

INCITE

Water water everywhere

As anyone who reads this column on a regular basis can attest, not much of what I write about reeks of extensive research. When I was writing my "Chamber Notes" column in the Blair Business Mirror, I had an unlimited word count so I could sprinkle-in facts and substance occasionally just to keep the reader off-guard. Now that I'm restricted to 404 words, I'm



Joe Hurd

back to writing like a third-grader again. One column that I continue to write each year looks at New Year's resolutions. I'm intrigued by what people in the business community feel is important as the calendar turns over and everyone gets a fresh start. I actually did spend some time digging through periodicals to see what's hot for 2021, other than living through a pandemic of course.

I look for resolutions that turn up on more than one list. I also search for the creative ones that clear-thinking people would consider for about five seconds and then move onto something attainable.

Among the candidates in that category would be: (1) Focus on a passion, not the way you look; (2) Stop multi-tasking; and (3) Do something that scares you.

Then there's the category of easy things that don't become difficult until it's time to do them. Those would be: (1) Talk less, listen more; (2) Don't buy things you don't need; (3) Take the stairs; and (4) Stop gossiping. Do business people gossip? Call me and I'll be happy to tell you who does and who doesn't.

The national focus on issues related to the environment has spawned: (1) Reduce your waste; (2) Bring a plant into your home; and (3) Buy less plastic. The Chamber's Sustainable Blair County Committee will be ecstatic over those.

Finally, the one resolution that somehow emerged from the depths of previous lists to appear prominently on practically every one of 2021's: "Drink more water." I have to admit that I was a little surprised by that one. With the incredible obstacles thrown in our path for at least the foreseeable future, I would think "drink more" would be a more popular strategy. I also see a potential conflict between drinking more water and buying less plastic.

As 2021 makes its eagerly anticipated arrival, the real resolutions should target the lessons we learned in 2020 and direct our resolve in the places where it means the most. There are enough of those to go around.

Blue Knob Auto Sales still evolving

It is a classic example of entrepreneurship meeting opportunity. In 1997, Randy Stiffler and Randy Ritchey – two local guys – started a business that purchased vehicles, detailed those vehicles and then took them to the auto auction for re-sale. The business itself was successful enough and would likely have continued that success for a long time. Stiffler and Ritchey had other ideas.

With the experience gained from the knowledge of the automobile market, the two decided to open a retail lot. Rather than follow the traditional strategy of other dealerships, they decided to do things a little differently. The prices that were placed on the vehicles were non-negotiable. It was clearly a risk but one that has since paid-off handsomely.

In the past ten years, Blue Knob Auto Sales in Dun-cansville has sold more than 115,000 vehicles. The company employs 185 fulltime employees and now also operates a service center and a Carquest parts store.

"We pride ourselves on customer service and strive to make the sales process as

stress-free as possible," acknowledges Business Manager Brian Schmitt. "We provide a hassle-free experience that has proven to be very popular with customers."

But don't customers prefer to haggle on price and amenities? Not so, according to Schmitt.

"Our customers enjoy not having to negotiate the price of the vehicle," he pointed out. "It makes the sales process more transparent and also helps lessen the time the customer spends at the dealership. It took a while for them to get used to it but the results speak for themselves. They also know that our 40-plus years of buying and selling vehicles will result in them getting the best price available."

Technology has played a huge role in Blue Knob's success. Thanks to the company's website, it has been able to sell to customers from almost every state in the U.S. and even in numerous other countries.

"Our website and online presence contribute to a vast majority of our sales," Schmitt disclosed. "Other than a few billboards and



Sales Manager Jim Paul has been an integral part of the success enjoyed by Blue Knob Auto Sales. Paul has been at the dealership for the past 15-years and has watched the business's incredible growth.

the napkins at the Altoona Curve games, our advertising has been done through our website and by word-of-mouth."

Like most businesses, Blue Knob Auto Sales was heavily impacted by Covid-19. When they were forced to close by the state, they lost what had traditionally become the two best months

of the year for sales and profit.

"It was a difficult time for a variety of reasons," Schmitt explained. "Not only were we restricted in how we were permitted to sell but we needed to train our personnel without having the availability of the trainers at the dealership."

Somehow, things still

worked out.

"Our people did an excellent job," Schmitt noted. "We sold and delivered 970 vehicles the first full month of operation after reopening. You really can't do much better than that."

(Blue Knob Auto Sales has been a Blair County Chamber member since 2010.)

Patronize our local restaurants

As the struggle continues for many restaurants and taverns in our region that are restricted in the ability to operate at anything resembling full capacity, the Blair County Chamber is doing its best to help. As a follow-up to the "Eat. Drink. Help" initiative of earlier this year, the Chamber has invited its restaurant members to submit their menus to be published during the next three months in the Chamber's weekly newsletter. "We know that other industry sectors are also hurting and we're looking for ways to ease those burdens," explained Chamber President/CEO Joe Hurd. "But our restaurants have been under siege so often since Covid-19 began that the sense of urgency is incredible." Listed below are the Chamber-member restaurants that provide takeout, deliver and/or have drive-thru service. Please support them as often as you can.

(All phone numbers are in the 814 Area Code.)

Al's Tavern, Inc.
944-9633

Alto Markets
201-2055

Austin's Texas Hot Dogs, Inc.
684-5807

Bella Italia
944-6015

Bestway Pizza, Hollidaysburg
695-8864

The Blairmont Club
693-1600

Brooklyn Deli
696-7827

Chick-Fil-A Altoona
942-1647

Cracker Barrel Old Country Store
944-0691

DG2GO Pizza Shop
684-5880

DQ Grill & Chill
949-2655

Dunkin' Donuts
944-5242

Greenbean Coffee House
201-2317

HoneyBaked Ham & Café
201-2281

Hoss's Steak & Sea House
946-5115

Iron Master's Country Club
224-2915

Jack & George's
943-5622

Jersey Mike's Subs
201-2318

Jethro's
942-2178

Jimmy Johns Altoona
201-2261

The Knickerbocker Tavern, Inc.
942-0770

Lena's Café
943-9655

Maddie Cakes
626-1203

Mama Randazzo's, Inc.
943-9011

Mamie's Café and Bakery
793-9122

Marzoni's Brick Oven & Brewing Co.
695-2931

Mayfield
317-5104

Old Carolina Barbecue Company
949-6222

Outback Steakhouse
941-0555

Power House Subs
201-2771

Primanti Bros.
204-2999

Prime Sirloin
693-8504

Spring House Grille
224-5309

Tom & Joe's Restaurant
943-3423

U.S. Hotel Tavern
695-2624

The Bistro at the Village Green
793-5234

The Ultimate Sub Company, LLC
317-5069

Villa Capri
201-2043

Zach's Sports and Spirits
943-9479

Judy Juda retires after 29-years with Chamber



Judy Juda's retirement from the Chamber will leave large shoes to fill. She has been the guiding force behind the Leadership Adult and Youth programs.

An integral part of the Blair County Chamber's growth ends her career later this week. After nearly 29-years, Judy Juda will officially retire as Vice-President of Programming and Membership Education.

"I've reached an age where I'd like to have a little more freedom and a little less responsibility," Juda acknowledged. "Also, age has sent me messages. I don't feel I'm as sharp as I used to be. If you're lucky, you know when the time comes. For me, I know."

Juda has overseen a variety of Chamber programs but is most noted for the continued success of Leadership Blair County which began in 1994 and is still going strong today. It is one of the many things that she will miss heading into retirement.

"The first thing I'll miss is the people I work with," Juda pointed out. "We're a family and most of us have worked together for a long time. We've been through a lot – both in our work and our personal lives. They mean a lot to me."

