



Busting-out the Resolutions

I was taken-to-task by a business associate last week who reminded me that I had failed to follow my past practice of devoting my first column of each year to New Year's Resolutions. And, horror-of horrors, the month is more than half over.

In case there are people still looking for guidance, I did some extensive research (4 minutes including a bathroom break) and found more than I bargained for. My google search sent me directly to a magazine called

InStyle which featured an article entitled, "Unexpected New Year's Resolutions That Will Actually Make Your Life Better."

I knew nothing about InStyle but always loved the intrigue associated with words like unexpected. So here's what I found:

1. "Commit to only doing exercise you actually like." I don't know about you but that would shorten my work-out dramatically. Likely down to 4 minutes (without a bathroom break).

2. "Hide your 'self' view on Zoom." Thanks to Zoom, apparently plastic surgeons have observed a spike in requests. Better to follow the lead of those who put their high school graduation photo on the screen. Or a beach scene.

3. "Examine your relationship with alcohol." Most of the people I know have already done that and are satisfied with the compatibility.

4. "Implement the 'Topless Test.'" This test, I've learned, recommends that you only spend time with friends you would take your top off in front of. It was after this resolution that I finally figured out that InStyle was a women's fashion magazine. Thank God. The mental images that this initially conjured-up would ruin anyone's New Year.

5. "Buy clothes that fit now." Just in case 4 minutes of exercise doesn't turn you into an Olympic athlete.

6. "Start Therapy." InStyle suggests an hour-a-week with a professional to discuss how you're doing. With less exercise, more alcohol and a sudden urge to select friends based on partial nudity, therapy might already be too late.

If ever there was a column that needed a disclaimer, this one might be it. Since I am not a subscriber to InStyle magazine, it is not my intention to disparage its attempt to help people navigate 2022. We're all seeking a way to make the best of whatever is to come.

Best of luck with your New Year's Resolutions, if they're still in play. See you on Zoom. Or not.

Joe Hurd
Blair County Chamber of Commerce

Rugger's inherit passion, loudness

Jay and Donnie Rugger have worked together for nearly a quarter-century. They have been brothers for much longer. As the top realm of the management team at Rugger Enterprises, LLC (d/b/a Spherion), the Rugger's have a number of similarities but even more differences, particularly in terms of career direction.

Jay has a B.S. Degree in Exercise Science from Penn State and is a Certified Health Fitness Instructor through the American College of Sports Medicine. His first job was at Great Lakes Rehabilitation Hospital in Erie. He now serves Spherion as franchise owner, President and CEO.

Donnie graduated with a B.S. in Geology from Waynesburg University. He is a registered hydrogeologist. His first job was as a Corporate Environmental Manager with British Hanson Industries in Pittsburgh. He now serves Spherion as franchise owner, Executive Vice-President and Corporate Secretary.

So what brought them

Working Together

back together? That would be their father, Don Rugger, Sr. who started the company in 1992 under the name Personnel Pool. Although no longer involved in the day-to-day operation, his influence remains strong.

"Our passion and loudness are likely part of our Italian genetics inherited from dad," Donnie acknowledged. "We've learned so much of this business from watching and listening to him. His knowledge of the industry is incredible."

Jay agreed. "We often quote two 'Don, Sr.-isms. One is that there is a job for every person and a person for every job. The other is, if you are not happy, why are you here? We've heard those two more than a few times."

Working together has been enjoyable for the brothers, mostly because of what each brings to the



Jay (left) and Donnie Rugger have traveled different career paths on their way to a great working relationship.

equation.

"We tend to agree on visions and goals," Jay pointed out. "Both of us learned from our dad to be calculated risk-takers. Donnie has great writing skills and does a lot of our contract review and other special project work. I'm the

person who will pick up the phone and call employees on a weekly basis about their performance."

There are also early differences that have evolved into similarities.

"In the past, it could have been argued that Donnie was the detail guy and I

was the bigger picture person," Jay admitted. Over time, we've grown more closely together in each of these roles. We've got a great working relationship."

(Spherion has been members of the Blair County Chamber since 1992.)

Ruga Rue Jerky and Banquet Hall building solid reputation for quality



Mark and Dori Stone have weathered the storm of a pandemic and managed to make Ruga Rue Jerky and Banquet Hall an up-and-coming business.

Keeping a business afloat during a pandemic is a feat that even some well-established companies have been unable to do. To accomplish such stability with essentially two unrelated businesses is next to impossible.

Just ask Mark and Dori Stone, owners of Ruga Rue Jerky and Banquet Hall. Located adjacent to Orchard Plaza in Altoona, Ruga Rue has been in business since 2017.

"We make handcrafted beef and turkey jerky," Mark explained. "It's made from top round steak, it's tender and packed full of flavor. We also have a banquet hall with a rustic feel that's available to rent for a memorable event."

The Banquet Hall was a throw-in but is showing potential.

"We wanted the building

because of the jerky kitchen. It fit our needs tremendously well," Mark noted. "The upstairs was so beautiful that we decided to turn it into a rental hall. It's a great place to hold a wedding. We only rent it out once a week because we don't have the staff to turn it over quickly."

But really, it's primarily about the jerky.

"We have a very high quality jerky that our customers love," Dori pointed out. "Having a good product is only half of it. The other half is customer service. We love giving samples and talking to people. We like to get to know our customers. Mark also loves giving tours of our kitchen. Everyone always comments on how clean it is and I always say that it had better be. Who wants to eat food from a dirty

kitchen?"

The process of making ends meet, according to the Stone's, continues to present a sizeable challenge.

"Prior to the pandemic, we sold our product at many festivals. That was our main source of income," Dori disclosed. "So once all the festivals shut down, it left us in a difficult situation. So we got USDA approval to start selling our jerky in stores."

"It's been a slow process getting back on track. Without excess income, it's been hard to advertise adequately. But we're feeling good about the direction we're headed and the encouragement we're getting from those who know our product."

(Ruga Rue has been members of the Blair County Chamber since 2020.)

Transportation issues gaining priority status



Tom Prestash (right), of PennDOT in Hollidaysburg, speaks to the Chamber's Transportation Committee about current projects. Assistant Executive Vince Greenland looks-on.

The Blair County Chamber's Transportation Committee is likely to have a busy 2022. The committee met in December and added a couple new items to an issues list already quite extensive.

"We've got a number of transportation topics that have moved from the periphery to the mainstream," explained Tracy Plessinger of the Altoona-Blair County Airport who chairs the committee. "We're fortunate to have a committee of knowledgeable people who are enthusiastic about making a positive difference in our county and beyond."

Among the high priority items are conversations regarding greater access to the City of Altoona from I-99. With greater funding potential through the federal infrastructure bill, former construction projects are back on the table, at least for discussion purposes. PennDOT District Executive Tom Prestash attended the committee meeting and laid-out the financial realities.

"We really need an additional source of access," believes Altoona Councilman Bruce Kelley. "There was

originally a Kettle Street Exit off I-99. Despite the cost, it might be a project that could be done in phases. It would also have some economic development opportunities associated with it."

Other discussion items at the December meeting included the need to have additional funding directed at further development of the Lower Trail and the creation of a plan to provide more dependable transportation options to visitors who would like to explore the county's attractions.

"None of these issues have easy solutions," Plessinger reminded. "But they all impact our overall transportation structure and in most cases they tie together. We're fortunate that we have a great working relationship with PennDOT and have had support from our elected officials."

"As a business organization, much of what our committee does is looks at ways that transportation can help business to operate more effectively. We've made progress in a number of ways and look forward to doing more in the near future."



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