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Founder's legacy guides Gingrich Agency

Not every business has the good fortune of embracing the legacy of its founder.

"We're extremely lucky," acknowledges Mark Gingrich, president of the Warren A. Gingrich Agency in Altoona. "My father was an excellent role model in both business and in his personal life. He was involved in community work and enjoyed personally taking care of his customers. He looked forward to meeting new people and making friends. He left us with big shoes to fill and we try daily to do our absolute best to carry-on his legacy."

Warren Gingrich founded the agency in 1954 and from the beginning prioritized honesty, fairness and family values. The twenty-one current employees at the Altoona location include Warren's sons Gary and Mark as well as his grandsons Carl and Clay. Gary is chairman-of-the-board. Carl and Clay are producers. The company also owns and operates White Jenkins Johnson, LLC in Saxton which has

five employees.

Even with his legacy of accomplishment solidified, Warren always managed to spend a few hours a day, helping out wherever it was needed. He passed away last May at the age of 96.

"Just having him in the office was motivational for everyone else," Mark pointed out. "He was always so positive about everything and so convinced that our business would get even through the most difficult times."

So far, even with Covid-19's widespread destruction of small businesses, Warren has been right.

"Fortunately, the insurance business is considered essential so we weren't required to close our doors," Mark disclosed. "The agency in Altoona has a drive-up window so we were able to conduct contactless business by keeping our staff and the customer safe while still able to practice social distancing. We've followed CDC protocols when clients arrive inside."

The Warren A. Gingrich Agency features all lines of

insurance including personal, commercial, contractor's bonds, group health and life. What they deliver is important, Mark admitted. How they deliver it is just as important.

"People in Blair County already know much about our agency. They love that we are family-owned and operated because that means deep personal service. My father taught us that each customer is special no matter what. We feel that our customers feel confident in putting their trust with us. That alone speaks volumes for this third generation business."

The insurance industry has witnessed many changes over the years. It has become automated in the way a policy is issued and serviced as to how a claim is handled.

"The customer is now used to having answers and feedback right away," Mark explained. "We have recently invested in a new computer management program which will speed-up our production as we head into the future of a paperless environment."



Blair County has had the good fortune of being home to a wealth of successful family businesses. For the past 66-years one of those businesses has been the Warren A. Gingrich Agency. Among the current principals of the business are, left to right, Carl Gingrich, Gary Gingrich, Mark Gingrich and Clay Gingrich.

As a 66-year-old business, the Gingrich Agency is also proud to be marking its 60th year as a member of the Blair County Chamber.

"Being part of the Chamber has been very important to us," noted

Gary Gingrich. "It's been a great way to stay connected to the business community and to do our part in helping Blair County remain a great place to live and work."

The future for the Gingrich Agency looks bright.

"We are always making sure we have competitive markets, Mark added. "We look to purchase other insurance agencies in the area and are on a constant search for talented new people in the area to hire."

Active Living Steps Challenge announces winners, sets goal in preparation for 2021 follow-up event

Ask most people in Blair County to list their greatest personal challenges during Covid-19 and somewhere on that list is likely to be the difficulty of staying in shape.

With or without a pandemic, the Blair County Chamber's Workplace Wellness Committee, in partnership with Healthy Blair County Coalition's Let's Move Blair County Committee and a handful of local businesses had already put plans in place to hold an "Active Living Steps Challenge." The timing couldn't have been better.

"We wanted to do something to make Blair County healthy," explained Coleen Heim, director of HBCC. "The pandemic gave us even more reason to organize something that people could rally around."

The Steps Challenge kicked-off on September 12th and concluded November 7th. Twenty-five teams with 258 participants walked 107,815,548 steps. The goal



Winners in the Active Living Steps Challenge are, left to right: Courtney Seidel of Stiffler McGraw, Christy Nau of Stuckey Automotive, Mary Jo Lanzel of the Lanzel Family and individual winner Peggy Campbell.

had been 100,000,000.

"We thought the goal was probably a little ambitious," Heim pointed out. "But when the numbers started coming in we were pleasantly surprised. People really do love to compete, especially when it benefits their health."

There were four categories

of winners. In the Individual category, Peggy Campbell walked 1,084,808 steps. In the Small Team category, the Lanzel Family walked 4,439,581 steps. Employees of Stiffler McGraw won the Medium Team title with 8,104,132 steps and the Large Team honors went to

Stuckey Automotive with 25,595,821 steps.

The next Steps Challenge will take place beginning on March 21st and will run until May 15th. The goal is 110,000,000 steps. To register as a team or an individual, contact Maria McFarland at mmm8289@psu.edu.

Annual Meeting awards still shrouded in secrecy



The Young Professional of the Year Award will be presented at the Chamber Annual Meeting later this month.

When the Chamber made the decision to change its Annual Meeting & Awards Presentation from in-person to virtual, some members expressed disappointment that the virtual format wouldn't allow for the "surprise element" that had become a tradition at this popular event. Not so fast, according to Chamber VP Gwen Query.

"Thanks to some creativity from our staff, board members and committee people, we've found a way to pre-

serve the element of surprise," Query pointed out. "How have we done that? Sign-up to attend and we'll show you."

The Annual Meeting & Awards Presentation will begin on Zoom at 7:45 a.m. on February 26th. It will include the passing of the gavel as board chair from Darin Tornatore to Richard Fiore, Jr. followed by the presentation of seven awards. To register, visit the Chamber Website at www.blairchamber.com.

Lower Trail provides scenic recreation for a grateful community

Sometimes even the worst situations can yield some pretty good opportunities. With physical health and mental stability becoming priorities in a pandemic world, certain outdoor venues suddenly took-on greater importance. The Lower Trail is one of those.

"We've attracted more and more people each year and created a high level of interest," explained Karl King, a board member of Rails-to-Trails of Central

Pennsylvania. "Once Covid-19 changed people's access to exercise, the trail became an even more desirable destination. It's been packed, especially at the trail heads."

The Lower Trail is seventeen miles long and is part of the 1,300 mile 9-11 Trail. It's a privately-owned nonprofit that relies on donations to remain viable.

"So far, the donations have allowed us to keep up with the maintenance costs," King disclosed. "If it wasn't

for our volunteers, we'd never be able to keep up with things. There's been a number of upsides to what's been taking place and we're encouraged by the potential, especially as it pertains to Williamsburg."

Located at one of the trail heads, Williamsburg, PA has explored the possibility of becoming a "trail town." Dave Cadle, a longtime resident there, has led the charge to pursue that designation. In the meantime, the number of people planning

their exercise regimens around the Lower Trail continues to increase.

"During the summer, we did the trail once a week," acknowledged Pat Miller of Altoona-Blair County Development Corporation, who bicycles there with his wife. "I can tell you this: You couldn't buy a bike around here anywhere this past summer."

Anyone interested in making a donation to help fund the Lower Trail should go to www.RTTCPA.org.



Karl King (left) updates Pat Miller on the progress of the Lower Trail.



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