl-



edged. “My father, Bill Leidy, helped me get things started. Since then, we’ve done our best to feature what people ask for. It seems to work.”

As understatement goes, that’s a pretty good one. Mamie’s is hardly-ever without a line of people waiting to be served.

“I love hearing from people who come here from all over the world that our food is the best they’ve ever had,” Wyland pointed out. “It’s incentive for us to continue to maintain a high standard.”

Among the items that keep people coming back are the famous yeast-raised doughnuts and more than twenty types of specialty filled doughnuts, sticky buns, unique breakfast foods and of course the Rueben and buffalo chicken grilled cheese.

“We describe ourselves as



Karen Wyland has made Mamie’s Cafe in Martinsburg a popular destination for those who love great meals and fabulous baked goods. Wyland named her restaurant in honor of her great-grandmother.

“old-fashioned, hand-crafted food . . . with flare!” Wyland noted. “People would be amazed at some of the dynamics of operating a business like this one.”

As an example, Mamie’s annually uses 10,080 pounds of butter and 10,305 dozen eggs. With such incredible volume, the challenge for Wyland and her staff has

been to streamline all the processes of making product. “It’s made a huge difference,” she stated. “I can’t imagine where we’d be otherwise. It’s made my life easier for sure.”

At 68 “and with a lot more grey hairs,” Wyland isn’t setting a timeline for her tenure at the helm of the business. Her daughter

Valerie, a graduate of the Smeal College of Business at Penn State, returned to the area and is now a partner.

“As far as the future of Mamie’s, I don’t think much will change,” Wyland concluded. “Then again, you never know.”

(Mamie’s Café and Bakery has been a Chamber member since 2011.)

Retiring Johnstone leaves tough act to follow at Catholic Charities

One of the most effective leaders of a nonprofit agency in Blair County is calling it quits. Jean Johnstone, Executive Director of Catholic Charities, Inc. is completing a distinguished career that has helped an incredible number of people to find their way during difficult times.

Catholic Charities is a religiously-based nonprofit that serves as the charitable ministry outreach of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown. The service area covers eight counties with offices in Altoona, Johnstown and State College that provide an extensive Emergency Financial Assistance program and professional counseling services for individuals, couples and families.

Johnstone was only at Catholic Charities for twelve years but made an impact at a time when the agency was going through extensive transition. She takes pride in the fact that she was able to bring the agency from existing solely on diocesan support and having a negative cash balance each month to financial stability with diverse revenue streams and a healthy bottom line.

“This was done with the tremendous support of the Bishop, Diocesan Leadership Team and my Advisory Board,” Johnstone acknowledged. “Together we worked to right-size the agency, build and strengthen programs that responded to each community’s unique needs and form many new partnerships with other community agencies.” She



Jean Johnstone has been successful in putting Catholic Charities front-and-center in helping meet the needs of people in our community. Jean will retire at the end of December.

also heightened awareness of the agency itself.

“When I began, most of my peers, the various communities and even the parishioners of the local parishes did not even know that Catholic Charities existed,” Johnstone pointed out. “Our decision to work with the consulting firm Affinity Connections helped us to develop a solid marketing and development plan.”

Although admittedly, Johnstone will miss being part of the great things that Catholic Charities is contin-

uing to do, she feels that the time is right to step aside.

“I want to be able to travel and do the things on my bucket list while I’m physically able to do them,” she explained. “Very soon, I’ll be a first-time grandmother. I’m looking forward to being able to do those grandma type of things.”

Jean and her husband Bruce (a retired attorney) have two daughters - Sarah and husband Marc Palmer live in Wyncote, PA; Kelli Johnstone lives in Estes Park, Colorado.

Leadership program gets repeat customers



Rebecca Culp and Jared Keller, both graduates of the Chamber’s Leadership Blair County Youth program, are now part of the 2021 Adult class.

In 2004, Rebecca Culp graduated from the Blair County Chamber’s Leadership Youth program. Six years later, Jared Keller graduated from that same program. In June of 2021, the two classmates will graduate from the Leadership Adult program.

So what is it that they didn’t learn the first time?

“The youth program was a great experience,” Keller remembers. “You made great connections but that was in high school. As adults, there’s more of a free-flow of ideas. I guess if you were comparing the programs you’d say that one was like a bachelor’s program and the other is like an MBA.”

Culp agrees. “As a fifteen-year-old, the training took me just so far – through high school, college and my first couple jobs,” she admitted. “As someone in an administrative position, I needed a different kind of leadership training. The LBC

Adult program is providing that.”

As they move through the various sessions of the program, they feel more confident in sharing their experiences and opinions.

“I hope I have more to offer now,” Keller pointed out. “As a youth, you don’t really have a lot of credibility. Now you’ve got a greater sense of how leadership impacts your community and how you can get more personally involved.”

Culp feels that her confidence level is much higher than it was when she was in the youth program.

“There are definitely some sessions that overlap in the two programs,” she acknowledged. “But it’s amazing that it’s somehow not repetitious mostly because you approach everything differently. I would personally recommend that everyone who has gone through the youth program, goes through the adult program as well.”