

## Small Tube Products observing 75th anniversary

Manufacturing has played a significant role in the growth of the Blair County business community. Despite some losses in that industry sector, several longtime manufacturers have continued to flourish here through astute management and the commitment to a strong labor force. One of them is celebrating 75 years in business during 2022.

Small Tube Products, located in Duncansville, was founded in Waterbury, Connecticut in 1947 by two entrepreneurs – Edward Oliphant and Alex Campbell – who believed that a market existed for niche-type copper and brass alloy products. The company started in a 16,000 square foot facility and employed less than ten people. It grew quickly.

By 1957, Small Tube Products had sales of more than \$1.5 million and had outgrown its manufacturing space. The decision was made to relocate the plant to Duncansville which had an abundant supply of skilled labor created by the

railroad industry and whose location was in closer proximity to the company's customer base and raw material suppliers. In 1958, a total of 34 core employees and managers made the move into the 52,000 square foot facility at 200 Oliphant Drive.

Today, Small Tube Products employs 190 and continues to maintain a high standard of production and customer satisfaction. Among its biggest fans is Vince Bushell, the company's President & CEO who has been in that role for less than two years.

"Having worked at two much larger brass mills and stepping through manufacturing operations around the world, I can tell you that Small Tube Products has the best culture of collaboration I've ever seen," Bushell acknowledged. "The results show. The employee engagement and attention to detail are second-to-none."

The company is very well diversified. It operates in a wide variety of markets that include heat transfer, elec-

trical, welding, military, plumbing and more.

"As one great leader used to say, our tubes are in everything from satellites to submarines," Bushell pointed out. The diversity in market segmentation has allowed Small Tube Products to weather many economic storms; while one or two markets may be struggling, five or six others continue to generate enough demand to support the workforce.

The culture of collaboration for which Bushell has such high regard has allowed Small Tube Products to get beyond some of the obstacles that have kept other manufacturers from moving forward.

"Supply chain disruptions and manpower shortages in Blair County and across the country have been the primary challenges these past two years," he explained. "Through collaboration, we've been able to address these challenges head-on with creative and constructive alternative solutions to make the most of what we've got to satisfy our customers. Last year we



Adam Oster, a #4-54 operator at Small Tube Products, is one of the many outstanding team members that make the company successful.

were on allocation with 100% of our suppliers and we still shipped the highest volume in nine years."

The employees, Bushell emphasized, are still the catalysts to the company's success.

"The work ethic and can-do attitude are incredible here," he noted. "Our team

is comprised of men and women from throughout the area whose approach to problem-solving speaks volumes about their upbringing and strong appreciation for this area."

It makes for a bright future for the company.

"We definitely have plans for growth," Bushell admit-

ted. "The Kothar Group, our corporate ownership, has been investing resources that are focused on growing all of their business units with Small Tube Products at the forefront."

(Small Tube Products has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 2001.)

## Stern enjoys opportunities at Homewood

Robin Stern is the new kid on the block at Homewood Retirement Center in Martinsburg but hardly new to the industry or the area. She became Executive Director at Homewood in January after having served in the field of aging services as a social worker, admissions coordinator, nursing home administrator and V.P. of Operations. The Central High School graduate has a degree in Social Work from Juniata College and a Masters in Management from Webster University. Robin and her husband Brian live in Roaring Spring.

**The Chamber:** You have been in long-term care for quite a while. What attracted you to that industry?

**Robin:** When I started out as a social worker in a local nursing home, it wasn't my intent to work in this industry. I soon discovered that I enjoyed working with residents and their families. Everyone has an interesting story to share. I also enjoy working with a team that has different areas of expertise to bring the best care and a variety of services to residents. No two days are ever the same.

**The Chamber:** With all the challenges that Covid-19 has thrown at long-term care, have you seen any potential opportunities emerge from the pandemic?

**Robin:** The use of technology, beyond the electronic medical record, has been accelerated. We are now asking how technology might help us solve a problem or work more efficiently.



Although Robin Stern had no intention of working in long term care, she found it to be a good career choice.

## Chamber Q&A

**The Chamber:** Homewood Retirement Centers is preparing to celebrate its 90th anniversary. What has made it so successful?

**Robin:** Homewood was founded in 1932, during the Great Depression, when churches often stepped in to provide care to the indigent elderly. Homewood at Martinsburg opened in 1974. I attribute the success of this organization to an unwavering commitment to its mission of providing compassionate, professional and caring services to enhance the quality of life for residents and co-workers. That

commitment has included the expansion of our campuses to include independent living cottages and apartments, assisted living and memory care, along with options for dining and fitness centers with swimming pools. The Martinsburg campus is especially proud of the Givler Cultural Center, where we frequently host professional performances including the Altoona Symphony Orchestra and nationally known musical groups, in addition to holding spiritual and social activities.

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

**Robin:** I've been fortunate to have many role models throughout my career. They were all people who

encouraged me to not copy how they did something but to use my gifts to get the task done. They were also people who gave me honest feedback and often challenged me to step outside my comfort zone.

**The Chamber:** Was there a particular career direction that interested you other than what you're doing now? Any regrets about not following it?

**Robin:** I've never looked for a job outside the field I'm working in. I am fortunate to have been able to grow professionally and work in a variety of roles within this dynamic industry.

**The Chamber:** What's still on Robin Stern's bucket list?

**Robin:** I would like to travel more and grow the perfect pumpkin in our garden.

## LBC Fellows program recognizes two leaders



Nancy McClelland, left, and Sherri Stayer have played important roles in the ongoing success of Leadership Blair County.

As the 28th class of the Chamber's Leadership Blair County program returns from its two-day retreat, highlighted by numerous discussions on the importance of servant leadership, two graduates of that program are still enjoying the rewards made possible by helping to promote that concept.

On September 23rd, Nancy McClelland and Sherri Stayer became the newest LBC "Fellows" for their outstanding commitment to the program. The recognition came at the Leadership Blair County Alumni Breakfast. The honorees were not made aware of the presentations in advance.

"It was a complete shock," McClelland, a retired banker with Reliance Bank, admitted. "I have so much regard for the LBC program and it has made such a profound impact on my career. I've certainly gained more from the experience than I've given."

Stayer had much the

same reaction.

"It's an incredible honor," she acknowledged. "I've stayed involved with LBC because I've experienced, first hand, the many benefits associated with the program. When I look at the other people who have been selected as Fellows, it's hard for me to believe that I belong in that same category." Stayer is Operations Manager/Business Development Specialist at PS Solutions in Altoona.

Jodi Cessna, who chairs the LBC Alumni Committee and is an LBC Fellow, is not surprised that the two new Fellows are questioning their selections.

"In its truest sense," Cessna noted, "this is an award for individuals who are convinced that they do not deserve it. Nancy and Sherri are not only servant leaders, they are extremely humble as well."

For more information on Leadership Blair County, contact the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or go to [www.blairchamber.com](http://www.blairchamber.com).

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