

Winter 2021

geauga BUSINESS

Guided by Faith, Inspired to Serve



PLUS:

Flambeau: A Legacy of Excellence

Company 119: A Red-Hot Choice for Digital Marketing Services

MVP Plastics Is Leading by Example

Solon Manufacturing: Where Engineering Innovation Lives

And much more...

Contents

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2 GUIDED BY FAITH, INSPIRED TO SERVE

6 A LEGACY OF EXCELLENCE

10 COMPANY 119 A RED-HOT CHOICE FOR DIGITAL MARKETING SERVICES

14 LEADING BY EXAMPLE

**17 FOUNDATION FOR GEUGA PARKS ANNOUNCES
PRESTON SUPERSTORE AS LEAD BUSINESS PARTNER**

18 SOLON MANUFACTURING: WHERE ENGINEERING INNOVATION LIVES

22 SETTING THE PERFECT TEMPO FOR SUCCESS

24 LEADERSHIP GEUGA DEVELOPS PROGRAM FOR RETIREES

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On the cover: Barbara Titus and Actor Gary Sinise reenact the famous bus scene in the movie, *Forest Gump*. Yes, life is like a box of chocolates!

Letter from the Editor



Dear Business Leaders,

As *Geauga Business* magazine celebrates its 10-year anniversary of publication, Chris Yuhasz and I would like to thank our local businesses and community leaders for their encouragement and support through the years. We have met many creative, knowledgeable, successful Geauga County business owners and CEOs, and it has been our honor to share their inspiring stories with our readers.



In this issue of *Geauga Business*, we celebrate the grit and determination of Barbara Titus. In addition to her demanding career as Vice President of International Sales and Operations at Sheoga Hardwood Flooring and Paneling in Middlefield, Ohio -- a notable achievement in itself -- her passion and dedication to helping military veterans and their families are unshakable. She has spent thousands of hours raising money and in-kind donations for the Gary Sinise Foundation, particularly in its work building specially adapted Smart homes for our wounded heroes. Additionally, Barbara serves on the Valor Retreat Board, a local, nonprofit organization planning to build a retreat in Hocking Hills, Ohio so our returning combat veterans and their families can enjoy a free vacation and reunite after the ravages of war. She would be happy to meet with you to discuss how you can also become involved in this rewarding work!

Then there is Jason Sauey, President and CEO of the Nordic Group, of which Flambeau, located in Middlefield Village, is the largest of its companies. Jason is following in his late father's footsteps as he steers the 16-member companies forward despite the recent challenges of a worldwide pandemic. In this article, Jason describes growing up with his dad, W.R. Sauey, and he shares the six family and corporate values that guide his decision-making in business and life.

I hope you enjoy these and other articles in this issue of *Geauga Business*. Please feel free to email me information on what is happening within your business at margiewilber@write2thepoint.com.

With Great Appreciation,

Margie Wilber
Editor-in-Chief/Publisher, Geauga Business
President, Write 2 the Point

Chris Yuhasz
Publisher, Geauga Business
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Guided by Faith, Inspired to

BY MARGIE WILBER

Barbara Titus likes to borrow the words of author Mark Twain: *"The two most important days of your life are the day you were born and the day you figure out why."*

Barbara discovered her "why" in her early 40s, inspiring her to serve those active in or veterans of the U.S. Armed Services, those who have given so much for the freedoms we enjoy in the United States.

"I learned early on not to take life for granted," Barbara says. "I have lived in many places throughout my life. My dad worked for Ford Motor Credit and was frequently transferred. Many of these places were in Northeastern United States, with the longest stint in Madison, Ohio. As fate would have it, this was the best place for me as I became increasingly ill in my early teens. Cleveland Clinic, University Hospitals Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital, and later UH Geauga Medical Center were where I lived more than anywhere else, with months spent on floors with other young people who had diseases that could not be cured. All my high school and college education was mostly self-taught with the help of some high school tutors, long before remote learning was popular. It was a huge struggle, but it taught me the need to be self-sufficient, responsible, focused and compassionate. Years and years of medical issues would result in the constant question in my mind: Why does God continue to restore me?"

"In 1977, my family came to Burton after church for a pancake breakfast. I felt a spiritual connection to the town of Burton," Barbara recalls. "I told my parents that day, 'When I grow up, I'm going to live in this town.' They laughed and prayed I would have that opportunity. Seven years and many health trials later, I moved into an apartment across from the Masonic Temple on North Cheshire. My husband Mark, the best support person I could pray for, would enter my life soon after."

A college graduate, Barbara worked in accounting for several companies before joining Sheoga Hardwood Flooring in 1991 at the bequest of its owner nine years after they began manufacturing hardwood flooring. "In 1993, I traveled to Dallas to attend the National Wood Flooring Association's trade show and met our first international partner. Today, Sheoga sells quality flooring throughout the U.S., Canada, Singapore, Malaysia, Japan and Saudi Arabia," Barbara states.

As Vice President of International Sales and Operations at Sheoga Hardwood Flooring and Paneling, headquartered in Middlefield, Ohio, Barbara has a busy plate. National and international travel are a given. "I am also responsible for overseeing 70+ office, sales and production employees," Barbara adds. "I work with some of the best people I know, whose integrity and commitment to quality make me continually strive to do better." Barbara is also a minority owner of Sheoga Hardwood Flooring.

BARBARA'S "WHY"

"God had more plans for me. In my 40s, I finally met the right team of physicians who brought about a 'remission' with good health and renewed strength. It was finally time to focus on others," Barbara says. "Loyalty and genuineness are two traits I value, and I hope I personify. I see these traits in our retired and active-duty veterans, and I am drawn to it."

In 2014, The Geauga County businesswoman says she discovered her "why" when she learned about a young U.S. military veteran who had suffered catastrophic injuries overseas, losing both legs and his left arm.

"The Gary Sinise Foundation (GSF) was building him a specially adapted Smart home in Marietta, Ohio, and I wanted to help. I called the mayor of Marietta and asked how I could get in touch with the team working on the house, so Sheoga and I could supply the hardwood floors throughout the house. At the home dedication some months later, I finally met the team from the Gary Sinise Foundation, and I knew I had to do more."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

Serve

“I work with some of the best people I know, whose integrity and commitment to quality make me continually strive to do better.”

- Barbara Titus, Vice President of International Sales and Operations at Sheoga Hardwood Flooring and Paneling



Guided by Faith, Inspired to Serve

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Barbara wholeheartedly agrees with GSF Founder, Gary Sinise, who portrayed Lt. Dan in the movie *Forrest Gump*, who says, "Freedom and security are precious gifts that we, as Americans, should never take for granted. We must do all we can to extend our hand in times of need to those who willingly sacrifice each day to provide that freedom and security. While we can never do enough to show gratitude to our nation's defenders, we can always do a little more." GSF's R.I.S.E program, an acronym for Restore Independence, Supporting Empowerment, helps those who sacrifice to defend our country: Combat veterans, first responders, and their loved ones.

"Gary has dedicated his life to helping our veterans and first responders, starting with his work at the Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago and expanding to include GSF and even concerts by his Lt. Dan Band to lift the spirits and morale of our heroes, their families and those in need. His mission resonates with my soul!"

"I prayed for direction, and God opened doors. Initially I reached out to the National Wood Flooring Association's (NWFA) CEO and COO who helped me formulate a plan to utilize all aspects of the hardwood flooring industry to supply high-cost products for these homes," Barbara says. "With their support, I engaged other national associations for granite countertops, exterior stone for cladding and patios, and interior tile work for critically important, modified bathrooms and kitchens. Together, these proud, loyal, and patriotic companies and associations have supplied more than \$6 million in products, installation and logistics and completed 53 homes since 2015. Please understand, this is not about what I have done but what we have done together. I am so honored and proud of every individual and company that has committed their time, treasures and talents in support of our veterans and first responders."

In 2018, Barbara had an opportunity to meet a local businessman who wanted to stop the scourge of suicide among returning military service personnel.

Larry Teichman, a former U.S. veteran and founder of Caritas Financial, in Chesterland, pledged his property in Hocking Hills, Ohio to build a retreat to allow a free week-long respite for these national heroes. With Barbara leading the fundraising effort, the VALOR Retreat Board was formed and is currently trying to raise \$2 million for the development and construction of handicap-accessible cabins and a lodge. "The retreat will provide a free recreational facility for combat veterans, their families, and Gold Star families, offering them a tranquil environment to recover from the ravages of conflict, to heal and reconnect with nature and one another," describes Barbara, who serves as Vice President on the VALOR Retreat Board. "VALOR Retreat gives me the opportunity to continue to serve our deserving veterans at a local level. I am excited to show everyone what we can do with their help."

**USMC Sgt Nick Kimmel,
Gary Sinise and
Barbara Titus**





US Army SFC Michael Schlitz and Barbara Titus



Barbara Titus and USMC SSgt Jason Ross with his family



US Army Corporate Kyle Hockenberry and his family

“I am so honored and proud of every individual and company that has committed their time, treasures and talents in support of our veterans and first responders.” – Barbara Titus

Mental health support for our warriors is an issue for which we must all be concerned,” she emphatically adds. “The battles do not end when the fighting stops. The latency of mental injury is showing itself in our combat veterans, and we are ill equipped to help these brave men and women who have witnessed and battled in unprecedented conditions. We are hopeful that places like VALOR Retreat will provide a place of rest and recovery with restorative modalities offered such as equine therapy, archery, and family counseling.”

In 2020, Barbara received a phone call from her hero, Gary Sinise, who invited her to join the Gary Sinise Foundation Board of Directors. She describes, “My fellow Board members are two immensely talented businessmen, a 4-Star (Retired) Army General, a Purple Heart combat-wounded (Retired) Army Colonel, the Executive Director of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation, and of course, Chairman Gary Sinise. Someone pinch me! This is not possible in my little world, but I am so happy to fulfill this honor.”

ADDITIONAL SERVICE

Barbara’s service does not end with military veterans. The passionate, high-energy dynamo serves as the President/Chairwoman of the Geauga Credit Union, on the University Hospitals Leadership Council, and as an active member of the Geauga Growth Partnership’s Intern program. This program provides paid internship opportunities for junior and senior high school students who learn all facets of a business during the summer months. Barbara has spent countless hours interviewing, training, and building resumes of young men and women throughout Geauga County.

Leadership Geauga, a community-based, nonprofit organization working to develop and encourage current and future leaders from a cross section of Geauga County, announced Barbara Titus is the 2021 Emerald Leader Award recipient. This award is presented annually to an individual, a business and/or a nonprofit agency that exemplifies outstanding leadership by positive contributions through volunteerism, philanthropy, or innovation that impact the quality of life in Geauga County.

Melanie Scanlon, Executive Director of Leadership Geauga, says, “Barbara brings her business acumen, and her deep commitment to public service to charitable organizations focused on the needs of veterans. She worked with a local Middlefield-based charity, Santa’s Hide-a-Way Hollow, to add a Veterans Day at the North Pole event to its annual schedule. Disabled vets from across NE Ohio enjoy a family picnic, fishing, haircuts, and visits with their families and Santa at a re-creation of the North Pole in Middlefield.”

Barbara refuses to slow down. “I understood the value and fragility of life early on. With my personal struggles and watching many young people lose their battles to cancer and cystic fibrosis, I learned to value every single day – good or bad. My dad and mom taught me service, with Dad serving in the Army National Guard for years and Mom as an RN, nursing our veterans at the VA early in her career and then caring for the most critically ill patients in hospital ICUs. My faith in God renews my strength and compels me to serve.”

A true woman of faith, role model, and Christian soldier, the Geauga Business Magazine’s editorial staff salutes you! 🇺🇸

If you would like to donate to the Gary Sinise Foundation or Valor Retreat, visit garysinisefoundation.org on a national level or valorretreat.org on a local level. These organizations put our warriors and their families in the forefront, honoring their sacrifices.

A Legacy of Excellence

BY MARGIE WILBER

“Work. Work. Work. Perseverance is the most important thing that I had.”

- W.R. Sauey, Founder, Flambeau Inc.



(center) Jason Sauey and his parents at Jason's graduation.

William Raymond Sauey, founder of Flambeau, Inc. died last year -- unquestionably a great loss for the Sauey family, the Geauga business community and beyond. Known simply by many as W.R., he left behind a legacy guided by six personal and corporate values: family, integrity, leadership, teamwork, knowledge, and excellence. Today, his son Jason, President and CEO of Flambeau, embraces these same values as he steers the Nordic Group's 16 member companies -- of which Flambeau is the largest -- forward.

Flambeau manufactures a diverse range of injection- and blow-molded thermoplastic components and products for industrial and consumer customers all over the world. Other companies under the "Nordic Group" umbrella include Duncan Toys (If it isn't Duncan, it isn't a Yo-Yo!), ArtBin, Flambeau Cases, Flambeau Europe, Flambeau Hardware, Flambeau Medical Markets Group, Flambeau Outdoors, Flambeau Premiums

Stadium Building Products, The Neat Nursery Company, Columbia ParCar Corp., and Seats, Inc.

Flambeau has 10 operating/manufacturing facilities in the U.S. and two abroad (UK and Mexico). Its U.S. manufacturing facilities are in Middlefield, Ohio; Baraboo, Wisconsin; Phoenix, Arizona; Columbus, Indiana; Madison, Georgia, and Sharon Center, Ohio. Columbia has locations in Reedsburg, Wisconsin and Leesburg, Florida while Seats' facilities are in Reedsburg, Wisconsin; Chariton, Iowa; Springhill, Kansas and in Mexico.

Despite Flambeau's (and Nordic Group's) tremendous success, Jason is quick to acknowledge the company's humble beginnings.

"My father was fascinated with business -- starting at an early age. He had a very entrepreneurial and inventive mind and an energy level to match," Jason affectionately describes. "He was the consummate salesman. His first job was selling magazines -- The Saturday Evening Post



and Ladies' Home Journal -- at the age of 10, even though the magazine salespeople were supposed to be at least age 12. Dad lied about his age and became the top sales 'boy' in the country."

W.R. Sauey enlisted in the Marine Corps in the summer of 1945. "My dad was proud of his service in the Marines; it reinforced a lot of his beliefs and his self-image as a rugged individualist," Jason states.

Upon returning home from the service, W.R. Sauey and his brother Ed combined their savings, along with a \$2,000 loan, to purchase parts to build a handmade, injection-molding machine. The young entrepreneurs began manufacturing the Halik Frog fishing lure in a 14 X 40 ft. building in Bruce, Wisconsin. From this small bait, Flambeau, Inc. was born.

"Perhaps what I am most proud of in my father is that he was driven to always spend his time in what he viewed as a 'productive' manner," Jason described in his dad's eulogy. "He always sincerely wanted to take care of and make a positive impact on his responsibilities -- his family, his business, his church, his community, and his country... He was raised with the belief in the importance of work and the need to apply his energies towards productive ends."

Jason continued, "A good part of his career included trying new things. He first got into blow molding in 1962 by selling General Motors a washer bottle job. He didn't even have a blow-molding machine, but he still sold GM a product to be made from that process." Flambeau became one of the first industrial blow molders in North America.

"My dad was a firm believer in the U.S. Constitution, personal liberty, and the principles under which the United States was founded. He was an ardent practitioner and supporter of the free market system. He supported and pursued the concept of the 'American Dream' in which people are free to pursue their personal ambitions by applying hard work and ingenuity to the opportunities that lay before them. He was also a lifelong member of the Republican Party. His view was that the Republican Party was the best political conduit to smaller, limited government and the protection of personal freedoms," Jason states.

"He ingrained in his children the concept of continual improvement. It was inherently understood. There was not a lot of personal recognition at home. Excellence was expected," Jason recalls. "Being around Dad my whole life, I picked up many tips and approaches to business. I learned from observing. There were constant lessons, all the time."

"Underneath all of my dad's endeavors, he had a deep, abiding faith in the Lord. Along with his faith, he prized time with his family when he allowed for it," Jason adds.

Today, W.R. Sauey's son appears to be following in his father's footsteps. "I am like my dad in that I am inventive and curious. I'm like him in terms of values.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

Jason Sauey, President & CEO, Nordic Group of Companies, Ltd.

"Perhaps what I am most proud of in my father is that he was driven to always spend his time in what he viewed as a 'productive' manner."

- Jason Sauey, President and CEO of Flambeau

A Legacy of Excellence

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

Every new employee receives a handout with Flambeau's vision and six corporate values: family, integrity, leadership, teamwork, knowledge and excellence. And like Dad, family is huge for me. I don't have the depth of work ethic my dad had. He thought and talked about business all the time. I enjoy playing tennis with my two sons, reading history books, and collecting wine," he admits with a smile.

Jason also agrees with his father that, beyond business survival, achieving a sustainable mode requires a mentality to persevere and endure through whatever challenges and crises may arise.

Uh hum. Excuse me. Can anyone say, "Pandemic?"

Jason shares three lessons he learned during this unprecedented time.

#1:

"Your team can be better than you think. Let them be better. Lay out the expectations then let them go. If they are the right people, they will perform," Jason encourages. "My dad never trusted people a great deal, but I do. Our people take initiative and are capable of dealing with great challenges. They have done a great job through the pandemic, and I am so thankful for that. I always tell our people there are two primary principles in management that must always be applied: 1) Achieve the best results using the least amount of resources, and 2) Make adjustments in times of changing conditions."

#2:

"Search for disconfirming evidence. Think critically. So many people attend to only inputs that reaffirm their beliefs. Look and discern between what is true and what is not. Identify the root cause of a condition and make proper causal attribution before plunging in with a solution," he cautions. "It's very difficult to truly identify the root cause if we only expose ourselves and listen to sources that support our views and notions. We've seen a lot of ineffective and irrelevant approaches applied during this pandemic. Have we really followed the science? Closing businesses and mandating lockdowns are counterproductive. We have done far greater harm by how we dealt with this virus – lost livelihoods, increased suicides and mental health issues, bankruptcies, domestic violence, and more. As we've continued through the experience, we haven't applied any learning and have just continued with the ineffective response."

"At Flambeau, we had to work hard to keep our plants open," Jason concedes. "The degree of influence and power the media and politicians have over people is criminal. It has cost us a lot as a nation."

#3:

"I have learned the power of alternative means of distribution. E-commerce. I am thankful we have been able to tap into and grow through e-commerce during this pandemic. It has been a liberating force and has given our companies direct access to the public. Flambeau's products are almost all in very mature markets. It is difficult to disrupt market share positions and grow business in mature markets. E-commerce has changed all that; e-commerce has given us a means to make our case directly to the public and circumvent the stifling and complacent forces of traditional retail distribution," Jason enthusiastically shares.

Jason describes that the last time he talked to his father, his dad compulsively asked him about business.

"I told him not to worry about the business. To focus on himself. I went on to explain, as I had many times during this Covid period of shutdowns and economic restrictions, that not much had changed since we last spoke. I told him the environment was still really challenging, but I said we were working through it. I said a lot of companies were not going to make it through this period of economic challenge."

"My dad died the next day, on my birthday," Jason says. "I believe my dad was telling me to make sure to make every day a birthday. Make the most of each day and give new life to whatever you are doing, for you never know what day may be your last."

"My last words to my dad were 'Dad, don't worry about anything. The business is going to be ok; we're going to get through this. Don't worry about Mom—we'll take good care of Mom. Just relax, Dad. Go find your peace.' He didn't respond, but I know he heard me, and I hope he truly is at peace now. Finding your peace is a hard thing for most anyone to do but particularly so for someone who was as driven as my dad was."

How is business so far this year?

"It's been a mixed bag," Jason describes. "Overall, as a company, Flambeau is doing better today than we were before the pandemic. I give a lot of credit to our managers and associates who stepped up. They knew they could not stand idly by. I received over 40 letters from high-profile industrial companies at the start of the pandemic encouraging us to stay open as a part of their supply chain as essential businesses in support of our nation's critical infrastructure. A few days later more than half those same companies informed us they were shutting their plants down. We made great efforts to stay open and get people to come to work. We had to make adjustments continually throughout the extended plant closures—layoffs, furloughs, whole plant furloughs—but we got through it."



“At first in the pandemic, the whole retail sector cratered, but a few weeks later sales of fishing products skyrocketed due to people having time on their hands, and fishing, being one of the few activities the governors of most states didn’t clamp down on,” Jason says. “Craft stores started reopening a little later, so there was more demand for our Artbin products. Our diversification has served us well. The industrial sector was much slower to come back, but it’s come back now finally, and our backlog is over \$14 million higher than it was last year at this time. Our biggest challenge today is hiring. Some people are choosing not to work.”

“It is critical this country maintains a free-market capitalism economy. Free-market capitalism is the most humane economics system ever devised by man. It makes the most efficient allocation and use of resources and elevates the standards of living wherever it is applied and practiced,” Jason concludes.

Hmmm. I think his dad would agree. 🤔

“We made great efforts to stay open and get people to come to work. We had to make adjustments continually throughout the extended plant closures.”

- Jason Sauey, President and CEO of Flambeau



Company 119: A **RED-HOT** Choice for Digital Marketing Services

BY MARGIE WILBER

What does firefighting have to do with digital marketing? At Company 119, the connection is fierce.

“We chose this name based on how we approach each work assignment,” states Christian Klein, founder/president of Company 119. “A core value at Company 119 is we ‘Run Toward Fire.’ This means when things are difficult or dangerous, we address the problem head-on with tenacity. We stand out from the crowd bravely to do the right thing, even when it’s the opposite of what others are doing.”

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Klein grew up in South Euclid and never imagined moving to Geauga County. “I grew up the oldest of eight children. My dad Ken Klein was a firefighter for Cleveland Heights, and my mom Karen Klein was a stay-at-home mom, teacher, principal and first-base coach,” he states proudly. “Entrepreneurism was birthed from the gutters for me – literally. At age eight, I helped my dad with his side job of cleaning gutters. I still remember, with mixed emotions, cleaning dirty gutters in temperatures just above freezing. It was hard, humble work, but I learned the value of a strong work ethic.”

Upon graduating from high school, Klein took an internship at a non-profit organization. He graduated with a Business Administration degree from Indiana Wesleyan University in 2005, and the organization he interned at offered him a full-time position, eventually turning into an Executive Producer role.

While attending school full-time and working full-time, he met his now wife Rebecca (Becky) Klein. (They married in 2004.) “Fortunately, I found the perfect partner who is patient and doesn’t shy from hard work,” Klein adds with a grin.



According to Klein, with a daughter on the way and a non-profit salary, money was tight. The internet was relatively young at the time with less than 50 percent of businesses having an online presence. When a few contacts needed a website, Klein offered to help. Klein Studios, now Company 119, was born in a Lyndhurst basement with no fireworks or fanfare. Klein moved his business into Geauga County in 2007.

“My friend owned a small computer repair business on Chardon Square,” he explains. “I helped him on weekends. He was a fantastic technician but struggled with the business end. Eventually, he met his future wife and decided to move out of the area. He asked if I might be interested in purchasing the company. I ended up buying it for the costs of parts and equipment lying around in the store. It fit my budget. My wife and I decided to move to Geauga County soon after.”

He continues, “I joined the Leadership Geauga class of 2010. That program did so much to educate and integrate me into the community. The people, non-profits, and companies I interacted with drew me in.”

With time, his company grew from a small, residential repair shop to include corporate IT and, later, a design division along with a name change to Company 119 and brought on his now partner, Nate Winne. “By God’s grace, just three years later, Company 119 was ranked the fastest-growing company in Lake/Geauga counties by FastTrack50,” states Klein with a broad smile.

FAST FORWARD TO TODAY

Today, Company 119 is a full-service digital marketing company that specializes in Digital Marketing Services with corporate headquarters located at 115 Wilson Mills Road in Chardon, Ohio. “Web design and development is still a large piece of our work, but it has been dwarfed by our digital marketing services in recent years. We work exclusively with online marketing channels such as Programmatic,

Connected TV, and Search Engine Optimization. Our primary focus is helping businesses reach more potential clients online; showing how they are better than their competitors; and giving them data to know what marketing is working and what is not.”

Company 119 helps clients grow their business online using a focused system for sales and marketing, integrating the latest digital tools. They create customized digital strategies based on real data. “We utilize data-driven research and methodology, identify target audiences for maximum impact, create key marketing personas and tailored messaging,” the passionate business owner continues. “We employ

16 individuals who range in skills from developers to graphic designers to client advisors. By keeping our focus solely on digital marketing, we have been able to build quite a depth of expertise in these respective fields. We are continually looking to add to our team as long as they believe in our core values, the first of which is that ‘We treat our clients, team, and community the way we would want to be treated.’”

Company 119 also offers the following services:

- Digital display advertising
- Email marketing
- Pay-per-click marketing
- Search engine optimization (SEO)
- Video marketing
- Social media marketing

Current or former clients that include Excite Health Partners – a national provider of healthcare technological solutions to more than 275 hospitals in the U.S.– Petitti Garden Centers, and LASIK Vision Centers. And their Geauga County reach is impressive:

- Sheoga Hardwood Flooring
- Legacy Village
- Kenston School District
- Payne & Payne
- Rescue Village
- Exscape Designs
- Geauga Manufacturing
- Geauga County Maple Leaf

Klein acknowledges that keeping himself and his employees up to date on technology in this fast-moving field is challenging. “This is a definite reality for our industry and world. We’ve found that refining the types of clients we work with has proven to be a strong strategy. With information and tools growing daily, no one firm can know everything about everything... Our team conducts weekly ‘Con-Ed’ Thursday lunches. We bring the entire firm together and cover topics impacting our industry. Our team is also evaluated every quarter with a focus on improving their knowledge base. This includes conference attendance, books, blogs, podcasts, etc.”

IMPACT OF COVID-19

Like most businesses, when March 2020 hit, there was a lot of concern and uncertainty at Company 119. While experts in their industry were recommending immediate cuts to staffing and costs, Klein and his senior staff set the number for what they needed to achieve to maintain staffing levels.

“We gave our staff an option: If we sunk below certain revenue thresholds, we would either reduce staffing but keep core members at current pay rates or do a 25 percent cut across the board,” Klein states. “They immediately said they would take the hit for the sake of their team members. Fortunately, we did not have to do either. Our lead developer Nick Goers came up with a free service for restaurants when they first shut down to promote their delivery services called sociallydistantteats.com which was featured on local news outlets. As the world started to grasp more of the realities of working remotely, we found our services to be in greater demand. The year ended up being strong for us. We’ve grown our team by several members.”

“OUR PRIMARY FOCUS IS HELPING BUSINESSES REACH MORE POTENTIAL CLIENTS ONLINE; SHOWING HOW THEY ARE BETTER THAN THEIR COMPETITORS; AND GIVING THEM DATA TO KNOW WHAT MARKETING IS WORKING AND WHAT IS NOT.”

- Christian Klein, founder/president of Company 119

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



Company 119

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

FUTURE GOALS

With the launch of its new sister company, Main Street Recruitment, Company 119 is focused on bringing messaging tools used exclusively by marketers to the HR recruitment space – particularly for employers who need to hire blue-collar employees, Klein says. “Most of these employers and hiring managers understand they cannot rely on LinkedIn or Indeed to find employees because they are not on those platforms. We use social media, streaming TV, and online advertising to find employees on the websites and social media platforms they are using. For many companies, increasing sales is now a secondary issue to finding the right employees. We hope to solve this problem for more companies in the future.”


“FOR MANY COMPANIES, INCREASING SALES IS NOW A SECONDARY ISSUE TO FINDING THE RIGHT EMPLOYEES. WE HOPE TO SOLVE THIS PROBLEM FOR MORE COMPANIES IN THE FUTURE.”

- Christian Klein, founder/president of Company 119

“We are doing what we love,” Klein says, “but making a difference in our clients’ lives is an unparalleled feeling. We

have won dozens of awards for our work and landed on the Weatherhead 100 list. We continue to grow. We launched a sister brand this past year, Main Street Recruitment, paying homage to our first Geauga County company.”

“Gauga County is an extraordinary place,” exclaims Klein. “Having our business here means our employees and their families have the opportunity to be educated in some of the best schools, experience some of the healthiest communities, and enjoy the beauty of nature while still having uncapped potential on the national stage thanks to modern technology. As the world comes to terms with remote working, many professional businesses that do business on a national level, in places like Geauga, should come into greater favor.”

Christian and Becky Klein live in Burton with their four children: Annalise, Will, Jack and Sam. Klein also currently serves as a firefighter/EMT for the Middlefield Fire Department. He also serves as a Director for the department, overseeing the financial aspects. Formerly, he served on the boards of the Northeast Ohio Consortium Council of Governments and Entrepreneurs Organization, Leadership Geauga, Geauga Grown Partnership and Better Business Bureau of Cleveland. 



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Leading by Example

BY BETSY SCOTT



Dogged determination comes to mind when describing Darrell McNair. Another word would be fearless. He not only has made inroads as a minority business owner in some surprising places, but he also appears ready to take on just about any challenge that comes along.

Born in Columbus and raised all around the country in a military family, his business ventures eventually brought him back to Ohio. His Middlefield-based MVP Plastics company was the culmination of many industrious pursuits in the decades since he graduated with a business degree from Kent State University in 1983. He also obtained his MBA from Baldwin Wallace at night while working his own paper distribution and construction companies by day.

"I've owned a lot of entrepreneurial adventures," says McNair, in addition to his experience in the corporate world, including

stints with IBM and Ford Motor Company. The latter job took him and his bride of three months north to Michigan. But his passion for enterprise kept calling. In 1996, he left Ford and started a health care-related business with his wife, and a chain of women's shoe stores in Michigan and Ohio.

"Nothing scares me," he explains.

During that time, he was offered a chance to partner with a private equity group to purchase a plastics company. In 2000, the group bought Nescor Plastics, located in Mesopotamia. Eight years later, McNair bought out his partner and rebranded to MVP Plastics the following year. It was a time of economic recession, yet he relished striking out on his own. "I felt it was a liberating moment," he says. "I bought my partner out, the economy was tanking; it was time to do something new and different."

Enlarging His Territory

McNair and his wife, who works in Cleveland, moved to Aurora to be near the operations — then in Champion as well as Mesopotamia. He relocated the business to Newton Falls in 2009 and outgrew the site within a few years. That's when he moved to the 35,000-square-foot current site in a Middlefield industrial park. As the business grew, he opened a molding plant in Texas in 2015.

"Texas was where your customers wanted you to be in order to continue to support the automotive industry as well as others," he notes. The two sites employ about 75 people.

"I like Geauga County, and most of my employees stayed with me, so I tried to keep them with me and stay within a reasonable driving distance, and it's a good industrial base in Middlefield and a business-friendly community," he says. "In addition, what I was looking for (to buy) was out here."

The tenure of his employees is among the highlights of his career. Some have been with him as long as his plastics business has been around. "I love being able to provide folks the ability to make fair earnings and a good quality-of-life (and) work balance," he says. "If I can make my employees happy, my customers happy on a day-to-day basis, that's what I'm most proud of."

Culture Shift

Starting in Mesopotamia, McNair immersed himself in networking opportunities, to get acquainted with his new surroundings.

"When I was in Mespo, I was on the KSU-Geauga Campus board," he says. "That was my first step into involvement in Geauga County, learning the community and learning the people. I also joined the UH Geauga Medical Hospital board, as another way of getting involved."

Overall, he feels he has been well received in the predominantly Caucasian county.

"There aren't too many minority-owned businesses out here," he says. "I only know of one other. My reception has been a positive experience. The employees have been with me 15-plus years and moved around to different locations, and I think it's a testament to what we do and how we build our business out here."

"I've got a great relationship with Amish out here. The people have all been very warm and helpful."

Early on, he did experience some pushback, mainly in Mesopotamia. "I was challenged a few times as a minority business owner out there because I was a minority out in that rural region, but it wasn't from the community, it was really more from some of the employees that I inherited when I bought the business," he says. "I had to discipline, including terminating, some people early on because of behaviors and attitudes out there." According to McNair, one individual came to work with a swastika on his head. Another employee wore a white hood to work, like a member of the KKK. Both were immediately fired. There were some unwelcoming messages left around for folks to see as well.

Then there was the time, in Geauga, that he tried to join a midday men's Bible study. "They gave me every reason why I shouldn't," he recalls. "That was probably about four years ago. That was the last place I thought I would encounter anything of that nature, in a house of worship. It blew me away." However, he holds no grudges and attempts to create an inclusive atmosphere where he can.

"We have a great culture at our company that's driven by respect and understanding differences," he says. "The majority of my workforce is non-minority, but we look at each other as equals."

Addition & subtraction

McNair runs a couple of other businesses out of his building, including All Foam Products Company, which he bought and moved here from Chicago in 2018. The other is MVP Design and Engineering. While these moves have bolstered his workforce, the forces out of his control have made their impact.

"We're smaller today than we were 12 months ago," he says. "The pandemic has hit us, but for the most part, we have been able to keep most employees here. I'm proud of keeping people employed."

At the same time, the biggest challenge is having adequate staff. And he's not alone.

"I can drive around our industrial complex, and everyone has a 'Now Hiring' sign up," he describes. "It's frustrating. Early on, understandably, people were staying home because they were worried about coming out with the many unknowns of COVID-19. There's a different work ethic out there now. Many of the basic, soft skills employers take for granted when hiring are now a premium. ... Business 101 (says) come into work every day on time."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

Leading by Example

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

He acknowledges he's needed to alter the way he runs things a tad in order to maintain his staff. That includes relaxing the attendance policy a bit, offering attendance and referral incentives.

"That's what keeps all of us up at night. How are we going to improve the caliber of the workforce coming up?" he questions, adding skilled-labor programs, like those offered by Auburn Career Center, are helping. COVID-19 caused him to stop all automotive production for a couple of months, but he looks on the bright side. "It forced us to look for other customers and new business opportunities," he says, "and it has been successful."

Getting personal

His future goals are a lot like his current ones — continue to grow the business and contribute to society. He estimates he devotes 20 percent of his time to community-related activities. Along with serving as a Geauga Hospital trustee, he serves on the Cleveland Cuyahoga County Port Authority and Jumpstart board.

He hopes to make a difference in more ways than one.

"I'm trying to bring more minorities into the entrepreneurial space, help minority entrepreneurs," he states. He has some dreams for his business, too, but whether they are a go in these uncertain times remains to be seen. "I have some things on the books, but there's still a big question mark out there," he admits. 🇺🇸

MVP Plastics employee Joe Kennedy builds the seat portion of a booster seat.



MVP Plastics is located at 15005 Enterprise Way in Middlefield. The versatile plastics component processor serves diverse markets from its facilities, including one McAllen, Texas, and Suzhou, China, where his company has a partnership with JC Auto Technologies.

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Foundation for Geauga Parks Announces Preston Superstore as Lead Business Partner

The Foundation for Geauga Parks (FGP) is pleased to announce that Preston Superstore in Burton, Ohio has joined the Foundation's 2021 Business Partnership Program as Lead Business Partner. Preston's gift of \$10,000 will help the Foundation continue their work of assisting parks in Geauga County to fund park and trail improvements and nature education opportunities.

"We are so appreciative of the Preston family's commitment to the community," says FGP President Adam Henry. "This gift will go far in helping us engage with more parks and municipalities in the county and continue enhancing our amazing parks and preserves."

The Foundation for Geauga Parks was formed in 1990 as the Geauga Park District Foundation and was responsible for raising funds for several signature properties and programs in Geauga: The West Woods, Observatory Park, and the popular Nature Scopes Binocular Program for fifth grade students. After these great success stories, the FGP broadened their mission in 2015 to allow them the latitude to support any and all parks in Geauga, and therefore, changed their name to the Foundation for Geauga Parks.

"We want to be the go-to fundraising source on which county, township and other municipal parks may rely to collectively protect the unique natural character of Geauga County," says Foundation Treasurer Jonathan Green.

In 2020, with support from the Cleveland Foundation, the Foundation initiated a Pollinator Garden Program in collaboration with Geauga Park District. Phase one of the program began by creating plans to expand the pollinator plantings and interpretive signs in Frohring Meadows. Going forward in 2021, the goal is to create expanded community

outreach and education about the importance of providing habitat for pollinators in parks and in our own back yards.



"We were inhibited from getting out in our communities in 2020, as so many other organizations, but we have high hopes for 2021," says Associate Director Paige Orvis. "As we move beyond the pandemic, we will seek safe ways to connect with our various park entities and community groups. Don't hesitate to call us if we don't call you first."

The Foundation Trustees are grateful to Preston Superstore as the Lead Business Partner. There are other opportunities for businesses to join the program and align themselves with a trusted name in park preservation in Geauga County. Learn more about the Foundation for Geauga Parks Business Partnership Program at <http://www.foundationforgeaugaparks.org/pages/partnerships>

The Foundation for Geauga Parks an independent 501(c)3 nonprofit that raises funds to support all parks in Geauga County. Its mission is to fund community engagement with nature through education, preservation, conservation and appreciation of the unique natural character of Geauga County. For more information, contact the Foundation office at 440-564-1048, admin@foundationforgeaugaparks.org or www.foundationforgeaugaparks.org



Solon Manufacturing:

BY BETH HALLISY



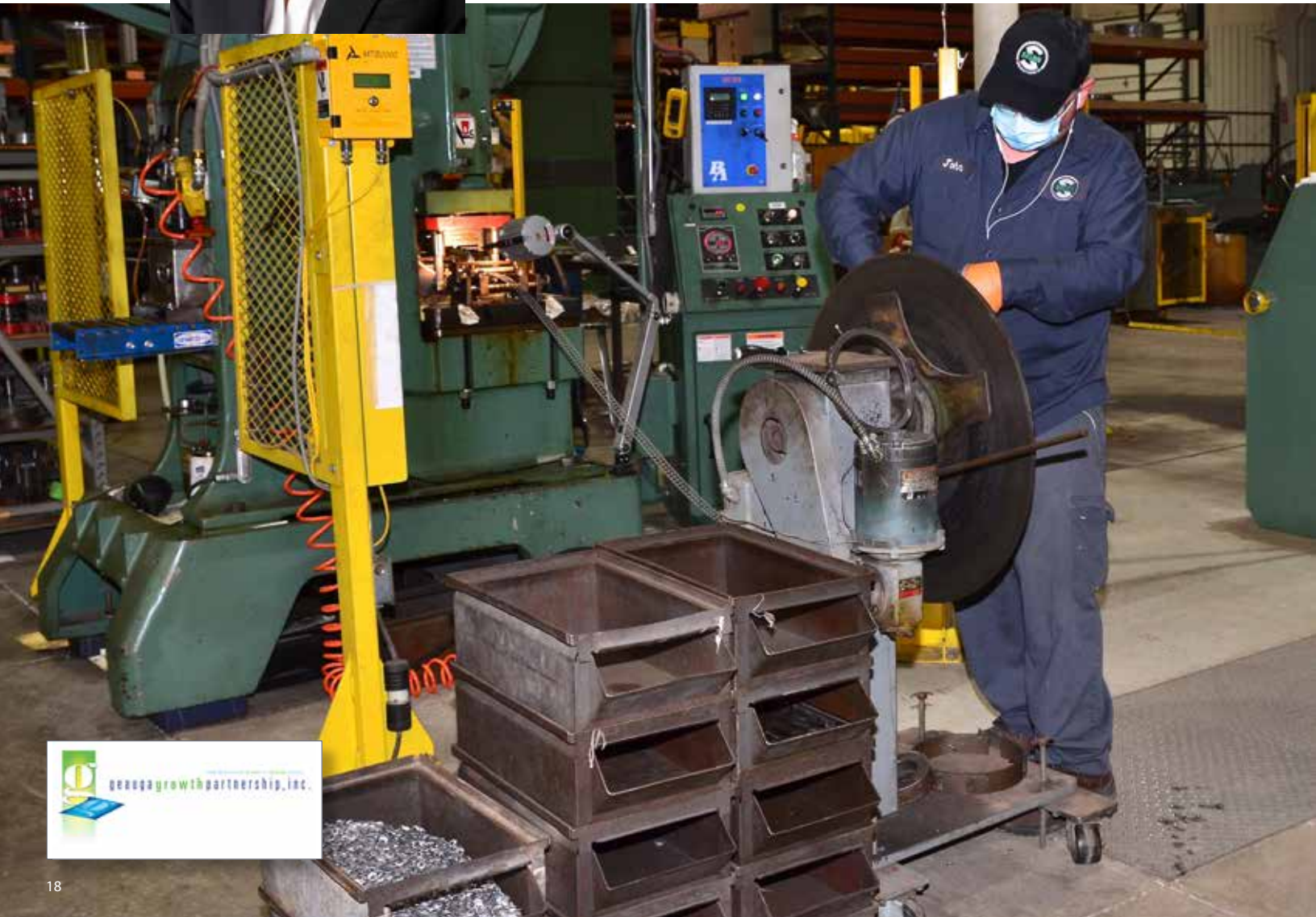
Where



More than a few Ohioans have scratched their heads when first hearing the name of one of Geauga County's oldest and largest companies. That's because Solon Manufacturing Co. has been located in the city of Chardon (and not Solon) for four decades. But because the engineered products manufacturer enjoyed an enviable national reputation when it relocated from Cuyahoga County to neighboring Geauga County in 1960, the conversation about a potential name change was a short one. The Solon brand would move with the company – a company exceedingly proud of its heritage.

Solon Manufacturing was launched in 1949 by four alumni of what is now known as Case Engineering School at Case Western Reserve University. Its first products were conduit benders made specifically for Republic Steel's electro-mechanical tubing and turbulators used on machines that cleaned automotive parts.

left: Diane Popovich, President, Solon Manufacturing Company





Engineering Innovation Lives

"Our founders really wanted to support the growing industrial needs of post-war Cleveland," says Diane Popovich, president and first woman officer of the company. Today, she says, 50% of the company is owned by retired shareholders and the other 50% by current employees. "We feel it is important to maintain a balance between external and internal stakeholders who can connect our history to our future."

Diverse Global Markets, Exact Quality

Today the multimillion-dollar company makes – and designs, warehouses, and ships – comprehensive lines of customizable washers and pressure switches. With approximately 50 employees working out of three Chardon facilities, the company satisfies a broad spectrum of industries worldwide – ranging from entertainment and food and beverage packaging to aerospace, energy, defense, marine and even earthquake testing. Doubling its size over the past 15 years, Solon Manufacturing conducts business in more than 40 countries. In fact, some of its largest customers are located offshore, according to Popovich, who joined the company in 2015 as a sales director.

"Diversification is critical to us," Popovich shares. "It helps to feed our imagination. But it also insulates our company in the event of any kind of downturns or if an industry takes a hit ... We still have lots of other irons in the fire."

Solon Manufacturing's Belleville washer is a highly engineered product that helps keep joints tight; it doesn't simply provide a connection," Popovich explains. "Our customers know it's a superior fastening solution," she says. "It's like a washer on steroids." The washers can range from a four-millimeter tiny product, or they can go up to 24 millimeters in diameter, she adds. "Our customers can buy from our online catalog, or they can order something custom designed and made."

One of Solon Manufacturing's founders initially created the Belleville spring washer for General Electric circuit breakers in the 1950s. There are many interesting applications in which the company takes pride. For example, astronaut John Glenn wore a Belleville on his flight suit during his first

orbit of the earth. (You can view the suit – and the Solon Manufacturing Belleville – at the National Air and Space Museum of the Smithsonian Institution.)

The company also now offers a pressure switch product line, which is marketed to customers looking to measure and monitor gas and other liquids. Due to their rugged and modular design, Solon's explosion-proof pressure switches were selected as the primary switch on the Trans-Alaska Pipeline system.

"Our pressure switches are highly configurable with a variety of special features and options available," Popovich points out. "So, if you were to go to our website, you could actually build an assembly and configure per whatever your requirement is. We like to say, 'we offer custom solutions with catalog-item lead time.'"

Popovich notes: "What's interesting is that these two product lines generally have the same exposure to audiences, but the buyers don't really cross pollinate. So, as a buyer, you wouldn't call here and order a pressure switch and a washer at the same time," Popovich explains. But, if you order a pressure switch today, your colleague across the hall could well call to order washers tomorrow.

"It's kind of an odd model," Popovich acknowledges, "but these are legacy products with strong branding in the market, and we enjoy a pretty good reputation with both lines." She adds that the company has "never really flirted" with adding additional products. "We think we are really good in these two areas. ... What differentiates us is that we do everything here, and we're vertically integrated, so from design all the way through replacement parts, we can supply a solution."

"We feel it is important to maintain a balance between external and internal stakeholders who can connect our history to our future."

- Diane Popovich, President, Solon Manufacturing Company

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20



Solon Manufacturing

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

Working Smarter, Together

"What drives our success is our people," insists Popovich. To celebrate its 70th anniversary last year, the company gave its employees the day off and treated them to a Cleveland Indians baseball game. This is a team that clearly enjoys each other's company.

"This team is the most dedicated I've ever worked with," says Popovich. "We emphasize expressing ideas in a safe space," she adds. "We talk a lot about ideas, and we have colorful conversations It's actually pretty fun.

"Everybody here knows that making mistakes is the most valuable way to learn and grow. They know it's OK to say no, too." She subscribes to the "fail early and often" approach to development. "But, staying until 10 o'clock at night and wearing that as a badge of honor doesn't work here," she emphasizes. "We want people to be able to give a 100% while they're here, feel good about it, and then go home and recharge. Our culture encourages people to work smarter and not harder."

Remarkably, the company has never had a layoff. "We're really proud that we've been able to keep everybody whole during the pandemic," Popovich reflects. "I love getting up every day. ... I love my team, and I think you would find that same level of commitment [across the company]. I think that's the best part

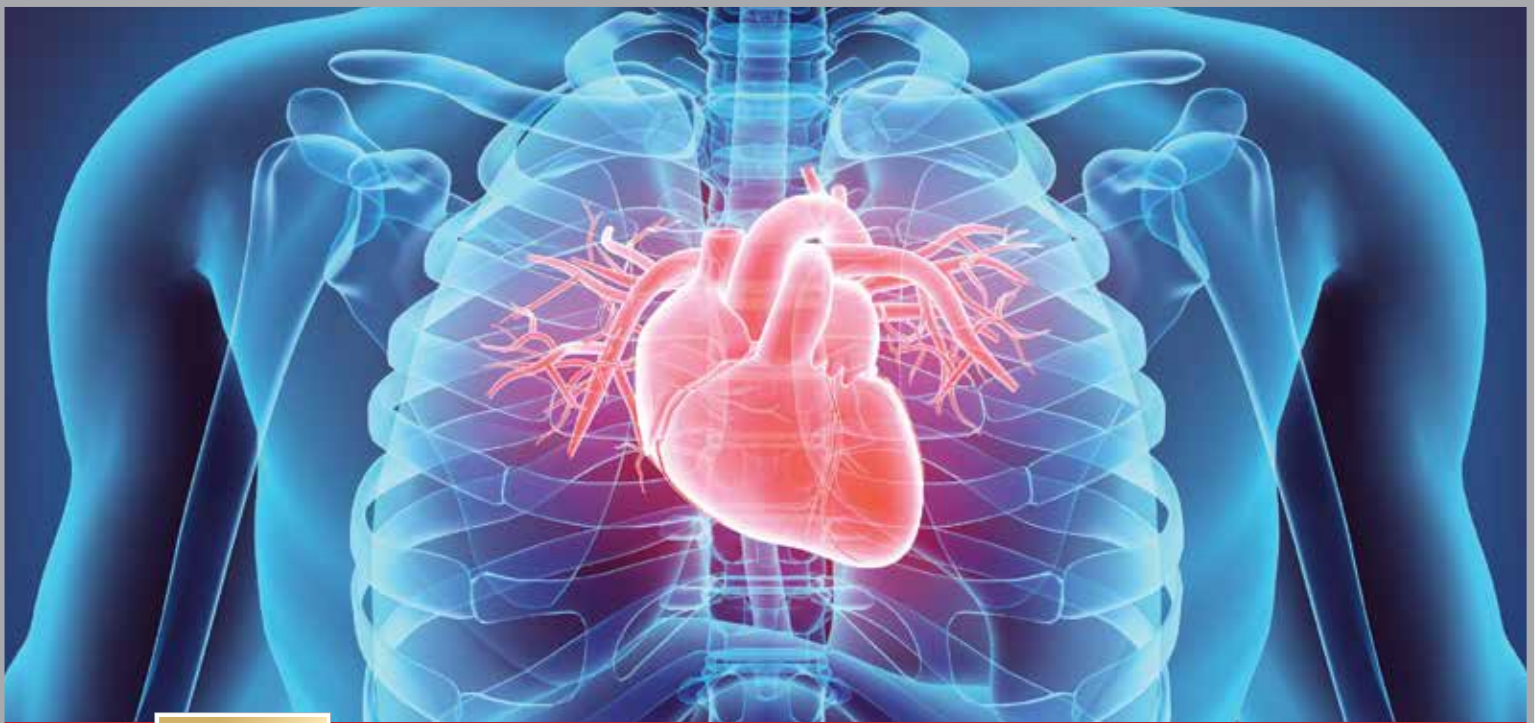
... We're not just about congratulating ourselves on what we've just done. We're less focused on growing to be more; we're focused instead on growing to be better."

That philosophy carries over to the company's community work, most notably in their work with and "gold" sponsorship of Geauga Humane Society's Rescue Village. "It's really important to us that we give back," Popovich says. Employees participate in raffles, puppy parties and even adopt animals. The company also sponsors families during the winter holidays through the Geauga County Job & Family Services. "Our employees really step up," she says. "It's that kind of generosity that speaks to the culture here."

Solon Manufacturing is also a member of Geauga County Community Improvement Corporation, and Popovich sits on the board of Geauga Growth Partnership. "I love what GGP stands for," she says. "We are dedicated to ensuring that the community remains relevant and thrives."

Popovich gives frequent nods to the company's "founding fathers," crediting them for the value-based culture that continues to fuel the company. "I think we are upholding the legacy imagined by our forefathers ... living up to our predecessors' dream of building value in products that serve industries, communities and people." 🏭





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Setting the Perfect

BY MARGIE WILBER



Anne Marie Wolfe made her passion for music her career. Sharp! And despite the obvious challenges due to the worldwide pandemic, the proud owner of Geauga Music Center, located at 216 Cherry Street in Chardon, remains enthusiastic and “allegro” (cheerful) about business.

Many Geauga County residents may recognize the 1996 Chardon graduate from her involvement as a youth in St. Mary’s Parish and St. Mary’s Elementary School choirs. Others with the New Celebration Choir, Boy Scouts, The Great Geauga County Fair Band, or Chardon Library. Recently, she has worked with the Junior Fair Band, Christmas Tree Lighting Band, and Summer Jam. But like many, Ann Marie’s love for music began years earlier as a young girl.

Anne Marie started playing clarinet at age 10 so she could join the school band. “Music was always part of our household. The radio was always on in the car, and mom or dad would sing along. Dad would play records; mom would pull out the reel-to-reel while we baked. I’ve been inspired to love classical music and opera by trips and visits to my grandfather’s home,” she recalls. “Grandpa was always listening to WCLV and loved opera. I joined the 5th grade band after my brother, and I joined the church choir with mom.” As a member of the Cleveland Youth Wind Symphony, she performed live on WCLV from Tower City and toured various cities in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

Anne Marie Wolfe, owner, Geauga Music Center

Tempo for Success

"We want every child who walks through our door to enjoy playing so much that they are still playing when they are in their 80+ years."

Upon graduating from Chardon High School, the promising musician earned a Bachelor of Music in Music Composition from Ohio Northern University and a Master of Music Performance in Wind Conducting from Indiana State University. While attending college, she traveled and performed at Daytona Beach, Disney World, St. Louis, Nashville, and Japan.

"I've been teaching woodwinds and low brass since 2002," Anne Marie says. "I also coach ensembles, and many of my student play solos for the OMEA Solo and Ensemble Contest." After working her way up to administrative ranks at The Village Music Shop, Anne Marie became the owner of Geauga Music Center.

The Geauga County resident took over the local music store and renamed it Geauga Music Center in 2006 at the age of 28. She is the fourth owner. "I took acting lessons from the original owners, clarinet lessons under the second owner, and worked for the third owner. I never envisioned owning a music store and teaching lessons," she admits with a smile.

"I play flute, oboe, the clarinets and saxophones, as well as trombone and tuba," Anne Marie states. "I've also been known to help out in the percussion section. I started to learn cello and guitar but with running a music store, I don't have much free time."


As a small, family-owned business, Anne Marie has several goals. "Number one is keeping the doors open. Number two is proving a service to the community that is accessible to all. Number three is making a lasting impact on current and future generations," she says. "Covid-19 has certainly been a challenge. Even though we

had a plan and were ready for the shutdown, it took us by surprise. I thought we would have another week. The transition to virtual lessons was smooth. Not all students came with us. We lost about 30 percent in the switch. As kids experienced fatigue, the weather warmed, and sports resumed, we lost more students and dropped to 50 percent. Virtual lessons aren't ideal long term, but they are a great alternative. We did a bunch of outdoor lessons over the summer for the woodwind and brass students. We are returning to more virtual lessons now that the snow has settled in."

Geauga Music Center's staff are all experts in their field, each highly qualified to give comprehensive music education. Most of their customers are children under 14. "We do have a surprising number of adult students," she adds. "We work with our students to develop and attain goals, learn skills, and understand and make music. We modify techniques to fit our students' needs."

Anne Marie encourages folks who do not feel they have musical talent. "We just have to find the right instrument, right teacher and right group to play in. If you desire to play music, we can help make it happen. We work hard to give you a music experience that will inspire you to be a lifelong musician," Anne Marie emphatically insists. "We want every child who walks through our door to enjoy playing so much that they are still playing when they are in their 80+ years. We want every adult who walks through our door to feel comfortable enough to pick up the instrument they want to learn and jump right in."

What is her favorite instrument to play or music to listen to? "Well, it depends on my mood or how I am trying to influence my mood," she admits with a giggle.

Call Geauga Music Center and schedule a lesson today at 440.286.8481 or email lessons@geaugamusiccenter.com. 



Leadership Geauga County Develops New Program for Retirees

The inaugural Heritage Program begins in May, 2021

What is the Heritage Program?

Similar in design and scope to Leadership Geauga's Signature Adult Program, the Heritage program will introduce class members to challenges and opportunities unique to Geauga County. Participants will enjoy personal access to community leaders, behind the scenes site tours, and in-depth discussions while gaining a deeper understanding of today's Geauga County. Class members will expand their personal contacts and leverage these into a network of civic-minded leaders. Program goals are to inspire retirees and adults approaching retirement to reconnect to their community, encouraging their personal action to be part of the positive solution to some of Geauga County's challenges. Each person's overall experience will be enhanced by the identification and achievement of personal goals in conjunction with individual efforts supporting the greater good of the county.

Why is this the right time for a new program?

Gauga County is Ohio's fifth fastest growing county of 'aging in place' individuals. Currently, 21% of Geauga County residents are 65 years or older. By 2025, Geauga County residents over 65 will number 30,000+. Individuals approaching or mastering retirement today are, in many ways, energized for this next life chapter and seeking new ways to learn, grow and have fun. Recognizing this trend, Leadership Geauga seized the initiative this year to add to its program portfolio with the Heritage Program. The Cleveland Foundation agreed with Leadership Geauga and granted multi-year support for the design and implementation for development.

Alice Munn (LG 2008), owner of Industrial Tapes, Inc. and community volunteer said, "As a business owner planning my own retirement, I believe the Heritage Program will be a great resource for meeting people outside of my industry. It will also support the mapping of my goals with my skills and interests, while benefiting my community!"

Who will participate in the Heritage Program classes?

The Heritage Program offers an opportunity for experienced leaders, who are retired or approaching retirement, to define their next chapter of community involvement while engaging with like-minded individuals. Ideal candidates are retired leaders from a variety of professions who are interested in community involvement but, due to prior career demands, may not have connected deeply with the community. Now is their opportunity to use their expertise and skills to benefit our local community.



Who will be involved in creating the classes?

To ensure relevance, Leadership Geauga's network of alumni, community leaders, and partner organizations will collaborate to reconnect and embed Heritage class members into our community. This will provide them the opportunity to become more involved in analyzing and solving civic issues that affect Geauga County. Pam Carson was hired to coordinate the program and she is connecting with community leaders, researching other program models and preparing for the first class which will begin in late Spring, 2021. Pam described her experience since joining Leadership Geauga, "I am so impressed by the community members who have offered advice and creative ideas toward the development of the classes, including locations, scheduling and content. There is such a generous outpouring of knowledge and community know-how from these Geauga County leaders and retirees!"



How does the Heritage curriculum differ from the Signature Adult Class?

The Signature Adult Class is traditionally 10 months in length, whereas the Heritage Program classes will be held bi-weekly for 6-8 weeks. The Signature Adult Program offers deep leadership knowledge and skills development, while the Heritage Program

Heritage Program offers an opportunity to give back."

The Heritage Program will offer a slightly different learning experience. Through a strategic approach to community challenges, class members will leverage their experience collaboratively to solve real problems.

Some retired leaders may have spent their career in one industry without exposure to other fields. The Heritage program will offer opportunities to learn outside of one's field of expertise. Others may read the news and believe they fully understand the issues of Geauga County. Until they visit a park, for example, and have meaningful conversations with community leaders about the challenges of balancing land conservation with rural development, they may not have fully appreciated the complexity of the matters facing Geauga County.

Laurie Hildebrand (LG 2001), recently retired from Kinetico, remarked, "I really like the focus of the Heritage Program as less on building leadership skills and more about tapping into the skills and experiences we've attained over our careers and applying them to a meaningful project."

How is the community responding to the concept of the Heritage Program?

Through interviews with a variety of community leaders and focus groups with alumni and community volunteers, the Heritage Program is preparing for launch in May of 2021. The response to the program has been very positive! Many retirees, after a career spent outside the county, are excited to deepen their roots

where they live. Many Leadership alumni enjoyed their class year so much that they intend to refresh and reinvigorate their knowledge and community involvement. Other experienced leaders are simply curious about what their own retirement might look like. This program will help create a road map that links personal passion and skills toward their community.

Bob Voss, licensed professional counselor in Ohio, Rotary Past President and 25 year Rotary volunteer in Geauga County, responded to news of the Heritage Program by commenting: "One of the many things I like about this program is that it lays the framework for retirees to reconnect with their community and to develop involvement in areas they may not have considered before. Having worked in the public sector for many years, the chance to spend time learning about the county's private sector businesses and developing a deeper understanding of real world work practices could be invaluable. Giving back and collaborating with connections outside of my background is exciting to me!"

CONTINUED ON BACK PAGE



will leverage the experience, practical wisdom and connections of its participants who are finding the time and interest to learn more about Geauga County and become involved, perhaps for the first time, in the community.



Terry Holland (LG 2020), a recently retired business owner remarked, "I like that the program provides a refresher on places that I may have visited as part of the Signature

Adult Program, but this time with a different perspective. I look at the Signature Program as an opportunity to learn about the county. The

continued from page 25

Leadership Geauga County Develops New Program for Retirees

The inaugural Heritage Program begins in May, 2021

When the Heritage Program launches in May 2021, we will have lived with COVID for over a year. The necessary physical distancing and isolation has created in some ways more disconnection from our community, social networks, and peers. This isolation can affect retirees even more. Research has demonstrated that, in retirement, it is natural to lose work friends and work networks. Individuals look toward the local community to expand personal networks and to increase interdependence within the local community. The Heritage Program can reignite a sense of connection with people in similar demographics, a sense of purpose in learning about community opportunities and working on a project, and a healthy sense of adventure in learning more about the community with peers.

Connection is a hallmark of the Signature Adult Program that lasts long after graduation. The Heritage Program will also provide ample opportunities to create a more diverse peer group outside previous work relationships. It will help to deepen connections through shared class and field trip experiences and working on projects together.

How does the Heritage Program support the goals of Leadership Geauga?

Many outstanding leaders and alumni of Leadership Geauga are the heart and soul of Geauga County who make a difference every day. The Heritage program will help participants to deepen personal connections to the incredible assets of Geauga county - its businesses, non-profits, and government agencies. Leaders in their next phase of life will find more meaningful ways to connect within their community.

Retired lawyer John Fitts is already involved in many organizations where he volunteers his legal expertise and community connections. He did not participate in the Signature Adult Program, but his wife Jan, a 2006 alumna, benefited from the program. John said, "since retiring, I continue to dedicate significant time to company boards and non-profits, but because class days will be scheduled in advance and a busy person schedules well, the Heritage Program is an opportunity I would work hard to find time for!"

Finally, the Heritage Program is outcome-based, meaning that the program goals include providing learning and hands-on experiences, with follow-up measurement of each project's community impact. Each project undertaken will clearly articulate a proposed outcome, focused on improving some aspect of Geauga County. Public sharing of outcomes will take place to inform the community and celebrate success.

Are you the type of experienced leader we described who is at or approaching retirement? Do you know of an individual who would benefit from the connections and opportunity to better our county? For more information on the Heritage Program, please contact Pam@leadershipgeauga.org. 