

Are we welcoming?

Every Saturday morning, for what must seem like an eternity to my family, I have eaten the same breakfast – corned beef hash, skillet-fried, covered by three eggs, over easy. The smell is very distinctive and to the non-ficionado a justifiable reason to take refuge in another part of the house.

As much as I sometimes enjoy being branded as a creature of habit, I have to admit that my breakfast obsession is clearly on a downward path. The eggs are holding their own. The hash is starting to smell like an old catcher's mitt.

In what may seem to be a weird parallel, workforce development has taken a similar route with me. As invigorating as it can be to play a part in some company's hiring success, it never quite loses that "whack-a-mole" feeling. My mallet is hitting more targets but those targets seem to be bouncing back with more determination.

Unlike the corned beef hash, which I could forego as a meal choice for, say, a year or two, workforce development is on the menu as an appetizer, an entree and a dessert. A county like Blair could get mighty hungry if we lose sight of any opportunity to explore whatever options make the most sense. Currently, one of those options is within our reach but has never gained priority status.

Last month, the Chamber's Executive Roundtable heard a presentation from Michael Ross, President of the Franklin County Area Development Corporation. Like Blair County, Franklin County has many outstanding businesses. Unlike Blair County, Franklin is having success in growing a diverse workforce that is paving the way for business recruitment and expansion.

The most significant group of new workers comes from a Latino population that has been part of Franklin County's agricultural workforce for many years. According to Ross, the community has embraced the infusion into other industry sectors.

"The people are family-oriented, religious and are exceptionally hard workers," Ross pointed out. "They have made a considerable difference here."

Four different times during his presentation, Ross used the word "welcoming" in regard to how the Franklin County community has adapted to new co-workers who have also become new neighbors. In many ways, he believes, the cultural benefits outweigh the workplace ones.

So where does that leave us? That remains to be seen. The Roundtable meeting generated many concerns. It's clearly time to address them.

Peterson happy to change with the times

Joel Peterson readily admits that the secret to being successful isn't all that complicated. Since his company – Clearfield Wholesale Paper Company – is celebrating its 100th year in business during 2022, the 63-year old company president must know what he's talking about. Joel is a graduate of Penn State/Dubois and he and his wife Cindy live in Clearfield.

The Chamber: Your company is marking 100 years in business. What factors contribute to that level of longevity?

Joel: Customer service is the key to our business as well as having a dedicated work force. We also are truly blessed to have survived many economic, environmental and employment issues over many years. The ability to change with the times is a key component of our business survival. Lately, technology has left the best effect on our business as we continue to grow. Continued investment in our company's infrastructure, such as warehouse design and scan gun inventory innovation makes us more efficient.

Chamber Q&A

The Chamber: What would people be surprised to know about Clearfield Wholesale Paper Company?

Joel: We have free delivery and no minimum dollar amount to purchase in our delivery/service area. We service the central Pennsylvania region from Bradford to Bedford and Blairsville to Bellefonte. We have the ability to do personnel maintenance training for keeping a facility clean and safe. CWP stocks over 4000 items and has access to 35,000 items within one day.

The Chamber: What would people be surprised to know about Joel Peterson?

Joel: Currently serving on the CNB (County National Bank) board of directors for 11 years. Past President of the Clearfield YMCA. Past Council President of the Bucktail Council of the Boy Scouts of America. Past Chairman of the Clearfield/Jefferson County Regional Airport Authority. Current Development Chairman of the (DEF)

Dubois Educational Foundation for Penn State/Dubois. Deacon and Trustee for the Clearfield Presbyterian Church. I continue to run in 5K races, golf events, Racquet Ball, and canoeing. I have also traveled many parts of the world and the US.

The Chamber: With staffing issues and supply chain challenges, how did CWP's strategy adjust to the new realities of the business world?

Joel: CWP has had issues with employee challenges, mostly in the driver/warehouse area. We are now fully staffed and ready to continue serving our customers. Good working environment, competitive pay rates and benefits are what has attracted our employees. With our network of service providers we are able to keep a 90 to 95% fill rate of orders. Our on-line system lets our customers know what items we have, their cost and their availability.

The Chamber: Who are your personal and professional role models and what makes them special?

Joel: My father Henry who was a fantastic salesman and my Cousin Al who dealt with the day to day opera-



Joel Peterson places a high priority on customer service and credits his staff with the company's longevity.

tions were good mentors. Following in their footsteps, I find myself repeating many of their positive life scenarios to help CWP be a nice place to work.

The Chamber: What's still on Joel Peterson's

bucket list?

Joel: First to make sure that the company continues to grow in the future and eventually be able to enjoy more traveling with my wife. Then to hike the Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine.

The incredible value of Chamber volunteers

Among the conclusions that can be drawn from last month's successful Highmark/Chamber Golf Classic is that business people enjoy getting out of the office to network and that the Blair County Chamber would not be able to hold such a well-organized event without a cadre or willing volunteers.

"Without our volunteers, this event looks a lot different," acknowledges Stacy Hoover, the VP who oversees the Golf Classic. "They handle the details that guarantee that the day goes well."

So why do they do it? "Volunteering brings a positive impact on our awesome community," admits Debbie Eckenrode of Farmer's Insurance, who spent most of the day selling chances to help raise additional dollars for the Chamber.

"The need for volunteers

is always there and my employer offers me the flexibility to take time off to volunteer," stated Cory Gehret of Stiffler McGraw, who also serves on the Chamber Board. Gehret and volunteer Shelley Clinich collected play-it-forward coupons on the 6th Hole and also sold 50-50 tickets.

"I'm new to the Chamber but appreciate the opportunity to help businesses increase their exposure," Clinich pointed out. "This is really a great event for that."

Brandi Noye of Doing Better Business is a volunteer with a leadership role in the Golf Classic. She is the vice-chair of the Golf Committee that plans and executes the event.

"Our volunteers recognize that this is a fundraiser which allows the Chamber to do programs that are non-revenue generating," Noye explained. "They really enjoy helping-out because they know it's for a good



Brandi Noye, vice-chair of the Chamber's Golf Committee, hands a snack item to Paul Randazzo at the Highmark/Chamber Golf Classic.

cause."

Perhaps the longest tenured volunteer at the Golf Classic is Chair of the Chamber Ambassadors

Sherry Stayer. Like many of the other volunteers, she assists the Chamber in many ways and has made a critical difference in numerous pro-

grams and events. "It's rewarding and I'm sure I gain more than I give by volunteering," she concluded.

Judicial Independence is topic of Chamber "Breakfast Club"

Judicial Independence, so critical to preserving the unbiased interpretation of the U.S. Constitution, is being threatened by political partisanship and the consequences are likely to impact the business community.

To put the situation into perspective, the Chamber will feature Judge D. Brooks Smith as the keynote speaker for its next "Breakfast Club" program. The title of Judge Smith's presentation will be: "Judicial Independence in a Divided America."

Judge Smith is a senior judge on the Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit

and previously served as that Court's Chief Judge. He has been a judge for more than 37-years, having begun his judicial career on the Court of Common Pleas of Blair County. Judge Smith assumed Senior Judge status in 2021. He currently teaches courses at Penn State Law.

The Breakfast Club will be held on June 9th, beginning at 7:45 a.m. at The Casino at Lakemont Park. The cost to attend 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



The Honorable D. Brooks Smith

register online at www.blairchamber.com. Corporate sponsor of the June Breakfast Club is Pinacle Cleaning Services.

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