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Pacifico Bakery 'kneads' no introduction

The recent announcement by Norfolk Southern Corporation of seventeen furloughs in its Altoona operation is a disappointing start to the New Year for those employees. As bad as it seems, sometimes that type of adversity can become a catalyst for an opportunity. The late Angelo Pacifico is a classic example.

Pacifico owned a bakery in Pittsburgh that was destroyed by a fire. He moved to Altoona and was hired by the Pennsylvania Railroad. In 1947, he was laid-off by the PRR and decided to return to his bakery roots. He started Angelo Pacifico & Sons Bakery and never looked back.

The growth of the business was steady but well orchestrated. By 1965, it was necessary to purchase Fairview Bakery to alleviate overcrowded conditions. Several local bakeries were added to increase sales and production.

Pacifico Bakery continues to operate at 1208 5th Avenue in Altoona. It is the area's leading producer of quality breads and rolls. The family still plays the lead role in making things go. Bob Pacifico, the company's president, has been with the bakery for 44-years. That was one year after his brother Ralph, the company's secretary/treasurer, started.

"We're truly a family business," Bob acknowledged. "Our fourth generation is becoming part owner. Michael and Sean Pacifico will be an important part of helping to make us grow. We are also proud that our fifth generation is working here now. And then there are the 60 employees who really make us who we are."

The bakery business has changed dramatically since Bob and Ralph first showed-up for work.

"When we both started in the 1970's, most of the work here was done by hand,"

Bob pointed out. "Now the equipment and ovens do about 90% of the work. We have made incredible progress in staying current and our product line has reflected our commitment to always find ways to improve."

Admittedly, much of it is out of necessity.

"We're in a competitive business," Ralph noted. "So our strategy is to try and give our customers the best product and service we can. Some days are tougher than others to make that happen. Lately, the obstacles dictate much of what we do."

Those obstacles are primarily Covid-19 related. Many of Pacifico's customers experienced shut-downs during 2020. A few never opened at all.

"We appreciate that by comparison, we were very fortunate," Bob admitted. "I can't imagine having to deal with what so many businesses faced in 2020 and in many cases are still



Bob (left) and Ralph Pacifico have 89-years of combined employment at Pacifico Bakery in Altoona. The company is in its fifth generation and has built a strong reputation for quality and service.

facing. We're grateful." The future of Pacifico Bakery will be largely determined by the company's ability to assess the opportunities and keep track of the market.

"Our plan is to try and expand our delivery routes," Bob explained. "We have a strong customer base and high satisfaction rating but you can never relax or compromise

what it has taken to get where you are. Having your name on the product makes a difference too." (Pacifico Bakery has been a Chamber Member since 1998.)

West Central Equipment a valuable asset to Blair County's agricultural future

In the early days of Covid-19, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf created a list of "essential" businesses that were not required to close as the result of the pandemic. One of those businesses was West Central Equipment in Martinsburg.

"We were considered essential because we support activities for crop production and animal production," explained Mike Jones, the store manager at both the Martinsburg and Ebensburg locations. "This placed us in the governor's category of life-sustaining businesses. We remained open and followed state Department of Health guidelines to protect customers and employees."

For anyone familiar with agriculture in Blair County, West Central Equipment has also merited that essential reputation. Opened in 1945 as Wineland Farm Implements, the company has been one of the county's most well-respected ag businesses. The John Deere dealer in Central and Western Pennsylvania, West Central Equipment sells, services and provides parts



Mike Jones, who is store manager of West Central Equipment, is confident that his company will continue to be a resource for the agricultural community.

for farm tractors, Harvesters, planters, hay equipment, skid steers, lawn and garden tractors, zero turn mowers and implements.

"We're in a very competitive market," Jones pointed out. "In this market, we offer a vast line to assist any and all customers from agricultural, commercial, governmental, large property

owners as well as the average homeowner. Our success has been heavily tied to our ability to meet a variety of needs."

Technology has played a critical role in that success.

"The internet and social media as well as texting platforms have become a big part of the selling process," according to Jones. "We always welcome customers into our store for the opportunity to look at the wide selection of inventory as well as a demonstration of any of our equipment."

The Martinsburg location is just one of five locations of West Central Equipment. The other four are in Butler, Ebensburg, New Alexandria and Somerset.

"We're a fourth generation family-owned business," Jones disclosed. "Our goal is to continue the success of the prior generations, well into the 21st century. Also to continue to support and serve our customers for generations to come." (West Central Equipment has been a Chamber Member since 1993.)

Businesses step-up to help local restaurants



The team at Professionals Auto Body was among the many local businesses that stepped-up to assist restaurants and taverns through the purchase of gift cards.

When the Blair County Chamber launched its "Eat. Drink. Help." Initiative, it was hoped that the business community would be willing to assist local restaurants and taverns to stay financially viable through the purchase of gift cards. Needless to say, they answered the call.

"We built some incentives into the program but clearly we didn't need to," acknowledged Jessie Covert, the Chamber VP who monitored the incentive. "Our member-businesses were eager to step-up."

Perhaps the grand champion of gift card purchases was Professionals Auto Body. Owner Ron Perretta bought more than \$3,000

worth and used most of them to buy meals for his employees.

"We did it because so many businesses need it," he pointed out. "Even though we were already doing it, once the Chamber starting promoting it, it was second nature for us to up-our-game. We plan to continue as long as the need remains."

The Chamber continues to look for ways to create opportunities for all industry sectors to regain some level of stability.

"It will take a concerted effort to make a substantial difference," believes Chamber Board Chair Richard Fiore, Jr. "We continue to be impressed by the generosity of our business community."

Digital Media Manager position available

The growing emphasis on digital marketing, particularly associated with social media, has created a full-time position on the Blair County Chamber staff.

"Our strategic planning process pointed very decisively to the importance of expanding our digital media presence," explained Board Chair Richard Fiore, Jr. "We recognize that to do that effectively will take a staff person who can spend considerable time focusing

on what will make the organization more valuable to its members."

The Chamber's Board of Directors is in the process of reviewing all aspects of the new Strategic Business Plan and will be providing incremental reports to the membership. The digital media aspect rated the highest priority.

To apply for the Digital Media Manager position, email a resume and cover letter to Joe Hurd at jhurd@blairchamber.com.

Chamber optimistic about first trip of 2021

The Blair County Chamber lost all three of its scheduled trips during 2020 due to Covid-19. It's optimistic that its first trip of the New Year will get the organization's travel program back-on-track.

That trip will be to the Canadian Rockies & Glacier National Park, which will depart on July 25th

and return on the 31st. If that trip sounds familiar it should. The identical trip was scheduled for last July.

"We were really sorry to lose that trip," admitted Chamber President Joe Hurd. "We had a lot of people signed-up because the trip had some great attractions and was very inexpensive. We're fortunate

that the identical trip became available for this year."

Highlights of the trip, aside from Glacier National Park, include Calgary, Waterton Lakes National Park, Athabasca Glacier, Banff, Lake Louise and much more. An informational Zoom meeting will be held on

January 27th at 6:00 p.m. To get the Zoom link, visit the Chamber Website at www.blairchamber.com.

The Chamber will be partnering with Epic Journeys and collette on the Canadian Rockies Trip.

"We've worked with these businesses on several occasions and they do a great job," disclosed Hurd.

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