

HURD IMMUNITY

Spilling your guts

If you are a member of the Blair County Chamber, today officially begins your opportunity to tell us what a lousy job we're doing. Lucky you.

As part of the Chamber's Strategic Business Plan we are issuing not one but two surveys to our members. The first is a Membership Satisfaction Survey which identifies programs, events, benefits, common practices and organizational attitudes that the Chamber is already offering and asking if you love them, hate them or are somewhere in-between.

The second survey, which will be rolled-out in September, puts the onus on the members to identify things that they'd like to see the Chamber doing instead-of or in addition-to what we're doing now. It can be anything with the exception of replacing dues and sponsorships with beer drinking contests and bus trips to Rocky Gap.

But first things first. The Membership Satisfaction Survey is only ten questions and in true Survey Monkey form provides multiple choice options that will either make you confident in your answer or make you wish that the survey was true or false instead.

You will be asked to determine the relative merits of golden oldies like Breakfast Club and Business After Hours. That's just the beginning. Should the Chamber get more or less involved in political advocacy? Do we give too many awards or too few? Are things like sustainability, workplace wellness and data security important enough to commit time and resources to? Should knuckleheads like Joe Hurd be allowed to write newspaper columns on behalf of the organization?

We're hoping that members will take the time to share their thoughts on issues that we too often assume they're embracing. I had one member tell me that he hadn't been to a Breakfast Club since the time Bud Shuster talked about "that highway." He hadn't come back since he never really liked the eggs at the Ramada. We moved the Breakfast Club to The Casino eighteen years ago.

The challenge with surveys, especially as a membership organization, is that many of our members will realize that they don't really know enough about the Chamber to comment on what is relevant and what is no longer beneficial. As a result, we're initiating informational programs to encourage them to see what they've been missing.

Chamber members who haven't received the first survey by email can access it at www.blairchamber.com.

Hoss's—where friends and family gather

When your reputation is predicated on a concept like hospitality, the last thing you want to deal with is uncertainty. Hoss's Steak & Sea House, like most restaurants in Pennsylvania, was held hostage by a pandemic and the accompanying executive mandates to the degree that its future viability was seriously in question.

"Being shut down on two occasions put an overwhelming strain on our resources and considerable stress on our employees," admitted Hoss's President John Brown. "We had to make many difficult decisions. We are weathering the storm due to the loyalty of our customers and the hard work and dedication of our employees."

While many restaurants managed to survive Covid-19 by aggressively implementing takeout, Hoss's was at a bit of a disadvantage. They were never built that way, according to Brown.

"Since the salad bar is the core of our concept, the transition from dine-in to takeout wasn't a simple matter for us," he pointed



out. "Our salad bar offers more than 100 items including a variety of salad fixins, prepared salads, soups, fresh breads, a nacho bar and desserts. People make their choices individually and want to sit down and eat after those choices are made. That's not really conducive to takeout."

Once dining-in was permitted, the challenge moved to a different set of priorities.

"We were proactive in putting-in mitigation steps to make our salad bar area completely safe including gloves for guests and attendants, masks and frequent sanitary wipe-downs of all equipment," Brown explained. "We encouraged social distancing, appointed a salad bar attendant to monitor safe operation and established one point of entry and egress."

Hoss's has 31 locations



Brandon Soellner, general manager at Hoss's in Duncansville, prepares the salad bar prior to opening the restaurant. Hoss's salad bar remains a highlight of the dining experience.

and employs 1,241. The "31" number has remained solid throughout the pandemic. The "1,241" hasn't fared quite so well.

"Our biggest challenge at present is finding people to staff our restaurants," Brown acknowledged. "As sales continue to increase, the labor pool is lagging. We have open positions in all our locations. We un-

derstand that we're not alone. But we have to adjust our hours of operation in order to compensate."

Hoss's has made other accommodations including adjusting some of its pay policies, creating flexibility in terms of hours and getting more creative with scheduling.

"We have no hesitation to make changes when

changes are necessary," Brown noted. "But it's important that we stay true to our brand and our reputation. We'll continue to explore ways to improve both our menu and our service. We'll continue to evolve and improve for the new normal."

(Hoss's Steak and Sea House has been a Chamber Member since 1985.)

Lisa Mancinelli State Farm meets customer goals and expectations



Lisa Mancinelli's office in Hollidaysburg is a museum-like tribute to the many innovative programs initiated by State Farm during her 31 years in the insurance business.

In her 31-years with State Farm – 21 of those as an agent – Lisa Mancinelli has seen the twists and turns of the insurance industry and managed to build a loyal customer base as a result.

"Insurance is always changing so we are too," Mancinelli acknowledged. "Most of the changes mirror the changes in technology. New safety features in cars, new ways to connect and serve customers, new avenues to promote the brand all play a significant role in what we do. It's a challenge we enjoy."

Located at 719 Blair Street in Hollidaysburg, Lisa Mancinelli State Farm Insurance Agency is a full-service business serving all insurance and financial needs.

"My team loves to help

people and find the best way to meet a customer's goals and expectations," Mancinelli explained. "We help find a solution and provide top notch customer service."

"The important thing to our customers is that they know we care. Insurance is protecting those things that mean the most. Building relationships with our customers is a high priority for us as we help them realize their dreams for the future."

Making customers aware of the many opportunities offered by State Farm has been the basis of an advertising campaign that has hit the mark in so many relevant ways, according to Mancinelli. In other words, "Jake from State Farm" has created a buzz that agents can use as a conversation starter.

"It's made a difference for sure," she pointed out. "Insurance is not the most exciting subject for people so it's often hard to keep our message top-of-mind. I do a lot of local advertising and support community events, which raises some awareness. But it's State Farm's national presence supporting the message that often encourages people to call."

Unlike industry sectors adversely impacted by Covid-19, Mancinelli believes insurance may be seeing an upside.

"With the pandemic, more people have realized how important life insurance is and are getting a plan in place."

(Lisa Mancinelli State Farm Insurance Agency has been a Chamber member since 2000.)

Mindfulness pinnacle to health and wellness

As the business community focuses on winding-down from summer and heading into fall, the Blair County Chamber's Workplace Wellness Committee will devote its monthly Wellness Chat, set for this Friday from 8:30 to 9:00 a.m. on Zoom, to preparing the mind for the journey.

The guest speaker for the Chat will Sharon Green of Bloom Yoga & Wellness who offers a whole-being approach that provides alternative ways to help support people in responding to the conditions of 21st Century living. Her practices include Mindfulness, Breath Exploration, Joint Freeing Movements, Vibration, Brain Boost and Relaxation.

Green's presentation is entitled, "Free Your Mind... the Rest Will Follow." Her diverse wellness and movement education paired with serving in the recovery and mental health fields, provides a trauma sensitive approach to serving people's overall well-being.

Green has been practicing



Sharon Greene

and teaching yoga and mindfulness for more than two decades. She is a certified 500 hour Professional Kripalu Yoga teacher, licensed massage therapist and educator. Bloom Yoga & Wellness is located at 123 Union Avenue in Altoona.

There is no cost to Chamber members to participate in the Wellness Chat. Non-members can participate for \$10. To register (and get the Zoom Link), visit the Chamber Website at www.blairchamber.com.

Update Your Schedules...

With these Chamber Events

Breakfast Club Aug. 19th 7:45 a.m. The Casino	Business Excellence Dinner Oct. 21st 5:30 p.m. The Casino
Business After Hours Aug. 19th 5:00 - 7:00 p.m. Park Home	Farm-City Dinner November 10th - TBD
"Down on the Farm" Sept. 30th 5:00 - 7:00 p.m. Kulp Farm	Trade Show (Chamber and CBICC) November 17th Blair County Convention Center

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