



Sore fingers

A few mornings ago, under bites of oatmeal, an item in the Altoona Mirror caught my attention. Under the heading “25 Years Ago,” was a notice that on April 1, 1997, someone named Joe Hurd was hired by the Altoona-Blair County Chamber of Commerce as its new Assistant Executive Director.

I thought it rather appropriate, given my penchant for frivolous attempts at humor, that such a significant milestone would occur on April Fools Day. I thank the folks at the Altoona Mirror for dragging a treasured memory out of their archives.

Those archives have been a frequent repository for my thoughts and opinions. It started in 1999 with the Blair Business Mirror. That monthly publication, in which the Chamber had full rein to feature businesses and promote events, also included an opinion column called “Chamber Notes.”

I have never been hesitant to share my opinions although during my formative years I might have been a tad overzealous. As an eighth grader in Catholic school my geography teacher once told me, “Mr. Hurd, if conceit was pregnancy you’d be Mother of the World.” That teacher was a nun. Once I realized that she wasn’t complimenting me (I was conceited and stupid!), I saw the importance of toning it down.

By the time the decision was made to discontinue the Blair Business Mirror in 2020, I was ready for a change. Not only did I write Chamber Notes each month, I was also writing all the other stories in each issue as well as a weekly email newsletter. I’ve been told by a staff member who would know, that over the 21-years of the Blair Business Mirror, I’ve written nearly 3,000 stories.

The “Business Insight” page which appears each Monday in the Mirror has been a good replacement for the Business Mirror. It allows us to be more timely with letting people know what programs are coming up and it continues to provide sufficient space for featuring the many great businesses that make Blair County a great place to live and work.

My new column, “Hurd Immunity,” is a lot like my old column except it’s more of a blessing for our readers since it restricts me to a word count. Less of me is clearly better for you. I appreciate the ongoing support of people in our community and hope you keep reading.

HH Brown a longtime success story

When it comes time to boast of the businesses that have helped Blair County to maintain a vibrant economy, one longtime business doesn’t always appear near the top of the list. And that would constitute an extreme oversight.

HH Brown Shoe Company, known to many as Cove Shoe, has been operating in Martinsburg since the early 1950’s. The factory was originally owned by Evey Footwear, which produced lady’s dress footwear. HH Brown acquired the factory in the late 1970’s to produce heavy duty Goodyear welted footwear and continues operating the factory today.

“A lot of people, even in the Cove, don’t know a lot about us,” acknowledges Scott Rhodes, a local guy who serves as Human Resources Director at the factory. “HH Brown has produced more than 30 million pairs of footwear in Martinsburg. We make and distribute more than 20,000 pairs of shoes weekly throughout North America from our Martinsburg distribution center.”

All domestically made Carolina and Double-H Boots are made in Martinsburg. The company’s portfolio of brands also includes Matterhorn & Corcoran, along with being the exclusive supplier of Pro Warrington boots for municipal firefighters.

“Today, our products are sold all over the world to customers seeking true quality craftsmanship with excellent value,” Rhodes explained. “From consumers looking for comfortable work shoes and boots to trade professionals, soldiers and law enforcement officers who all demand safety, durability and all-day support, along with the very best in comfort, fit and performance.”

According to Rhodes, the aspect of high quality is no accident.

“For the past 25-years HH Brown has been a proud member of the Berkshire Hathaway family of companies and a global leader in the footwear industry with an unparalleled reputation for quality craftsmanship. We are driven by the desire to make the best



Marissa Martin, Quality Manager at HH Brown Shoe Company, makes a stitching repair on a pair of HH western boots.

shoes and boots possible.”

The Martinsburg operation currently has 300 employees while the parent company employs 1,000 nationwide.

“We have great people working here who take considerable pride in what we do,” Rhodes admitted. “We work only one shift a day,

five days a week. Throughout the pandemic, our business and production remained strong. Our workforce was able to adapt to all local, state and federal guidelines.”

Still, as Rhodes looks at the challenges of the next 25-years, workforce is likely to be front-and-center.

“Maintaining a strong workforce for domestic production, like other businesses in our community, will be something to keep an eye on along with continuing to produce competitively priced goods.”

(HH Brown has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 1987.)

Wellness center for patients is crucial to Health First vision



Beth and Michael Vipond have played an integral part in the creation and development of Health First Chiropractic.

Wellness takes on many forms and for healthcare providers, the challenges are finding the most effective ways to deliver services to a patient population with constantly-changing priorities.

Health First Chiropractic at 1554 Valley View Blvd. in Altoona has created a modern office with a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. A recent renovation allowed the business to accommodate a larger volume of patients. With multiple doctors and massage therapists, they are able to take a team approach to wellness that has caught the attention of the community.

“We pride ourselves in not only addressing our patients’ expectations for their long-term recovery, but also address lifestyle factors, complimentary exercises and nutrition advice to promote long-term wellness,” explained Beth Vipond, Health First’s business man-

ager. “Patients are now able to schedule online and communicate through text to our front desk”

Dr. Michael Vipond started his chiropractic practice in 1989 and in 2005 founded Health First of Blair County. The business currently employs three chiropractic physicians – Dr. Vipond, Dr. Eddy Luke and Dr. Lindsey Kosicki. The staff also includes two licensed massage therapists, an office manager and a front desk manager.

Massage therapy, Beth Vipond believes, has provided an aspect to chiropractic that has made a critical difference in patient satisfaction.

“With the changes at our facility, we can create a spa-like feeling in a professional setting,” she pointed out. “We can accommodate everyone, even if they don’t receive chiropractic services in our office. We have experienced tremendous growth in our massage ther-

apy practice due to increased health insurance coverage.

“Our patients have noted a greater benefit with the option of receiving massage therapy with their chiropractic treatment. Many patients will schedule monthly maintenance visits for chiropractic and massage in one session.”

Covid-19 also changed the focus of providers like Health First.

“It’s gratifying that even with a reduced staff, we were able to care for the needs of first-line workers who were extremely overworked and stressed,” Beth Vipond noted. “Injuries like sprains and strains were more frequent and the transition to working from home increased the frequency of upper back and neck complaints.

“We were fortunate to be in a position to help people and we look forward to doing that in the future.”

(Health First has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 2006.)

Pittsburgh Pirates development coach to address Chamber

If the Pittsburgh Pirates are to make significant strides in 2022, John Baker will likely be the guy who can make that happen.

Baker is the new Director of Coaching and Player Development for the Pirates. He was in a similar role for the past five years with the Chicago Cubs and had a playing career with the Cubs, the Los Angeles Dodgers and the Seattle Mariners.

Baker will be the keynote speaker at the next Chamber “Breakfast Club,” to be held this Thursday, April 14th beginning at 7:45 a.m. at The Casino at Lakemont Park. He is tasked with overseeing a player development system that must be great for the Pirates to create the sustainable contending team they want in Pittsburgh.

“We are excited to add John to our baseball operations leadership team,” explained Pirates General Manager Ben Cherington.



John Baker

“His experience as a player will be an asset to his new role.” Cherington spoke at last year’s Chamber event, which was done as a luncheon.

The cost to attend the Breakfast Club is \$20 for Chamber members and \$30 for non-members. A buffet breakfast is included. To register, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at www.blairchamber.com. Corporate sponsor of the April Breakfast Club is Lion Country Lodging.

Business Before Hours slated for April 12th

The Blair County Chamber will hold a Business Before Hours and Ribbon Cutting on April 12th from 7:30 to 9:00 a.m. at Pleasant Valley Notary & Services, located at 1216 Pleasant Valley Blvd., Suite 210 in Altoona.

Pleasant Valley provides fast, courteous services that allow customers to obtain all PennDOT documents

and notary services without delay.

There is no cost for Chamber members to attend; non-members can attend for \$10. The ribbon cutting begins at 7:30.

Stop-by, grab a bite to eat and learn about this business! To register, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at www.blairchamber.com.

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