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Up, up and away

When I was eleven years old, one of my favorite television shows was called "Lost in Space." The premise behind the show (which debuted in 1965) was that by 1997, planet earth would be so overpopulated that people would need to somehow dart-off to other planets to avoid the horrible consequences of living shoulder-to-shoulder.

In 2006, as a fully-grown adult, I watched with interest as our Chamber created a



Joe Hurd
Blair County Chamber of Commerce

Sustainability Committee to explore plausible ways of saving the environment. The feeling was that the business community was in the best position to slow the disappearance of clean water and breathable air since businesses were allegedly the culprits in these atrocities to begin with.

Being unaware of any travel opportunities to other planets, I pursued the only option available to me which was to embrace sustainability and hope that the committee was adept enough to figure-out alternatives to drinking and breathing. And that nothing stupid like a pandemic would occur.

If you've read any of my past columns, you're probably aware that I'm now heavily onboard with "tree-hugging" to the extent that I was instrumental in having our Chamber selected as "National Sustainability Chamber of the Week" earlier this year. I'm not sure how we qualified for that designation. It really doesn't matter. I've never hesitated to accept awards under false pretenses even when the future of civilization hung in the balance.

Still all is not well. A couple months ago, I let my guard down and a new group of concerned business people talked me into forming a Data Security Roundtable. Two weeks ago, that Roundtable held its first meeting. Since there wasn't a chairperson elected for the group, I agreed to get the conversation started. One hour later, I was looking for Elon Musk.

My only question had been, "Why should anyone be concerned about data security?" The people in the room looked at each other. Then they looked at me. I believe they looked at each other to determine if anyone had the authority to throw me out of the room. If it had been possible to change the subject, I would have given it my best shot.

They punished me in another way instead. They answered my question. By the time the meeting ended I knew considerably more about data security. Frighteningly more. The Roundtable meets again on Wednesday. After that, I'll make sure you know too.

Family remains top priority at McAleer's

As the Blair County business landscape continues to undergo its share of changes, primarily as the result of new businesses locating here, it's encouraging that some of the "old guard" still feels confident to lead the way. McAleer's Plumbing, Heating & Air Conditioning is one of those businesses.

Located at 1008 Chestnut Avenue in Altoona, McAleer's has been on the scene for more than 130 years. The current owner, Larry McAleer, appreciates the company's impressive history and feels a sense of pride and obligation to make certain that the run remains strong on his watch.

"My grandfather, Charles McAleer, started the business in 1886," Larry pointed out. "Not only was he good at what he did from a technical standpoint, he was also good at relationship building. So a big part of our company's ability to grow and maintain a significant number of customers has been the ongoing friendships and the level of respect that has

been passed-on through the generations."

As with many family businesses, McAleer's has established name recognition that generates a feeling of confidence when it comes time to call someone to handle an emergency or just accomplish something routine.

"People in this community know who we are and are usually familiar with someone who has needed our services," Larry noted. "It motivates us because we know that we always need to be our best."

It helps, Larry emphasizes, that McAleer's has been successful at hiring and keeping outstanding employees.

"We are so fortunate to have the technicians that we do," he admitted. "Our team of experts and certified master plumbers are fully dedicated to providing the highest level of professionalism and workmanship. Not every business in this industry can say that."

A key part of the McAleer team is Larry's son Brian who serves as



Larry McAleer (right) and his son Brian have successfully continued the long tradition of quality service that Charles McAleer started in 1886.

general manager.

"He does a super job," Larry explained. "It's really great for me to have the opportunity to work with him each day. We have fun. It's probably kept me involved longer than I expected to be."

Having fun is a huge departure from what transpired at McAleer's and through-

out the business community a year ago. The pandemic made it practically impossible for anything meaningful to happen without a whole lot of soul searching. Brian McAleer remembers it well.

"We needed to establish a list of priorities," he stated. "We chose safety as our number one priority. Safety

for our employees, safety for their families, safety for our customers. We followed all the CDC guidelines. It has all worked out and we're so grateful that things are getting back to normal."

(McAleer's Plumbing, Heating & A/C has been a Blair County Chamber member since 1994.)

LBCY to welcome class



One of Pennsylvania's most highly-regarded youth leadership programs will welcome its 19th class on July 17th with an orientation at the Laurel Lodge.

Leadership Blair County Youth, which brings together high school sophomores from throughout Blair County, will consist of 25 students. The schools that will be represented are:

Altoona, Bellwood-Antis, Bishop Guilfoyle, Central, Claysburg-Kimmel, Hollidaysburg and Williamsburg.

Tami Chadick will once again serve as LBC Youth Program facilitator.

"We had more applicants for this year's program than we've had in several years," acknowledged Gwen Querry, the Chamber VP that provides oversight to the program.

LBCY - Class of 2022

MAXWELL BARONNER
Hollidaysburg

SHELBY BEAUCHAMP
Hollidaysburg

HOLLY BUTLER
Bishop Guilfoyle

CLAIRE CARPER
Williamsburg

CAMERON CLAYCOMB
Claysburg-Kimmel

JOYCE COTTLE
Claysburg-Kimmel

AVA DIXON
Hollidaysburg

ROWAN GORSUCH
Williamsburg

JORDAN HESCOX
Bellwood-Antis

OLIVIA HESS
Bellwood-Antis

RYAN HOSTLER
Bishop Guilfoyle

ISABELLA KNORR
Altoona

MELEAH LANG
Altoona

KAYLYNN LEIDIG
Central

MARY MCKEEGAN
Hollidaysburg

MARKLIN MYERS
Bishop Guilfoyle

ROGER ROYER
Williamsburg

ALYSSA SACCHIETELLA
Claysburg-Kimmel

JULIA SCHMITT
Altoona

CHANCE SCHREIER
Bellwood-Antis

HUNTER SMITH
Central

JULIANNA SQUIRES
Altoona

FINLEY STEINBUGL
Bishop Guilfoyle

MIRANDA TORNATORE
Bellwood-Antis

LANEY YOST
Altoona

Holiday Financial prides itself on loans with a personal touch

In the topsy-turvy world of pandemic winners and losers sits those happy people who suddenly found themselves with a nice clump of government stimulus money and the not-so-happy people whose livelihood is predicated on lending money.

Holiday Financial Services in Duncansville, which provides fast, friendly, individualized service for those looking to borrow for auto purchases, bill consolidation and home improvements, noticed a bit of a difference when Covid-19 reared its ugly head.

"At the beginning of the pandemic, our customers were borrowing for priority-based needs," explained Joe Strouse, company president. "Our lending demands did decrease as the result of the government incentives as I'm sure they did at other lenders. However, as a testament to our customers, they continued to make contact with our offices and fulfilled their financial obligations. I'm not sure everyone else was as fortunate."

Holiday Financial has the good fortune of being a wholly owned subsidiary of CNB Financial Corporation. The reputation of CNB along with its geographic footprint has helped Holiday Financial to gain a solid regional presence.

"We've been able to leverage the resources of a larger regional bank which enables us to provide more services for our customers, referral sources and employees alike," pointed out vice-president Frank Goss. "That makes an incredible difference."

Holiday Financial began operations in Sidman, PA in November 2005 by purchasing the performing loans of Holiday Consumer Discount Company. It now operates in



The Holiday Financial Services team consists of (seated): Jack Portser - Branch Manager, (from left): Diann Ogline - Operations Manager, Frank Goss - Vice-President and Joe Strouse - President.

nine markets; Bradford, Clarion, Clearfield, Duncansville, Ebensburg, Erie, Indiana, Johnstown and Ridgway.

"We provide loan solutions for customers that need personal or auto loans ranging from \$500 to \$25,000," Goss noted. "In addition HFS provides financing for local merchants. Our local Hollidaysburg Office has funded over 2,000 consumer loans in the past three years to help people in our local community meet their financial needs."

Holiday Financial's strategy during the past fifteen months, when it was most difficult to assess how to

move forward, was simply to do what it does best.

"Internally, we focused on new ways to provide access for our customers including online applications, online payments and improved methods of electronic communications, like text and email," Strouse disclosed. "We were able to remain open throughout the pandemic, fully staffed, allowing us to meet the needs of our customers. We anticipate our lending to return to pre-pandemic levels by year-end."

(Holiday Financial Services has been a Blair County Chamber member since 2006.)

Chamber supports fund

The ongoing challenges facing local hospitality businesses have caused the Blair County Chamber to petition lawmakers and rally other chambers to generate support for HR 3807 which would re-fund the Restaurant Revitalization Fund.

That fund was officially closed on June 30th after the \$28.6 billion that had been allocated was exhausted. All

told, only 28% of the applications that were received by the SBA were funded. The estimate of unfunded requests is nearly \$75 billion. The Chamber has asked Congressman John Joyce to cosponsor HR 3807.

"Our hospitality businesses continue to need our support and encouragement," acknowledged Chamber Board Chair Richard Fiore, Jr.



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