

The content for this page is coordinated by the Blair County Chamber of Commerce in cooperation with the Altoona Mirror

INCITE

What's in a name?

This is my last "Incite" column. That should bring a sigh of relief from those of you who only clean the parakeet's cage on a biweekly basis, are in a maximum security prison or who are just learning to read and haven't found Dr. Seuss yet.

Your pain is about to get worse. Not only do I plan to continue writing but my column will now appear under a different designation. I

had originally chosen "Incite," not entirely because it was a play on words with the title of the Chamber page but because I couldn't think of anything better at the time. Frankly, I didn't really care what it was called. I wrote a column called "Chamber Notes" in the Blair Business Mirror for 21-years. How much imagination do you think it took to name that one?

I was okay with Incite because it means "to urge to action." I gave myself too much credit to assume that readers would use my message as a source of inspiration to accomplish great things and bring about positive change. If I had looked further in the dictionary, I would have seen that incite also means "to provoke." As an accidental dissident, I seem to be attracting a more disruptive legion of followers.

I had a lady tell me that my column was the only thing she reads. "I don't always understand what you're trying to say but I always get a chuckle out of it," was her explanation. Humor-over-substance. Perhaps that should be my calling-card.

I've had others admit that they've based business decisions on something they've read in my column. I hope that's not true and I really hope that whatever verdict is rendered in bankruptcy court will allow them to get back on solid financial footing. I've read through a number of my past columns and I've found nothing that could be interpreted as sound advice.

So what will the new name of my column be? With the pandemic still taking center-stage in how we approach each day, it might be appropriate to include some reference to the incredible resilience that our business community has shown with its collective backs against the wall. If there was a simple way to combine that with my new practical approach of disavowing anything I say or write to keep people from trying to brand me as credible, it would seem to be an unbeatable combination. The verdict?

"Hurd Immunity." It almost makes Incite seem not-so-bad. (Joe Hurd is President/CEO of the Blair County Chamber of Commerce.)

Blair County Chamber of Commerce

Joe Hurd

McKeegan drawn by "special mission"

As the new president of Mount Aloysius College, John McKeegan brings a strong academic background and a wealth of experience that includes more than a decade in the legal community. The native of Lewisburg, PA has a B.A. Degree from Bucknell University and a Juris Doctor from the University of Notre Dame. John and his wife Theresa have six children – two are in law school and one is in medical school. The McKeegan's currently live in Hollidaysburg.

The Chamber: What attracted you to Mount Aloysius College and what have you encountered at the Mount that has surprised you?

John: I was drawn here by the Mount's special mission. As a candidate, I sensed that the campus community supported our mission, and now having joined the institution, I am inspired by the palpable dedication and passion of our faculty and staff (each and every day!) for responding to students' needs and preparing them for bright futures. Our graduates are imbued with key values of mercy, justice, service, and hospitality - in a time of national divisiveness, they will be community builders. I've also been blown away by the beauty of our campus, and its incredible technology, labs, and athletic fa-

Chamber Q&A

ilities. This place and its people are incredible!

The Chamber: In what ways has Covid-19 impacted your acclimation to your new position?

John: My on-campus interview was just days before the Covid shutdown in March, 2020. Putting it mildly, it has been a rather interesting time to acclimate! It has certainly helped that this is such a friendly area. Although many traditional in-person encounters have been postponed, I've found ways to connect with our students, faculty, and staff in accordance with our Covid protocols. We've also employed virtual gatherings to help build the sense of community, through town halls and livestreams, and used social media, community messages, and videos to share campus events and for folks to get to know me. I'm looking forward to later this year, when we can all spend more time in personal meetings, including with our local business and government leaders.

The Chamber: What concerns do you have about how higher education in general is being impacted by Covid?

John: Mount Aloysius is known for personal atten-



New Mount Aloysius President John McKeegan is a native Pennsylvanian who's excited about returning to familiar territory. McKeegan has effectively connected with staff and students at the Mount despite the challenges of Covid-19.

tion to student success, and that continues to be of paramount value for us. Of course, the pandemic has caused great uncertainty and stress for students. We have to meet them wherever they are, whether that is virtually or in-person, and invest in both alternative delivery platforms and in services that address overall well-being. Our outstanding programs, in nursing and allied health among others, will provide a launching pad to fantastic careers that make a difference.

The Chamber: Who are your personal and professional role models and why?

John: In the course of my

career, I've been blessed to learn from many true professionals - who always put the success of others and of the organization first. However, my father is my ultimate role model - a man of faith, fortitude, and firm conviction. As the son of immigrants, my dad had a humble upbringing in Pittsburgh, and through hard work and the power of his God-given intellect, became a beloved professor. But at home and at work, it was "never about him" - it was about doing the right thing, and making a positive difference.

The Chamber: You're a diehard Notre Dame sports fan. How is that

playing-out among your Pitt/Penn State colleagues?

John: I'm a diehard Mountie now! It's true, I do love Notre Dame, but Pitt and Penn State are also fine institutions (and I'm careful not to mention which school has the most national championships and Heisman trophy winners!). As a lifelong Steelers, Pirates, and Pens fan, it's great to be back in PA, so there's a good chance of common ground in some sports area.

The Chamber: What's still on John McKeegan's "bucket list"?

John: At the moment, getting completely past this pandemic!

Australia and New Zealand trip at top of Chamber's 2022 travel

With two trips still ahead of it during 2021, the Chamber is announcing that its first trip in 2022 will be its longest ever in distance and duration. The Chamber will travel to New Zealand from January 7-17 and continue to Australia from January 17-23. Ketrow KURTZ Travel is the Chamber's partner on this trip.

"This is a trip that people have been begging us to do for several years," acknowledged Chamber President Joe Hurd. "We've looked at a number of different options and tried to select the best attractions, the best time of the year to go and the best cost. We're confident that we've



Among the attractions as part of the Chamber's trip to Australia and New Zealand is the Sydney Opera House.

found all of those."

An informational meeting on the trip will be held on March 25th at 5:00 p.m. on Zoom. To access the link,

go to www.blairchamber.com. The remaining two trips for 2021 are to the Canadian Rockies in July and to the French Riviera in October.

Breakfast Club to focus on Operation Our Town

It's an understatement that Operation Our Town has made an incredible impact on Blair County's ability to deal effectively with its drug problem. Without the generosity of the local business community and the relentless efforts of law enforcement, it's hard to imagine the dire straits that the county would be facing.

Each March, the Blair County Chamber commits its Breakfast Club program to paying tribute to the impressive list of accomplishments that Operation Our Town generated during the previous year. That Breakfast Club will take place next Thursday, March 11th, beginning at 7:45 a.m. For the first time, the event will be done virtually, via Zoom.

"We're looking forward to once again partnering with Operation Our Town to allow the business community to hear about the many incredibly important things that took place as the result of their investment in the program," explained Richard Fiore, Jr., the Chamber's Board Chair. "Once again, businesses stepped-up."

Among the highlights of the Breakfast Club will be the presentation of the 2021 Community Partnership Award to retiring Altoona Police Chief Janice Freehling. The Chief has been a long-



Janice Freehling

time supporter of the OOT program. There will also be a number of Law Enforcement Awards.

The speakers at the breakfast will be District Attorney Peter Weeks and Jim Walstrom.

"It's always valuable to hear an overview of the investigations and arrests that were executed to keep our community safe," Fiore pointed out. "It's impressive that after all these years, OOT continues to gain momentum. It's unfortunate that there's still a strong need to offset the drug traffic that has plagued our area for so many years."

The cost to attend the Breakfast Club is \$15 for all attendees. To register (and secure the link), visit the Chamber Website at www.blairchamber.com. Corporate sponsor of the Breakfast Club for March is Pinnacle Cleaning Services.

WELCOME TO THE CHAMBER

Full Motion Technologies

3900 Industrial Park Dr.
Altoona, PA 16602

Locher Candles

1424 North 4th Ave.
Altoona, PA 16601

Sorge Funeral Home & Crematory

422 North Juniata St.
Hollidaysburg, PA 16648

Just Play - Slinky

800 Beaver St.
Hollidaysburg, PA 16648

Marcus & Mack, PC

820 S. 12th St., Suite B
Altoona, PA 16602

Vicki's Florist

937 1st Ave.
Altoona, PA 16602

KU Resources, Inc.

22 South Linden St.
Duquesne, PA 15110

Solensky Insurance Agency

3119 Pleasant Valley Blvd.
Altoona, PA 16602

ZenLeaf

590 West Plank Road
Altoona, PA 16602

CONTACT THE CHAMBER

814-943-8151

chamber@blairchamber.com

www.blairchamber.com

