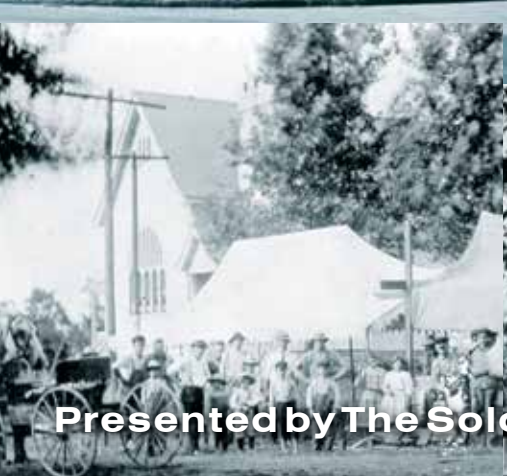
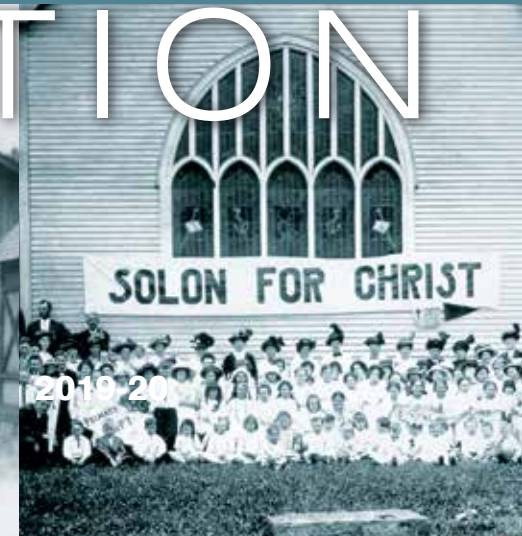


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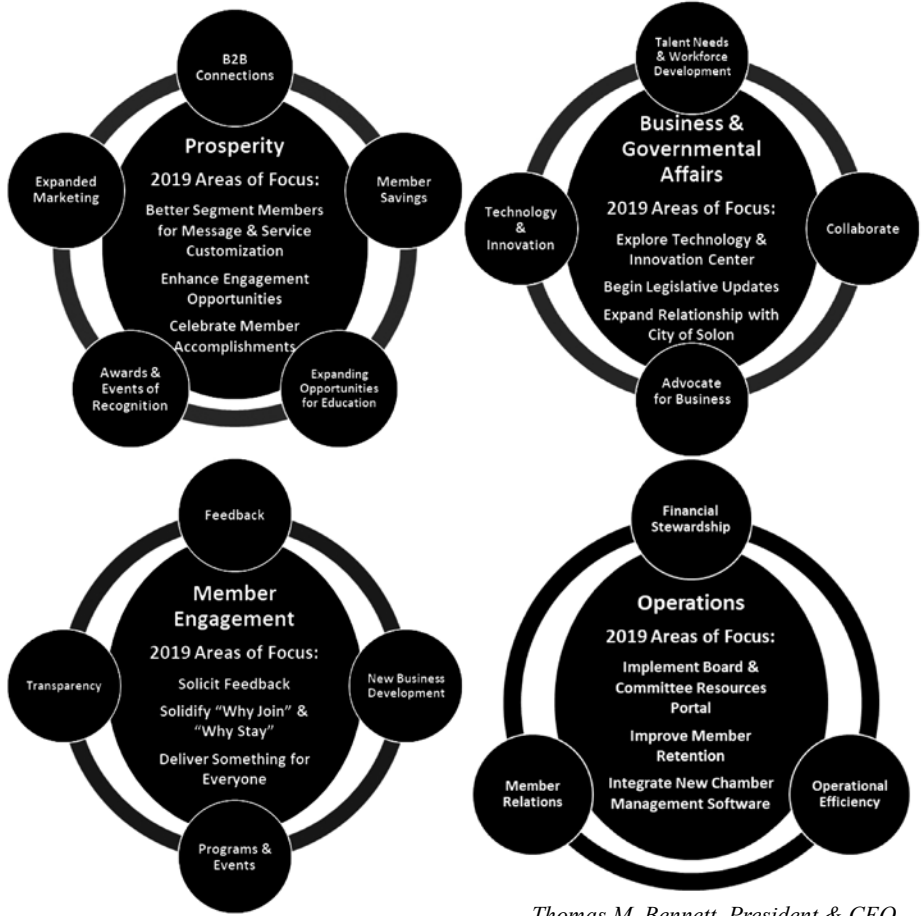
Dear Solon residents and Solon businesses, Greetings from the Solon Chamber of Commerce! On behalf of the staff, the Board of Directors and our 400 plus Member Organizations, I invite you to look through the amazing 2019 Solon Connection Magazine. First, a

heartfelt thank you to the team at the Solon Times for putting together amazing articles and advertising opportunities.

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Photos courtesy of the Solon Historical Society

The McBride family, longtime Solon residents from the city's earliest days, pose in front of what is now called the Lynch House on Bainbridge Road. The city celebrates its bicentennial in 2020.

Getting ready for bicentennial

Memories of past to be intricate part of 2020 celebration in Solon

By SUE REID

Solon's past and present will come together as the community prepares in grand fashion for its bicentennial celebration in 2020.

For 85-year-old Dorothy "Dotty" Smercina, the city in which she has lived her whole life is one rich with memories. As a young girl, her town was one of gravel roads and farmlands.

It was a childhood filled with old-fashioned games, neighborhood gatherings in the grass, riding her pony on Miles Road and swimming at Neptune Lake. It was there, at age 10, that she met her husband Charles "Chucky" Smercina, who went on to become the city's ninth mayor.

"I've lived in less than a 10th of a mile my whole life," Mrs. Smercina said from her Brainard Road home.

Continued on page 9



"The boys that wore the Blue," a group of Civil War veterans, held a reunion in Solon during the city's olden days. The Solon Historical Society will have events throughout 2020 recounting stories of Solon's history as the city as a whole celebrates its bicentennial.

History of Solon

The community of Solon was part of the Connecticut Western Reserve some 200 years ago. Sea captain Jason Robbins and merchant Isaac "Samuel" Bull were the first settlers, according to historical accounts. In 1820, they selected land around what is now Aurora Road near the Grantwood Golf Course for the community. Two years later, a school was started with just seven students.

Solon began to change from a small town to an area with both residences and industry under Mayor Edwin Carter in the 1950s. He persuaded voters to approve strict zoning to control growth and set aside 2,200 acres specifically for industrial growth, ensuring a solid tax revenue base for Solon.

With a substantial increase in population, Solon officially became a city in 1960. That growth has continued. In 1970, the population was 11,147 compared to about 25,000 today, according to U.S. Census figures.

Continued from page 8

Her maternal grandparents Walter and Lottie Drozdowski were among the earliest settlers in Solon in the 1800s, raising ducks and geese on Cannon Road. Mrs. Smercina's parents Joseph and Clementine Pazdernik, born in the early 1900s, started a small store in the city called Pazy's that was once a pool hall.

Located on Miles Road, it was a meeting place of sorts on Saturday nights, Mrs. Smercina recalled.

"All of the neighborhood would come there and play pinochle and bring bakery," she said.

The Solon of today, bursting with development, shopping centers and numerous housing development, is vastly different from the city of long ago, extremely rural with lots of open land.

"The bicentennial will be an opportunity to sort of embrace that history in our community, while at the same time, looking into the future," Mayor Edward H. Kraus said. "We have such a unique, rich history."

The celebration will be spread throughout 2020, with about six or seven events presented, and programs and activities held about every other month.

"A lot of it is a work in progress," Mayor Kraus said, "but we want people to really understand that this is a big deal for us. There are people who have a long history in Solon."

It is that history that they want many to understand, Councilman Robert Shimits, president of the Solon Historical Society, added.

Mrs. Smercina, an active member of the Solon Senior Center, recalled the city not having any stores besides her parents' small store, which at one time had the only telephone in the neighborhood.

As a young girl she would run to tell her parents if they got a telephone call, she recalled.

"There was nothing here to be honest with

Continued on page 10

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Continued from page 9

you,” Mrs. Smercina said of the once rural area.

Solon was a farming community and had always been a robust business community where goods were shipped by railroad, cars and buggies, the mayor explained.

“We really want to highlight that,” he said of the bicentennial events and programs. “We will use this as a great opportunity for educational programs.” Many of the programs at the Solon Historical Society in 2020 will be geared toward the bicentennial as well.

Many do not know the history of the city, Mayor Kraus noted, with 90 percent of the residents being newer.

“There are a few who grew up and still live here,” Mayor Kraus said. The planned events will reflect Solon’s history through pictures from the past, he said. Thousands of pictures have been set aside for the celebration.

They are similar to the countless black and white pictures with scalloped edges that Mrs. Smercina scattered across her kitchen table, recounting memories of long ago.

The Smercinas, married in 1953 at St. Rita Catholic Church, would spend Friday nights as a young married couple at the former Quinn’s Restaurant on Aurora Road near Solon Boulevard. There, they would see friends and neighbors and listen to music and dance.

“We had such a good life,” Mrs. Smercina said.

They knew so many people in old Solon that going to the Kroger’s formerly in the Solon Square Shopping Center would sometimes take two hours, she recalled, as she would bump into so many people.

When her husband ran for mayor back in the early 1970s, they made all his campaign materials by hand and held meetings and election parties at Quinns.

“We were friends with Jim Quinn,” she recalled, “and went to Alaska for 28 days with the Quinns in their motor home.

“It was a busy life,” she said.

Time capsule

Remnants of old Solon will be unveiled in a time capsule, planned to be unveiled in late spring or early summer in honor of the bicen-

ennial, Mr. Shimits explained. Buried at the historical society back in 1970 for the city’s Sesquicentennial, or 150-year celebration, contributors to the time capsule included City Council members and the Solon City School District.

Other events planned to mark the bicentennial include a communitywide festival similar to a street fair along Portz Parkway, as well as an ice cream social and a formal black tie dinner event to be presented at Signature of Solon. The gala dinner will serve as the kickoff to the year-long celebration.

“We will also use our existing events like Home Days and the Fall Fest to wrap the bicentennial in,” the mayor said. Home Days theme will be “Solon 2020.”

The celebrations, programs and events will also have the involvement of a variety of community organizations, such as the Solon Rotary Club, the Solon Chamber of Commerce, Solon Civic Club, and Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1863, among others.

“It’s really important to engage everyone,” Mayor Kraus said. “The bicentennial will be a great way for students to understand the history of the community we live in.”

In the works is engaging the drama club at the city school district to perform a play about the history of Solon, Mr. Shimits said.

“We have people who don’t still live in Solon but are from all over the country,” Mayor Kraus said. “We want to bring those people back who have a long history with the community.”

Mrs. Smercina’s two children still live in Solon, including daughter Cindy Bomeli whose home is a stone’s throw away from her mother on Brainard Road. As a student at St. Rita School, Mrs. Bomeli recalled the bus going by what was once a dairy farm where Enterprise Parkway now sits.

“We made a game of how many milk cans there were,” Mrs. Bomeli, 63, said, adding that children in her class didn’t have phones in their homes. It was also a time when you got your milk delivered in glass bottles.

Mrs. Bomeli and her brother David, 61, represent the fourth generation of the family in Solon and Mrs. Smercina, an only child, the third generation dating back over a century.

“It’s important to know this history and tie that to the future as well,” Community Center

Manager Rich Parker said. “Not only has Solon been a great community, but it is going to continue to be a great community.”

The bicentennial is an opportunity to really “celebrate Solon.

“We need a good reason to bring everyone together and celebrate,” Mr. Parker added.

Plans in works

The Recreation Department staff along with the Solon Center for the Arts is part of the planning for the year’s events.

Recreation Director Donald W. Holub said there will be tours of the city with Lolly the Trolley. The tours will highlight the century homes that are still standing.

Mrs. Smercina remembered when she and her husband had to move their home on Brainard Road in July of 1971 for the construction of the Route 422 freeway. The home just needed to be moved a few hundred feet north from its original location.

“I’ve only moved 500 feet my whole life,” Mrs. Smercina added with a laugh.

Socializing back in the day involved visiting homes of friends with their two young children and playing pinochle, she said adding that the visitor would make a little bakery.

It was a simpler time, she said.

“We were excited when McDonald’s came to town,” Mrs. Bomeli added with a laugh.

There also used to be music in the Community Park when her husband was mayor, Mrs. Smercina said. Also, the log cabin was built when he was mayor, which still is in place today.

“We would like to show people where the historical areas were and recreate some of Solon from all those years ago,” Mayor Kraus said. “We want to also show people the growth of the community.”

Residents who feel they have something of interest to share of “old Solon,” whether it is photos or memories are asked to share them.

The year will also feature video testimonials of the city’s living history.

There will be many fun events in 2020 geared toward families, as well as outdoor activities. The celebration will also encompass service projects to be done by people in the community.

“It’s about showing the city pride,” Mr. Shimits said. ■

Solon welcomes these new businesses:

2018 New Businesses

- D-BAT Solon
- Security Self Storage
- Lori Mason Photography
- Rose Italian Kitchen
- Bryant & Stratton
- Simmons Trucking
- State Farm Linda Myers
- Foot Zone
- ICEE
- Industrial Commercial Properties
- Crown Packaging
- Vector Technical
- Matthews Counseling

- Kyntronics
- Channel Products
- Best in Class Education Center
- Towneplace Suites
- Chakra Superfoods
- Body Technic Systems
- Club Pilates
- Collaborant Group
- Pulp
- Accuray

2019 New Businesses

- Delta Diversified
- Rossi Schlotter & Co., CPA

- AKT Peerless Environmental
- Sound Acoustic Solutions
- Capital Enquiry
- Scientific Games
- NCJW/Cleveland
- Escapology

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Solon's bright economic forecast

City continues as destination for businesses, industries

By SUE REID

The city of Solon has a bright economic future.

There's the growing \$43 million annual income tax collection, an active job creation grant program and redevelopment of businesses and restaurants citywide.

But one project is setting the tone for the future, Mayor Edward H. Kraus said.

"For me it's Swagelok," he said. "They have opened my eyes as to what the future holds for us."

The global company, that has been in Solon since 1965, announced in 2018 that it would build its \$30 million to \$50 million Global Headquarters and Innovation Center in the city. The announcement came after three months of searching for the best site in Ohio and other states.

The Swagelok headquarters is set to result in 100 new jobs over the next decade and \$87 million in new payroll. It is one of five job creation grants the city awarded in 2018

that together are projected to generate an additional \$97.5 million in payroll over the next 10 years. About 90 percent of that increased payroll would come from the new Swagelok projects.

Other projects are on the horizon in Solon including the long-awaited redevelopment of the SOM Center Plaza, where a building that once housed Sears stood empty for years. It will soon be home to Hobby Lobby and an Aldi grocery store. Another long vacant site on SOM Center and Solon roads will soon be home to a new Chick-fil-A with a Yours Truly opening just down the road.

Why is Solon a destination for businesses? "Solon offered a thoughtful, comprehensive response to our RFP (request for proposal) that included financial incentives, infrastructure investments, and a commitment to working with our business for both the betterment of the community, but also our associates and company," said Joey J. Arnold, vice president of Continuous Improvement and Quality for Swagelok.

Solon is easily accessible because it is near the Route 422 highway, has a strong public school district for families who move here and city officials dedicated to working with businesses, Mr. Arnold noted.

"There were several criteria outlined in our request for proposal, but convenience and access for our current associates was a priority factor," Mr. Arnold continued. "Other criteria included schedule, building requirements, access to flights for national and international visitors, ability to reduce energy consumption and culture community fit."

It is those types of amenities as well as options for leisure activities that draw people to Solon and help energize its robust economy, said Johnie L. Reed, assistant professor of business administration and instructor of economics at Cuyahoga Community College.

"Businesses come to Solon because they know Solon is a great economic base," Mr. Reed explained. It is a place that has been "strong for some time."

"Businesses can pull employees from the area," Mr. Reed said. "In theory, people want to drive less than 15 miles from work, so if you can have entrepreneurial ventures in Solon, you have a great pool of people."

In addition to the 100 new employees, Swagelok's Innovation Center will be available to their customers, associates and sales channel, which includes approximately 3,500

Continued on page 12

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Continued from page 11

individuals located in 70 countries on six continents, Mr. Arnold explained.

The building is planned to be complete at the end of 2020 or beginning of 2021.

More to come

Also on the horizon in Solon is Vitalia Senior Residences at Solon, a \$30 million senior living community on Kruse Drive, a new Yours Truly planned for Kruse Drive, as well as upgrades to buildings along Aurora Road including one being transformed by Rita's Salon and Spa.

“Our businesses want to be in a community that is entrepreneurial, innovative and growing,” Mayor Kraus said. “That is our future, and that is where we are headed. It’s a global market, and we are a global community.”

Mr. Arnold said Swagelok began assessing the need for a new headquarters and the addition of a formal Innovation Center in early 2015. The drivers for new office space included outgrowing its current building and the opportunity to co-locate several corporate functions that are divided among several locations as well as a desire to upgrade aesthetics of its headquarters, Mr. Arnold explained. They also wished to continue to position Swagelok as an employer of choice for professional talent in the competitive Northeast

Ohio labor market.

“Creation of an Innovation Center, a highly collaborative customer-facing space, will allow us to improve upon and expand that work we do together with customers and our sales channel on product, service and technology development,” Mr. Arnold said.

It will enhance Swagelok’s relationship with its customers by accelerating investments in emerging manufacturing, engineering and collaborative technologies, “which are highly attractive and relevant for our global customer base,” Mr. Arnold said.

“This space will support training inventive solutions with our customers, and provide a creative and flexible space for our associates, our customers and our sales channel to work together on business or system challenges,” he added.

Another project is in the works. It’s an innovation center designed to boost the economy and offer options for businesses in Solon. The center is planned for a 10,000 square foot space at 30640 Bainbridge Road and will be owned and operated by the Solon Chamber of Commerce.

“It’s really an exciting time in Solon,” said Cary Root, a city business owner and Solon Chamber board member. “Things are brighter and looking up in almost every way.

“It’s a perfect storm in a real positive way,” Mr. Root continued. He said the businesses that the chamber works with and advocates for are coming together in a more synergistic way.

Mr. Reed noted that offering businesses and their employees more, with a variety of amenities outside of just coming to work each day, is a way to continue to bolster economic growth. A strong economy is also a reflection of the stock market, which has been looking good for the past decade, Mr. Reed added.

“With the economy so strong in the past seven to eight years, that feeds into the process of spending more money,” Mr. Reed said. “Money is more liquid now and things that couldn’t happen 12 or 13 years ago, are now happening.”

Growing small businesses

“Companies are growing right before our eyes,” Mayor Kraus said, “and we have to make sure we respond to the growth.

“If we do that, the companies will see the value in Solon and they will see a partner in government.”

Angee Shaker, director of business and marketing for the City of Solon, said the city’s goal is to always be responsive to businesses.

“We get out and listen to them,” she said, “and we also offer incentives to support their growth.”

Whether it is the job creation grant or Growth Revitalization and Incentive Program, which is a one-time grant given for upgrades to older vacant buildings or commercial properties making exterior renovations, Ms. Shaker said she will help walk businesses through the process to make things easier.

“If they have a challenge such as attracting new talent, we connect them with resources that can,” she said.

Businesses appreciate Solon for its top school system, close proximity to Cleveland Hopkins International Airport and downtown Cleveland, as well as its strong industrial base, she added, which currently has a vacancy rate of 5.5 percent, even lower than last year’s 6.15 percent.

“Our industrial area is extremely strong and our vacancy rate is low compared to nationwide averages,” Mayor Kraus noted. “When you see a sign to lease space, your automatic assumption is the whole building is vacant, but may be a small portion of building. It gives a different narrative, but when you look at the (vacancy) numbers, it’s pretty low.”

“Businesses see that Solon is a growth area, and they want to be here,” Ms. Shaker added.

Solon is in a good place because they are not fully occupied so when companies outgrow their space, they will still have additional sites available to them so they don’t look outside the city, she added.

“In the 21 square miles of this community, we use every inch of that square mile, and we use it well,” Mayor Kraus continued. If the space isn’t there for an incoming business, “we come up with creative ideas” to help them utilize space.

The Solon Chamber also advocates for the business community in a number of ways, Mr. Root added, and is changing from past practices.

“Our primary mission is to be advocates for the business communities in Solon,” Mr. Root continued, “but I see us becoming more



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"In the past, we have been maintaining doing business visitations, but now we try to keep a pulse on what is going on and what help we can give. It gives us a great opportunity to be proactive."

Mr. Root said there are so many good things going on in the city and a great future for it to continue.

Mayor Kraus said it is a "yes first" attitude that has changed the culture under his administration.

"Yes first means so much to so many businesses," Mr. Root added.

"It's a cultural shift for us as a city to put yourself in the shoes of businesses," the mayor added.

While the incentives are great, the mayor said what he believes businesses really want and what fosters a strong economy in Solon is a "partnership."

"That is what ultimately brings in business but also keeps people here," Mayor Kraus said. "I felt that for a while, our success was in spite of ourselves, not because of what we are doing."

"I want to change that," he said. "We need to be proactive and pro business." ■

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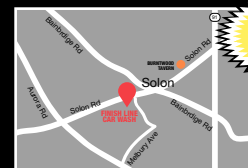
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Independent yet not alone

Vitalia designed to provide full life as residents age

By SUE REID

Under way this year for completion in 2020 is one of the city's newest developments by Omni Senior Living – Vitalia Senior Residences at Solon – which broke ground on land at the intersection of Kruse Drive and Bainbridge Road.

“Our focus is all senior living,” Omni President Mario Sinicariello said. “We knew there was a need in Solon, but we do our homework.”

The company, that is moving its Beachwood headquarters to Solon, began looking for a location for its \$30 million senior living community three years ago.

“It wasn't easy,” Mr. Sinicariello recalled. “We talked to the city and to the senior center to understand the needs of the community and spent a lot of time understanding the community.”

From there, the Omni team took on the task of locating a site large enough for the project settling on the 5.38 acres across the street from Uptown Solon plaza.

A referendum on the ballot in May of 2018 to rezone the land from commercial to senior living residential paved the way for the project that will include buildings for independent living, assisted living and memory care on the campus as well as amenities such as a therapeutic swimming pool, exercise facility, coffee bar, fenced-in dog park and a library with programming from the Cuyahoga County Public Library.

“There used to be much less of a focus on lifestyle,” Mr. Sinicariello recalled of housing options for aging residents in the past. “It was just about caring for seniors, and now it is seniors making their own choices and having choices.”



Rendering courtesy of Omni Senior Living

This artist's rendering depicts the plans currently being constructed for Omni Senior Living – Vitalia Senior Residences at Solon, which broke ground at Kruse Drive and Bainbridge Road. The facility will house independent living, assisted living and memory care and feature amenities including a therapeutic swimming pool, exercise facility, coffee bar, dog park, library and more.

Hence the translation of Vitalia to mean “full of life,” he continued.

The focus today is on lifestyle with aging adults being extremely active by taking yoga classes or even playing beach volleyball by the pool.

“It's the idea of life and socialization,” Mr. Sinicariello added, noting that many studies show the benefits of people interacting with one another.

“Socialization has been proven to be one of the most important contributing factors in improving and maintaining quality of life and health,” agreed Jill Frankel, director of Solon Senior Services. “Vitalia offers the ability to live independently but not alone. Because of the opportunities to eat with others, participate in activities, utilize transportation and communicate with staff, residents will have the opportunity to engage with others regularly when they choose.”

At Vitalia Senior Residences at Solon,

seniors will also have the ability to either walk or experience a short drive to a variety of amenities, one of the many draws that brought Omni to the city.

“It is a phenomenal location in Solon just because of the walkability,” Mr. Sinicariello said.

People can wake up in the morning and walk over to First Watch in the Uptown Solon shopping center or to Mitchell's Ice Cream for a cone in the evening, he gave as an example.

Those eating in the community dining room will have an open menu available all day, said Gary Biales, vice president of development for Omni.

“People can come and eat anytime they want,” he said.

“Our independent living comes with three meals a day and all those amenities included,” Mr. Sinicariello said. “Our vision is to

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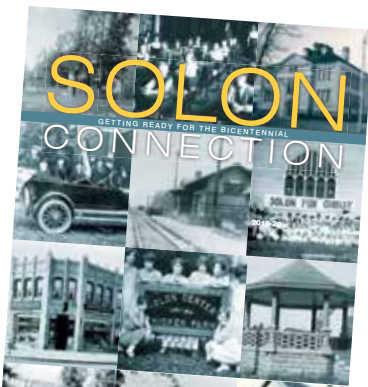
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sort of be the ‘all inclusive.’

“How some seniors go on cruises, our idea is a cruise ship on land,” he added.

The amenities don’t stop there.

The community will include three salons, two theaters, a game room, coffee bar and a demonstration kitchen. There will also be house cleaning and laundry services available with the Independent Living units as well as movies shown nightly in the theater.

The independent living building, which would be four stories with 90 units, will be a combination of suites, one and two bedroom units. The assisted living/memory care building will be three stories and include 42 units for assisted living and 18 for memory care. Memory care would be located on the first floor and assisted living on the upper floors.

Omni also worked with the city on an architectural style that honors the city’s master plan. Part of the development agreement they entered into with Solon requires the installation of sidewalks connecting properties for overall walkability.

The independent living building will encompass 110,000 square feet and face Kruse Drive, with construction expected to be complete by January of 2020. The second building, for assisted living and memory care, will feature 60,000 square feet and face Bainbridge Road. That building will be complete by February of 2020.



Photo by Alana Clark

Omni President Mario Sinicariello, left, and Vice President of Development Gary Biales have committed their company to Solon in more ways than one. In addition to the construction of the \$30 million Vitalia Senior Residences at Solon senior living community, the company is moving its Beachwood headquarters to Solon.

Many in Solon are searching for these kinds of services, Mr. Sinicariello said.

“We understood the needs, and we are happy to bring this to the community.”

“In addition to offering independent living with catered services, Vitalia offers its resi-

dents the opportunity to easily receive greater levels of care if needed, including Memory Care assisted living,” Ms. Frankel said. “This is wonderful for couples who have different needs, because it allows them to safely live close together in an environment that best

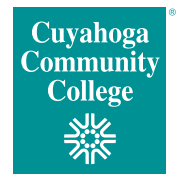


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suits them individually.”

Two other Vitalias are open in Strongsville and Westlake with two additional locations in progress. The Solon locations will be the largest of their Vitalias.

“This is a legacy for us, and it is important,” Mr. Sinicariello noted.

“This really opens up the possibility of having a home where literally everything is taken care of,” Mayor Edward H. Kraus said.

The community will also be wonderful for the families of the seniors living there who will come to visit. They can walk around the different areas on Bainbridge Road and Kruse Drive, the mayor said.

The Vitalia itself will have areas to walk and sit, the mayor continued.

It can also be like a “walking senior center,” Mayor Kraus said. “Those seniors can use our senior center but also events can be held there,” whether it be wellness opportunities, an educational program or an exercise class for example.

“It just opens up more engagement,” he said.

In business for more than 30 years, Omni also made the decision to move its corporate headquarters to Solon, adjacent to Vitalia Senior Residences at Solon, making an overall \$3 million investment in a 15,148 square foot single story office building that will sit on a 3.78 acre lot. Construction began in 2019 for the headquarters with a target completion by fall.

“The whole idea is the full integration of the community and to also enjoy the amenities there for our employees,” Mr. Sinicariello said of the Omni employees who will number 30 in the headquarters and 60 in the senior living community.

“When we started thinking about Solon, we saw that the land next to it (Vitalia) was available,” Mr. Sinicariello said, and relocating from Beachwood speaks to their commitment to this project and to the community.

Omni has made multiple visits to the Solon Senior Center to gauge community feedback on their project.

Interest is already mounting for the community, even months before it is complete, Mr. Biales noted.

“Some have already reserved rooms, and people already are picking out floor plans,” Mr. Biales said.

Vitalia Senior Residences at Solon is aiming for seniors starting at about 72 years of age. Costs for independent living units are \$3,200 a month; \$4,000 a month for assisted living and \$5,500 for memory care.

The community will generate \$2 million in new payroll for Solon and between new payroll taxes and property taxes the city would gain about \$75,000 annually. The Solon schools would fare even better with \$530,000 in annual property taxes due to Vitalia and no new students to add to the district.

“If you look at Solon and the population, there are quite a lot of people over 72, and

there is no where they can go in Solon” for this type of living, Mr. Biales said.

“People want to stay in the community they are already in,” Mr. Sinicariello added.

“It’s always best to go where you grew up or where you are from,” Mr. Biales said.

“They have their friends here, and the walkability of that location is unlike anything you can find in Solon,” Mr. Sinicariello added.

“Vitalia Senior Residences at Solon fills a need that presently does not exist in Solon,” Ms. Frankel added. “We speak to many older adults, as well as residents who are looking to move loved ones closer to them, who wish to live independently but only want or need some supportive services to do so.

“Vitalia’s services cater to their needs,” she said.

“We are so excited to be in this community,” Mr. Sinicariello concluded. “It’s a great community, and they are so engaged. It’s one of the most amazing communities in Northeast Ohio.” ■



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Photo by Peggy Turbett

Solon resident and composer/musician Christie Dilisio leads choir practice at Church of the Holy Angels in Bainbridge where she is music director. She has been involved with music from an early age, learning to play the piano at age 5 to accompany her own singing.



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Christie Dilisio finds balance with faith, family, music career

By SUE REID

The path to a career in music was almost a given for Christie Dilisio who grew up listening to Frank Sinatra, the Beatles, Barbara Streisand and Tony Bennett. At age 5, she began playing the piano because she wanted to accompany herself while singing.

"I liked to play and to improvise," said Mrs. Dilisio, 64.

The 34-year resident of Solon and native of Parma went on to receive formal training, playing the piano all through high school at Nazareth Academy before earning Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees in music from the University of Akron.

All through that time, Mrs. Dilisio worked in bands and sang solo.

"While people were getting jobs as waiters and waitresses, I found it was good to sing in those places," she recalled.

She refrained from telling her professors about the side work until her piano professor, who was a classical musician, said, "I know what you are doing, and I did that, too."

After graduating from college, Mrs. Dilisio and her all-girl band Tripoly drew a large crowd at the former Quinn's restaurant in

Solon on weekends. There, she and her two classmates would play hits by Abba, achieving the "tight harmonies of the time," she said. The girl group was a staple at the popular restaurant on Friday and Saturday nights for about four years.

"It would be packed, and it was very fun," she recalled. "We had a really big following."

Tripoly played all of the dance music of the time, and patrons would make requests. Mrs. Dilisio played the keyboard and sang.

She did the same at Georgie's Italian restaurant, formerly on SOM Center Road. There, she played Friday nights for a decade while being a stay-at-home mom to her two sons Matt and Nick. Under her name "Christie Dilisio," she would perform oldies and the Top 40 hits from artists like Carly Simon and Tony Bennett.

"I used to put the mike on the piano, long before karaoke, and people would take it and sing," she said, adding that she knew what people liked to hear.

While working part-time at Georgie's, Mrs. Dilisio began teaching music to St. Rita School, where her sons were students.

"I went to school with them," she said with a laugh.

At St. Rita's, she taught about 1,000 children music during those special years, she recalled.

"I had every child, and I loved it," she said.

Interacting with the children was even more enjoyable than the music, Mrs. Dilisio continued.

"It's the people more than the music," she said. "The music is just a bonus."

Mrs. Dilisio said working with people is a joy because when they sing, "it's not forced. They have to choose it." There is a commitment, dedication and trust involved, she noted.

"You are handling their hearts," Mrs. Dilisio said. "When the kids would sing, I take that really to my heart."

She felt the same with the choirs she has directed, fostering a love of the choir setting early on in her career as choir director at Trinity High School in Garfield Heights for five years.

"I don't take credit for it," she said of the music. "I tell the choir this: A choir isn't a choir unless it's all of them. I'm one of the people."

She loves the harmonies of choirs and said it is like "being on a team."

"That's the best part, just being connected," Mrs. Dilisio said.

Mrs. Dilisio's path in music took an unexpected turn when she began in the church setting, working as a substitute at Church of the Holy Angels in Bainbridge while still teaching at St. Rita, performing and caring for her family.

"I never thought I would end up in church setting," she said. "I wanted to be a choir director and loved being in choir in high school."

At that time, Holy Angels was located in a

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Solon resident Christie Dilisio leads a 150-member choir as music director at Church of the Holy Angels in Bainbridge. She has also produced five compact discs of original music.

Photo by Peggy Turbett

Continued from page 19

smaller church on Chillicothe Road and had just a guitar group. They liked her contemporary piano style and asked her to take on a full-time role. She has worked at Holy Angels for the past 20 years, creating a music program that has grown to a 150-member choir.

Rooted in community, the choir and her work at Holy Angels is one of her life's greatest inspirations, she said.

"I'm so inspired by this congregation," Mrs. Dilisio said. "When I see cars coming in and out, this is a dedication of people's lives."

The church's music program has grown under Mrs. Dilisio to include a handbell choir and a children's choir.

"It's a very social group, and it's a special, committed group," she said of the members.

Mrs. Dilisio, who is found conducting the choir and behind the piano each Sunday during four services, also writes music for the church, including the Responsorial Psalms that are favorites among church members.

"The tunes are simple," she said of such songs as "Angels Beside Me."

Mrs. Dilisio has produced five compact discs, with the latest entitled "Heart Songs," all her original music.

She recently was working on a piece about grace before meals which was performed by children at the church on Holy Thursday before Easter at the parish's potluck dinner.

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"Songs come to me when I am driving," she said. "I'll just think of a melody."

Mrs. Dilisio said she feels grateful and so blessed in what she calls a "humbling job."

"People are volunteering to come," she said. "They become friends, and the relationships in the parish are beautiful."

"That's Christ reaching out," she said. "I get goose bumps when the choir sings – every week – because I get to hear the best part."

Mrs. Dilisio's work at the church is an extension of her faith, she said. "My faith is that Jesus doesn't live here on Earth but he lives within us."

"We have to be the hands and hearts of Jesus," she said. "We love and support each other and all the caring you do is showing your faith to others."

Mrs. Dilisio said she has been on the receiving end of the caring more than she deserves.

"I believe the purpose of your life is to be the hands to your family first and to the people you meet, your friends," she said.

Her work has allowed her to be a better mom, a better wife and a better grandmother, she said. She is "grammy" to five grandchildren.

Mrs. Dilisio and her husband Terry, a sales manager, were married in 1980. She said that a Yamaha grand piano was the first piece of furniture in their home.

"We didn't have a couch, washer or dryer yet," she said with a laugh. "I went and bought the piano because we would always say we can't afford it."

She also plays on a Yamaha at the church and loves its "rich bass."

"Piano is our main instrument, unlike most Catholic churches where it is an organ," she said.

In addition to weekly Masses, Mrs. Dilisio plays for funerals and weddings.

"It's a joyful thing in my life," she said. "I'm fortunate because I get to do something that is so pretty and beautiful."

"It's a happy thing."

Mrs. Dilisio has also traveled extensively with the Holy Angels choir, to such destinations as France, England, Switzerland and Italy.

They have been on eight European tours, singing in places that are amazing and "unimaginable," Mrs. Dilisio described, including St. Peter's Basilica, Notre Dame in Paris, St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin and a castle in Switzerland, among others.

"This is not typical of church choirs," she said, with many taking maybe one or two European trips.

"We have done it every other year," she said, adding that the choir will travel to Greece in 2020.

About 50-90 people go on the trips, with some spouses accompanying.

"I really feel in my heart that we are showing such a good side of America," Mrs. Dilisio said. "They welcome us, and we portray the very best of kindness and goodness because we are bringing music and sharing our faith with the people."

Mrs. Dilisio said she is honored to have shaken hands with music directors from all over the world.

"You just are awestruck," she said.

On these trips, the choir performs American music, gospel tunes, barbershop and more.

"We do sacred classics as well," she said. "They want to hear what Americans sing, and that's when they are smiling."

Closer to home, the choir has done a great deal of community outreach, performing in nursing homes, at Cleveland Indian games, Cleveland Cavaliers games and also for the homebound at the parish.

"I really like bringing the music out and going further out because it's such a positive thing," Mrs. Dilisio said. "I really enjoy that, and I tell other directors, find something you love within to build the community."

She told her sons, one of whom is an architect and the other an orthopedic surgeon, that when they were embarking on a career, find something they love.

"I look forward to coming to work each day and I told my boys that," she said. "It's such a cool thing."

"I just love it," Mrs. Dilisio added. "You feel like you are making a difference." ■



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Three decades of leadership

Joseph V. Regano at helm as school district achieves top designation

By SUE REID

Solon City School District Superintendent Joseph V. Regano, one of the more familiar faces in the city, came to the district more than three decades ago during a time when education was vastly different from today.

The year was 1985 when farmland surrounded Solon High School on Inwood Drive and a field house served as the gym outside of the school.

Solon was mostly a rural community, beginning to come of age, he recalled.

"There were people moving into the community from the suburbs," Mr. Regano, 70, described of the migration. They came from areas like Warrensville Heights, Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights without a great understanding of Solon as a community.

Mr. Regano recalled one of the first strategic planning meetings he attended, held at the Pine Lake Trout Club in Bainbridge and intended to define Solon schools. The group included board members as well as community residents.

"We went around asking, 'where were you living five years ago?'" Mr. Regano said, and no one was in Solon.

"They had all moved from somewhere else so they brought those values and what their (school) district was like," he said. "We were able to explain that we are developing, and we need to know what you think it should look like so we could marry that information moving forward."

"The first thing you do is develop those core values that are common," he noted.

Those values continue to be at the core of one of the state's most successful public districts. Students here consistently pass achievement tests mandated by the Ohio Department of Education with top marks result-



Photo by Alana Clark

Joseph Regano

ing in Solon earning the designation of being one of the highest achieving districts and often the No. 1 public school district in Ohio.

Mr. Regano, a native of Warrensville Heights, said his role then and now is to determine what residents, board members and educators are saying.

"I really do feel the No. 1 thing is listening," Mr. Regano said. "You either listen by hearing or listen by watching."

Listening has helped with his decision making since moving from assistant superintendent in 1987 to superintendent. Whether it was a new program, idea or direction the district needed to go in its budget, all of his decisions were predicated on what those core values were that the community identified, he noted.

"At the end of it, you get to a place where you agree upon what those values are and what's important to everyone," Mr. Regano said.

Molding the district

That first strategic session set the vision of what the Solon school district would be in the next five to 10 years and beyond.

At the time he joined the Solon district, it had just 3,000 students, compared to the 12,000 at Euclid City Schools where Mr. Regano had

previously served as business manager.

Solon's housing growth in new subdivisions including the Preserve, Chagrin Highlands, Thornbury, and Signature of Solon resulted in student enrollment hitting a high of 6,000.

As a result, he oversaw additions to each one of the district's school buildings to accommodate the growth.

"We built the dual schools," Mr. Regano said of the combined building housing Solon Middle School and Parkside Elementary, and added on to Orchard Middle School, Roxbury Elementary, Lewis Elementary and Solon High School.

The construction on the buildings came after district officials worked to get bond issues passed.

"The one thing I have never had to do here is convince the citizens how important education is," Mr. Regano noted. "They all moved here for that reason, so it made it a lot easier."

Mr. Regano said he has attended meetings through the years with colleagues whose levies fail time and time again in their districts.

"If we have a levy, we are not going to give you a reason to vote no," Mr. Regano said.

Today there are about 4,600 students in the district, which changes the planning dynamics for district leaders.

Mr. Regano, a resident of Mentor, said that he works daily to determine how the strategic plan would work with a goal of all children achieving to their highest degree.

"I love it every day," Mr. Regano said of his job which focuses on the business side of education. "Just to see the district function and operate brings me the greatest joy."

"There are tasks I like better than others," he added, "but this is one of those jobs that either you like to do this and don't mind being criticized" or you don't.

No typical day

Mr. Regano arrives at school each day by 6:15 a.m. Meetings and phone calls involve

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a variety of issues such as security, parking, employment, building and staffing matters.

"I used to make myself visible as a young superintendent," he said, "and try to have people understand who I am.

"(Now) most people know me in the district," Mr. Regano said. "We are in a district where people generally don't follow a chain of command. They call the superintendent or a board member, and then you go back down the ladder."

One of the harder parts of the job is continuing the success, especially when you have students who are achieving at top levels. It is often hard to get them to achieve even higher, Mr. Regano said. Continued achievement is one of the measures the state education department measures each year.

"It's a much more difficult process than taking kids not achieving and moving them forward."

The hardest part of his job, though, is facing the death of students, Mr. Regano said.

"That is the absolutely worst," Mr. Regano said. "Those are the times I get the same feeling before attending that wake – I want to quit. I don't want to do this. It's horrible."

Mr. Regano began in education as a teacher, instructing students in the Euclid City School District in business law, accounting and English for nine years. There he met his wife, Sandy, a fellow teacher, and the couple married in 1971. They have two grown children and four grandchildren.

He earned a degree in education from the Ohio State University and completed his master's in administration in 1976 from Cleveland State University.

Mr. Regano said it was a desire to move up in his career that drew him to Solon. He added with a laugh that Solon initially lost his application and did not call him for an interview.

A few months later, he did some consulting work in Solon and then was asked to stay.

"I figured they found my application, but once I was hired I realized they hadn't," he said.

As superintendent, Mr. Regano said his role is in providing order and clarity.

When presented with an idea, he always makes sure that whatever change is made benefits the students and the district in some way.

Mr. Regano said the district cannot stay the same and must always work to improve as state standards and new assessment measures come into place.

Mr. Regano noted changes over the years including special education students now being served in the Solon district instead of outside programs of the past.

"We were able to establish programs so their needs were taken care of in the district," he said.

Parents speak up when they are concerned about the core values of the district, he said.

The mission is clear today and should serve as a guiding light when Mr. Regano retires in the next couple of years, he said.

In addition to special education programs, Solon has been a leader in sports programs,

adding opportunities for girls, and Advanced Placement classes offering 27 today compared to three in the past.

Partner with city

Mr. Regano, who was hired when former Mayor Charles Smercina led the city, said all of the mayors over the years have been devoted to serving residents.

"They (also) knew the value of the schools and were ready to help us in any way," he said.

"In many communities, there is this rub between the schools and the city government," Mr. Regano explained, "and I don't know why. We never seem to have that."

Looking ahead, Mr. Regano said his staff is re-mapping the district for future projects and buildings.

Parts of the high school are more than 60 years old and Roxbury Elementary is 50 years old.

"They are all in good shape and nothing is imminent," he said, "but somewhere down the line, there have to be changes."

For now, Mr. Regano is keeping the district mission on its road to continued success.

"We want to keep that high rating and accountability," Mr. Regano said. "That means making sure what we do every day is for the good of the students." ■

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Neighborhood place



With the table-side pierce of a steak knife, hot egg yolk dribbles from the Tavern Burger at Fisher's American Tavern, featuring Angus beef, bacon, cheddar cheese, lettuce, tomato and a pierced sunny side egg. Owners Scott and Tami Fisher have kept the tavern's original flair with more of an upscale feel and a new menu.

Photo by Peggy Turbett

American Tavern is back with Fisher's special touch

By SUE REID

"Thanks for bringing our tavern back to Solon." That is music to the ears of new Fisher's American Tavern owners Scott and Tami Fisher.

It is what customers have said for the past year since the South Russell couple purchased the neighborhood tavern, which has been in its location for more than 40 years.

"We didn't want to lose their American Tavern feel," said Mr. Fisher, 56, describing the vibe originally created by founders David and Linda Pickle.

"We wanted to bring that feeling back."

The restaurant had changed names through the years and even closed for a period of time. But the Fishers want everyone to know they are back and have taken the neighborhood tavern on Miles and Bainbridge roads to new levels.

"That was our biggest hurdle – to get people to come back," Mr. Fisher said. "They stopped coming for various reasons. We want to let them know it is under new ownership with new offerings and a new menu.

"Old time residents of Solon, and even Orange, they are coming down here and realizing it is not what it once was," he added.

"This is a place where everyone can come and count on great service, food and atmosphere," Mr. Fisher said. "It's where you see your neighbors.

"It's your local place that you can go after a movie or to have a drink or even take the kids," Mrs. Fisher, 48, added.

"We turned it from a dive bar to nice local eatery with an upscale feel," Mrs. Fisher added.

To that end, many of the dishes are made from homemade ingredients, like the popular chicken paprikash and the variety of soups like chicken noodle and chili. They hand bread all their chicken tenders, a favorite appetizer among patrons who also enjoy the nachos and fried mushrooms.

"It is tavern flair that is upscale," Mrs. Fisher said.

The couple purchased the restaurant in March of 2018 and noticed the building desperately needed work.

The Fishers proceeded to give the space a complete overhaul, with new flooring, bar tops and more.

"It needed its character back because somewhere along the way, it lost its vibe," Mr. Fisher said.

Inside the tavern, which is located on Miles Road at the most northern tip of Solon and bordering Bedford Heights and Orange Village, are colorful pictures and signs along the walls as well as the words in lights, "laugh, eat and drink," which is their motto, Mr. Fisher said.

"What do you do in life" but that, he said.

Fisher's American Tavern provides a vibe that attracts all ages, the Fishers said.

"It's a very diverse clientele," Mrs. Fisher said. "You have families and elderly and everyone in between."

Many flock to the tavern for such dishes as "Annie's Fish and Chips," named after Mr. Fisher's mother who died at age 89.

"Her favorite food was fish and chips," Mr. Fisher said. "Our whole house smelled like malt vinegar."

This is not Mr. Fisher's first foray into the restaurant business, although it is the first restaurant he has owned along with his wife.

Mr. Fisher's father Morris ran the Theatrical Grill which was his first introduction

into the restaurant business. His uncle owned Harvey's Barbecue Ribs.

Mr. Fisher also ran the former Solon Panini's from 2010-2012 and was a partner in the Captain's Club in Eastlake. Prior to re-opening the American Tavern, he was general manager at Mavis Winkle's in Twinsburg.

"These are places we built from scratch," he said. "We took a building and delved it into what our visions were, and this was no different."

Mrs. Fisher, who met her husband while they both worked at Shooters downtown, said they always dreamed of owning a restaurant together.

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“We both have a passion for the business,” Mrs. Fisher said.

Each day, the couple, married 23 years, can be found at the tavern, working behind the bar, in the kitchen or milling around talking to customers.

While it is often a lot to juggle, as they have two young children, the Fishers say a good day is when they have a packed restaurant, everything goes smoothly and customers are happy.

“We like making people happy,” said Mrs. Fisher, who formerly owned a marketing company and also holds an accounting degree.

Fisher’s American Tavern measures 2,800 square feet and is packed with televisions, fun signage and upbeat music. The restaurant is open Monday through Saturday for lunch and dinner and closed Sunday for the Fishers and their staff of about a dozen to spend time with family.

In addition to happy hour Monday through Friday from 3:30-6:30 p.m. which features half price appetizers and drink specials, the tavern has nightly specials. Monday is burger night with special priced burgers; Wednesday is wing night; Thursday is karaoke from 8-11 p.m.; and Friday is fish frenzy with a new fish item special featured. The Fishers said that on the horizon may be a rib night.

“No day is the same here,” Mr. Fisher said,



Photo by Peggy Turbett

which adds to the excitement.

The couple decided to add their name to the restaurant so everyone knows there are new owners.

“We wanted to keep the American Tavern and what it stood for and the institution of it,” Mr. Fisher said. ■

Tami and Scott Fisher resurrected a century-old public house as Fisher’s American Tavern, renovating the interior and offering such treats as Annie’s Fish and Chips, named for Scott’s mother. The spot has functioned as various iterations of restaurants over the years.

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Hunan Solon taking pride in authentic Chinese fare

By SUE REID

Authentic through and through. That's how Rachel Weng describes Hunan Solon.

"We specialize in authentic Chinese food," said Ms. Weng of Solon, the restaurant supervisor. When people are looking for menu offerings that reflect their China roots, "they come here," she said.

Located in the City of Solon on Enterprise Parkway for the past 20 years, Hunan Solon boasts a plethora of dishes and caters to customers of all walks of life and ages.

Popular and unique dishes include Japanese Soft Tofu with golden mushrooms and pork in oyster sauce; spicy cubed lamb with black bean and jalapeño peppers; and a variety of Thai cuisine and curry offerings.

Hunan Solon boasts chef specialties and dishes of seafood, beef, pork, lamb, vegetarian, rice and noodles.

Photo by Peggy Turbett

Managers Roger Fong and Rachel Weng continue the tradition of serving up classic Asian fare in a contemporary setting at Hunan Solon. The restaurant offers authentic Chinese food as well as Japanese, Thai and curry dishes.

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Chef Andy Tong, from China, works with three other chefs to expertly prepare each menu item, Ms. Weng noted.

“A lot of travelers who have been to China like to come here,” she said.

When they arrive, they ask for the “authentic Chinese menu.” Among those offerings include Har Gow, a traditional Cantonese dumpling served in dim sum; or a shrimp and bamboo wrap dish with vegetables and seasoned with white wine; or a chowder made of fish maw with pork, bamboo shoots and shiitake mushrooms.

“Our chefs have worked in big restaurants in China and know how to prepare this,” Ms. Weng said of the authentic dishes.

Hunan Solon offers lunch and dinner seven days a week and boasts a full bar.

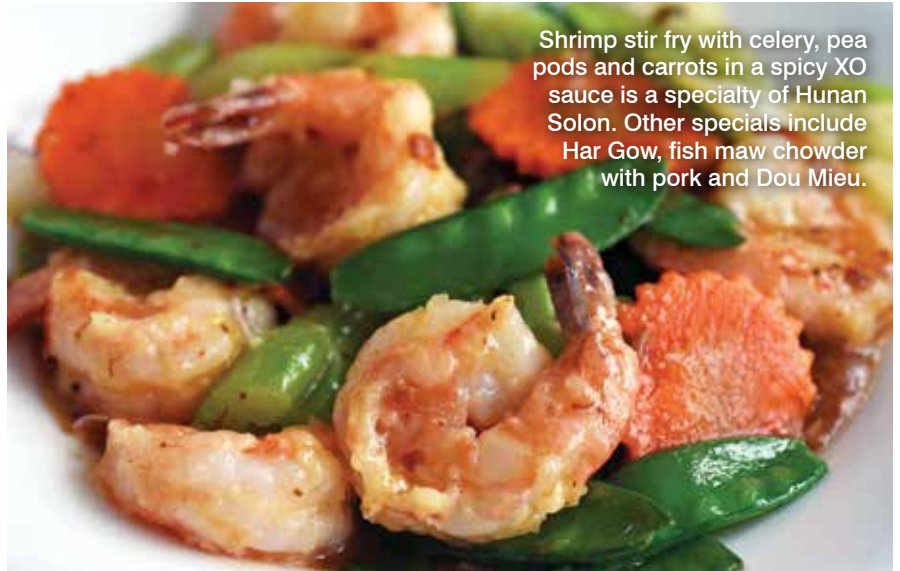
Ms. Weng said all natural ingredients are used at the restaurant for a healthy flair. Vegetables are steamed and the least amount of oil is used in preparing the dishes, she said.

“Many of our customers, especially the older ones, care about their health and we care about customers’ health, too,” she said. They use natural ingredients as much as possible. Their lobster is prepared from fresh live-tanked lobster.

The staff at Hunan Solon number 15, the majority of whom are of Asian descent and speak Chinese and Cantonese. The atmosphere in the restaurant is elegant, quiet with just soft music playing – and warm and welcoming. White and blue tables and chairs coupled with soft, colorful lighting result in an upscale feel.

Hunan Solon underwent a remodeling last year which expanded the restaurant to 4,000 square feet, added new windows and installed a fairy garden.

They accept large group parties and have catered weddings and other special events.



Shrimp stir fry with celery, pea pods and carrots in a spicy XO sauce is a specialty of Hunan Solon. Other specials include Har Gow, fish maw chowder with pork and Dou Mieu.

Photo by Peggy Turbett

“Customers comment how clean and nice it is here,” Ms. Weng said. “The staff is friendly and explain the food ingredients as well as make recommendations to customers.”

Hunan Solon also specializes in a large vegetarian selection of foods, including favorites like string beans in garlic sauce, Asian eggplant also in garlic sauce; as well as the authentic Chinese dish Dou Mieu, which features the very tender “top of the bean,” Ms. Weng described. This dish is topped with fresh garlic.

Other complex and authentic offerings include Deep Fried Flounder sautéed with celery, carrot, pea pods and white sauce; spicy pan fried fish with Cai Chua, which are pickled mustard greens, and dry red peppers in a soup; as well as sliced beef Gai Lan, which is beef with Chinese broccoli.

The chefs also offers gluten-free selec-

tions, with popular choices including crispy ginger beef and chicken, and a wide-rice noodle stir fry, among many others. Thai curry specials are vast including classic Thai curry dishes with red, green and panang curry, which is a red curry that is thick, salty and sweet with a nutty peanut flavor.

Ms. Weng said the restaurant has grown and changed through the years.

“Back when we started, we had only two rooms, and customers would be standing outside in line,” she recalled. Now, the restaurant has been “opened up” she said, with three large rooms.

Weekends are especially busy at Hunan Solon, and annual events also include the Chinese New Year celebration which features the Lion Dance. Ms. Weng noted that Hunan Solon is open on all holidays, including Christmas. ■

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TSC16

Traditions of Imperial Wok still alive with new owners

By SUE REID

It's lunchtime, and the front counter at Imperial Wok in Solon is bustling with activity. The phone rings off the hook for take-out orders – one after the next – for such dishes as chicken fried rice, sweet and sour chicken and hot and sour soup.

Meanwhile the restaurant, with delectable smells filling the air, is packed with patrons.

A staple in the City of Solon for nearly 40 years, Imperial Wok boasts four generations of customers.

Specializing in Chinese and Cantonese food, as well as Japanese sushi, 35 employees, 75 percent of which are of Asian descent, serve customers.

“Everything here is scratch made,” co-owner Michael DuBois, of South Russell, explained. All the preparations are done by

Continued on page 32

Under the new ownership of Adam Kemelhar, left, and Michael DuBois, Imperial Wok in Solon has added sushi to its classic Asian menu. The city staple has been in business for nearly 40 years.

Photo by Peggy Turbett

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Szechuan chicken with eggplant pairs with white and fried rice bowls at Imperial Wok in Solon. Other signature dishes include their General Tao's Chicken, Wonderful Shrimp and Scallops and Singapore Style Noodles.



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hand for all of the dishes, recipes of which date back decades.

Some signature dishes at Imperial Wok include their General Tao's Chicken, which is chunks of chicken deep fried with a spicy sauce; Wonderful Shrimp and Scallops, which is stir fried with fresh broccoli, pea pods and baby corn in a lightly seasoned sauce; the Phoenix Nest, jumbo shrimp and white meat chided stir-fried with bok choy; and Singapore Style Noodles, a dish with shrimp, roast pork, peppers, onions, egg and curry, and the list goes on.

"You can take any dish and design it any way you like spice wise, include veggies, or moderate the spice," co-owner Adam Kemelhar, of Solon, said. "It gives the customers a ton of flexibility to get exactly what they want."

Popular starters include egg rolls, crab rangoon, which is diced crab meat mixed with cream cheese, onions and spices and deep fried; Jade chicken lettuce wraps and their soups, all of which are handmade including Wonton soup, which is a generations old recipe, and their hot and sour soup.

"Our fried rice is really popular," Mr. DuBois said. "We make a lot of shrimp fried rice here."

In addition to the Chinese and Cantonese food, Imperial Wok serves Thai cuisine and curry dishes.

Mr. DuBois and Mr. Kemelhar recently took over ownership of the restaurant from longtime owners and founders Shirley and Chee Cheng.

"She wanted to make sure the restaurant was passed down to someone who would care for her employees and customers in the same manner she did," Mr. DuBois noted of Mrs. Cheng.

"There was a lot of apprehension because of the culture," Mr. DuBois continued. "We didn't know how we would be received by employees and customers, but we had a game plan from day one and that plan was not to change one thing."

"The only thing we would change was the name we were signing on the check," he added.

Mr. DuBois and Mr. Kemelhar said growth is on the horizon for the restaurant, which boasts a full range of sushi bar appetizers, dinners and rolls.

"We absolutely want to grow the business," Mr. Kemelhar continued, "but with that being said, we have a foundation here and a tradition that we have to make sure stays in place from a community, customer and employee standpoint."

"All that has to align," he said.

Mr. DuBois said the growth will come from incremental sales, such as catering. Imperial Wok serves much of Solon's industrial and business areas.

"Another big portion of what has never been done is giving back to the community, by way of working with school systems, charities and organizations," Mr. DuBois said.

The duo, who are lifelong friends and have experience in the restaurant industry, recently hired the head sushi chef from Akira Hibachi,

which closed nearby in Uptown Solon.

Open seven days a week for lunch and dinner, Mr. Kemelhar noted that take-out is a significant piece of their business. Those who dine in enjoy the quiet, soft atmosphere of the 7,000 square foot restaurant, which also features a party room for events.

This summer a new wine list will be revealed.

"We draw from all over," Mr. Kemelhar said of customers who travel from as far as Canton and the west side of Cleveland to dine at the restaurant.

"You can't find something like this in our

geographic area," Mr. Kemelhar added. "It is really a big differentiator."

The menu features dishes of poultry, seafood, beef, pork and noodles, among others. There are also combination dishes available for lunch and dinner as well as family dinner options.

Imperial Wok underwent a renovation about eight years ago, and the restaurant boasts an upscale feel.

Each year they Celebrate the Chinese New Year with festivities including the lion dance.

"The entire place was full," Mr. Kemelhar said of the Chinese New Year event. "It was all just good family fun." ■

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Embracing education



Photo by Peggy Turbett

Solon resident Dr. Alex Johnson has served as president of Cuyahoga Community College since 2013, working to improve relationships between the college and community and increase opportunities in a variety of disciplines. After several years working in four-year universities, the Concord, North Carolina native transitioned to two-year colleges in 1993.

Reflections

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Alex Johnson continues leading Tri-C on a path to excellence

By SUE REID

Dr. Alex Johnson, now president of Cuyahoga Community College, shared the two major influences that had a positive impact on his journey through life.

The first was his high school biology teacher, who not only inspired him to be a better student in science, but a better person, said Dr. Johnson, 68.

“He taught a difficult subject in a manner that was understandable, and as a result, I flourished in the sciences and loved it,” he said, nearly pursuing a career in medicine.

The native of Concord, North Carolina, said his next influence and inspiration was his grandmother, who had a fourth-grade education.

“She inspired me to embrace education at a level I had not before,” he said.

“She was a member of the world of ideas and inspired me to no end,” he continued.

While growing up, Dr. Johnson watched other students excel and move on to higher education, and wanted to do the same.

Eventually, he moved from Concord to New York City for a better way of life, and despite meager means, went on to major in education at Winston-Salem State University where he earned a bachelor’s degree.

“I didn’t realize I wanted to be a teacher until my high school years,” he recalled.

When he graduated from college, Dr. Johnson returned to New York and taught in early childhood centers in the Bronx.

“It helped me understand that I wasn’t equipped to handle kids who came to the class with developmental issues,” he said.

As a result, he went on to earn a master’s degree from Lehman College and eventually a doctorate from Pennsylvania State University in early childhood and special education.

The advanced degrees gave him the capacity to teach “in a more meaningful way,” he said.

After his time at Penn State, Dr. Johnson took a teaching job at Bowling Green State University and then ultimately moved back to Winston-Salem State University where he was a faculty member and eventually an administrator.

“It was both rewarding and challenging in the same breath,” Dr. Johnson said. “It was rewarding because there was recognition that perhaps I could contribute in a different way to the institution.”

Dr. Johnson went on to rise through the ranks of the university for 11 years, eventually becoming the chief academic officer at the age of 37. He also was a full professor with tenure.

“It was a tremendous accomplishment for me,” he said, adding that his grandmother was still alive at the time to see his accomplishments.

After being in the position for six years, a number of four-year institutions began courting

him as a candidate for the top job in their schools.

Then, he received a call from Carol Cartwright, retired president of Bowling Green State and Kent State universities, asking if he would be interested in the presidency at Cuyahoga Community College.

“I said not really,” Dr. Johnson recalled, “but she asked me to think about it.”

He didn’t have experience in the two-year sector but had gained a healthy respect for community colleges, he said, after seeing the success of Winston-Salem students who started at two-year colleges. Dr. Johnson ended up taking Ms. Cartwright up on the interview


offer. Shortly after that, the then-43-year-old was named president of Tri-C’s Metropolitan Campus in downtown Cleveland serving in that position from 1993 to 2003.

Initially, his sense was that the Metropolitan Campus was not welcoming to area residents.

“We had a lot of individuals who wanted to connect to the community and provide important services to the residents,” he said.


Under his leadership, the college instituted a number of community-oriented programs including one designed to screen preschool children for developmental delays and refer

Continued on page 24



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them to services throughout the county.

After leading the Metropolitan Campus, Dr. Johnson went on to serve as president of the Community College of Allegheny County and the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges. He also served as chancellor of Delgado Community College in New Orleans.

He returned to Tri-C in 2013 as its fourth president and today describes a full range of educational offerings spread out over 140 programs in nine distinct areas.

Under his leadership, the school has increased its graduation rate by 200 percent and its workforce credentials from 1,000 to 16,000.

About 55,000 students attend Tri-C's four campuses and other Cleveland and suburban locations each year, making it the largest community college in Ohio. Programming allows for a seamless transition to four-year institutions or the workforce, Dr. Johnson noted.

Promoting opportunities

Some of the college's strongest areas include information technology, manufacturing, public safety, hospitality management and landscaping. The college also boasts a strong creative arts department, unusual for a community college, Dr. Johnson said, as well as popular nursing and business programs.

"I'm proud of the manner in which our colleagues have banded together to ensure that students graduate in a more efficient and effective manner," he said.

Dr. Johnson is also proud of the collective engagement at Tri-C. "We created a culture of collaboration and teamwork, promoting student success and equity and access of institutions as well," he said.

Dr. Johnson takes great pride in the sup-

port the college received from the residents of Cuyahoga County, who approved a \$227.5 million bond issue that was instrumental in constructing and renovating facilities throughout the college campuses that will serve it for the next quarter of a century.

An example is the bustling Metropolitan Campus Center where a glass enclosed student center was constructed with funds that the college saved over the last decade.

Dr. Johnson said he wants Tri-C to be viewed as a highly regarded community college "and we are.

"We want to be noted for the way we help people become successful both educationally and economically," Dr. Johnson said, "and make certain ultimately that individuals achieve not just educationally but achieve socially."

Dr. Johnson said it is also important that the college add value to businesses that are looking for individuals who need to enter the workforce.

One of the challenges of his role as president is making sure the college extends its boundaries to the community so that the faculty and staff are involved in some way in community outreach and civic engagement.

"We work with local organizations to make sure people can come to us," Dr. Johnson said of individuals who may not have the best job or education.

"We can help them more fully," Dr. Johnson said. That can also include individuals who serve in the military.

Maintaining and attracting new funding sources is another challenge he and other college presidents face.

"The objective is to keep the tuition as affordable as we possibly can," he said.

Since his time at Tri-C, it has become the most affordable institution in Ohio," Dr. Johnson noted. "We are very proud of that

accomplishment," he said.

Another difficult task is to make sure people understand that Tri-C serves an important role supporting community and business.

"We have to make sure individuals understand that on a regular basis," he said. Currently, there are 5,000 high school students enrolled at Tri-C, he said of the state's College Credit Plus. In this program, high school juniors and seniors earn high school and college credits simultaneously while taking classes at area colleges.

Dr. Johnson said he finds great fulfillment in his role.

"I've been a college president now for 25 years somewhere, and it has always been a community college," he said. "My desire has never been to go back to the four-year sector.

"The community college is rewarding in a lot of different ways," he continued. "It helps you understand the human condition and to help individuals reach their maximum potential."

Dr. Johnson prides himself in being part of the greater community by serving on several local and national boards including the United Way of Greater Cleveland, Northeast Ohio Council on Higher Education, Team NEO and the Greater Cleveland Partnership.

A day in the life

His typical day begins most often with a 7:30 a.m. meeting at his office, which is on Carnegie Avenue in downtown Cleveland.

Dr. Johnson also spends time during the week having conferences with individuals outside of the college to get updated on various initiatives. He admits to missing being in the classroom, but does spend a great deal of time on the college's campuses. Town hall meetings are held on a semester basis.

"One of my responsibilities as president is to cultivate opportunities for additional fundraising for scholarships," he said. Dr. Johnson meets regularly with business leaders and offers advice to those considering developing their own workforce programs.

"Over a 25-year period of time, there's a lot you can learn, but a lot you can still learn as well," he said. "I learn every day from the college faculty and individuals on our staff."

In his spare time, Dr. Johnson is an avid golfer and enjoys spending time with his family, including his daughter, Dr. Kim Johnson, who works at Tri-C as director of the transfer center, son Nakia, a Cleveland Metroparks ranger and Nakia's wife Shamuire. Dr. Johnson has two grandchildren, Ruby, 11, and Rory, 5, who are students at Gilmour Academy.

His wife Daphne of 45 years died in 2018.

Last summer, Dr. Johnson took up flying model airplanes and enjoys traveling with his family. He said he does not plan to retire anytime soon. There is still much to do.

"I would like to expand access to the institution and see the completion of this current construction phase." ■

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Photo courtesy of Rep. Robinson
State Rep. Phillip Robinson, Jr.

Serving the people

State representative focuses on funding for schools and local governments

By TIM TEDESCHI

Phillip Robinson, Jr. learned the value of hard work and serving those around him from an early age by watching his parents.

“They scrimped, they saved over time, nights, evenings, whatever it took to give my sister and me a chance at a better life and a brighter future,” he said.

A newly elected state representative for Ohio’s District 6, Rep. Robinson, D-Solon, said he has felt the same pull to working hard and public service throughout his life.

Rep. Robinson, 37, said after growing up in Bedford Heights and graduating from Gilmour Academy, he went to George Washington University in Washington, D.C. to study finance. He was in college during the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which altered his

planned career trajectory.

“When 9/11 happened it was the idea of trying to do service,” he said. “So after graduating from college, instead of going to Wall Street I ended up working for Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-California) in D.C. for several years as a way to give back and learn how important service is to people, what it means to carry yourself and how to be an elected official, integrity and working very hard on behalf of people that put you into office.”

After subsequent jobs with marketing and public relations firms, Rep. Robinson and his wife Elizabeth moved back to Northeast Ohio to start a family, settling down in Solon.

“The reason why we chose Solon, because we’re not from here originally, was because of the family, the community, the great schools and just we think it’s a microcosm of the state of Ohio,” he said.

Back in Northeast Ohio, Rep. Robinson felt pulled once again from the private sector into service after volunteering to tutor and mentor a young man who was several grade levels behind in reading.

“That was an incredible experience between him and I building that bond,” Rep. Robinson said. “At the end of that, he gave me two things. He gave me a plant and he gave me a note saying, ‘you’re the best teacher ever,’ but he had misspelled the word teacher.”

Continued on page 38



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Continued from page 37

His tutoring experience inspired Rep. Robinson to enter the nonprofit world, eventually running the local Cleveland chapter of City Year, an AmeriCorps organization and program where students volunteer for one to two years to help mentor and tutor high school students to succeed and graduate. Today, Rep. Robinson works as City Year's senior vice president for regional and site operations, overseeing nearly 30 locations across the country.

Even in his position at City Year, Rep. Robinson said he again found himself wanting to do more to serve his community, and successfully ran for the District 6 seat in November of 2018. He said it is an honor to serve his district and be part of writing Ohio's next chapter.

"The promise of Ohio, why people chose to move here, why people stay here, the reason why my wife and I came back, is because it's a place where people can live, work, thrive and retire and have a full life," he said. "I believe my job and I believe the job of the state legislature is to find ways to make sure we're keeping that promise to Ohioans and really renewing that promise and keeping that promise with Ohioans."

After being sworn in on Jan. 8, 2019, Rep. Robinson said his first few months in office have been exciting and challenging as he adjusts to the "whirlwind speed of working down in Columbus.

"With term limits as well, there's constantly a new class of freshmen coming in and there's a learning curve to become knowledgeable of all the things that are happening in Columbus, but also making sure that you're providing world class constituent services back to the people that you represent," he said. "Every day you're learning some-

thing new, figuring out different ways how you can advocate and represent the people that put you there in Columbus."

With a "day job" focused on helping students, it's not surprising that public education is one of Rep. Robinson's most passionate issues in the Statehouse. He said he believes the state needs to invest more in early childhood education, calling for universal preschool and full-day kindergarten statewide.

"We need to make sure that our children in Ohio are being invested in from day one and not only put someone in a great position to thrive and grow and get a quality education, but also to be economically competitive which will create a brighter future for our community and our state," he said.

Rep. Robinson said he wants to make progress on state funding for public schools, specifically citing the need to address the elimination and phasing out of tangible personal property tax reimbursements that have decimated budgets for some public schools including the Solon City School District.

"They were told with that phasing out that there would be another way to help figure out the funding situation for schools, and my concern is if we don't figure that out then residents will continue, as they were in Solon this past election cycle, to have to tax them-

selves in the form of another levy to help keep world class schools in District 6," Rep. Robinson said.

Restoring local government funds, which Rep. Robinson said have been "raided" by the state over the last decade, is another legislative priority of the freshman representative. Too many municipal governments are being forced to decide between buying new police vehicles or fixing potholes in roads or keeping trash hauling costs down due to shrinking budgets, he said.

"Those are important issues we need to figure out how we more fully or get to the path to restoring local government funds which really is impacting cities in District 6, especially with how many taxes we send down to Columbus," he said.

Rep. Robinson said he would also like to improve Ohio's business climate, working toward a system where local entrepreneurs can start a small business in one day instead of going through bureaucratic red tape.

While some might see the balancing act of working as a legislator, nonprofit executive and husband and father as a chore, Rep. Robinson said he views it as an opportunity to connect with his community, many of whom are doing their own balancing acts of jobs and taking care of children and aging family members.

"I actually think having that management experience understanding what other families are going through is an asset going down there as a citizen legislator to represent people in Columbus," he said. "I think that type of connection and proximity, being very proximate to what's happening in our communities, will make me a better legislator and someone who understands keenly what we need to focus on."

Rep. and Mrs. Robinson live in Solon with their two children, Olivia, 4, and Phillip III, 1. ■

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Photo by Peggy Turbett

Keren Himmel, left, and Jaclyn Heller of H&H Revived display their interior design work in the kitchen of this recently renovated home in Solon. The duo met when their children went to preschool together five years ago and found they shared a common passion for antique furniture and interior design.

Designing women

Friends grow business with their artistic eyes

By JULIE HULLETT

Jaclyn Heller and Keren Himmel were not expecting to grow an interior design business throughout Northeast Ohio when they met five years ago. When their children went to preschool together, Mrs. Heller and Mrs. Himmel found that they share a love for antique furniture, which soon developed into a successful business where they build friendships with their clients.

Mrs. Heller and Mrs. Himmel are interior design consultants and co-owners of H&H Revived, based in Solon, which tackles interior design projects of any size.

After they met, Mrs. Heller, 36, said that the women realized that they both love interior design. They started spending a lot of time together, chatting about design and taking classes at White Magnolia in Chagrin Falls to learn how to paint old furniture.

“There’s never a quiet time when we’re to-

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gether," she said. "We talk all the time."

Mrs. Himmel, 38, said that her father used to own an auto garage on Cannon Road in Bedford Heights. The women took antique furniture and other items purchased at estate sales to the garage to repaint. Mrs. Heller said that they held a show for their friends to display the restored pieces, and their new-found talent traveled by word of mouth.

"People started calling us to paint their existing furniture. It started snowballing," she said. "People just bought furniture and asked us to paint it and find things to go with it."

Mrs. Himmel added that they were painting furniture in the auto garage in 2014, gathered more skills and clients for several years, and got their business license in 2017.

Unique qualities of H&H Revived

There are two unique aspects to the business, the two owners said, including their ability to manipulate furniture and the friendships they form with clients. With their experience in painting old furniture, the duo agreed that they are able to create exactly what a client is looking for if they cannot find it somewhere else. Art pieces are among the items created.

"We have the ability to change things," Mrs. Heller said. "We're crafty, and we can do things on our own if we need to."

Clients keep coming back requesting new projects, the two owners said, in styles of modern, contemporary, traditional and transitional.

"Most of the time, people who are our clients become our friends. That friendship grows and we talk about what else we can do in the house," Mrs. Heller said. "It's just so exciting and fun for us to do. Every client has a different design aesthetic and no two are the same."

Process and materials

Mrs. Himmel explained that the business partners start by meeting with the client to determine the scope of work. The client may show the women pictures of what they are looking for in a redesigned room or house, and often send them Pinterest boards with design ideas. The designers then create a vision board, which pinpoints the client's preferences, and is used to choose furniture, carpet, wallpaper, colors and fabrics for every room.

"We have two visions for each room," Mrs. Heller said.

If a client is looking to restructure a room, designers will also work with architects and contractors and present drawings for a restructure. They work with various contractors who offer their services depending on the client's needs.

Mrs. Heller and Mrs. Himmel said that they order their materials from various local companies, including Edelman, The Thomas Brick Company and Cleveland Granite and Marble. Either designer will visit the site multiple times per week to ensure that the work is completed properly, they added.

When looking for furniture, the business partners said that they tend to look for unique pieces often traveling across the country to

trade shows and showrooms in cities such as High Point, North Carolina and Naples, Florida.

"We don't like to do the same thing twice. We don't want to use the same manufacturer for the whole house," Mrs. Heller said. "When we go to trade shows, we find really small, cool manufacturers."

Finding balance

As young parents, Mrs. Heller and Mrs. Himmel said that they must balance work and family. H&H Revived is run out of their homes in Solon, which allows them to spend more time with their husbands and children. Mrs. Himmel has a 7-year-old son and a 4-year-old

daughter, while Mrs. Heller has a 7-year-old son and two daughters ages 5 and 2.

"It's so fun to be able to work together," Mrs. Heller said. "Our kids are best friends and our husbands are close."

"We bounce ideas off each other, and we're so open and honest with each other," Mrs. Himmel said. She handles the financial matters while Mrs. Heller takes care of marketing.

"We're very lucky, we get to be with our families," Mrs. Heller said. "I feel like every time we're going to present to a client, we're both so happy and excited because we found the perfect thing to present to them." ■



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Photos by Anton Albert

Valerie Kislyansky, right, helps a shopper during a recent food pantry in Solon. The 10-year-old girl from Solon is a member of Kids2Kids, a nonprofit organization started by parents looking for a way to involve children in volunteerism.

Kids2Kids

Youths engage in large, small acts of kindness to help children

By SUE REID

Solon resident Lexi P'Simer's eyes light up when she describes her volunteer role at the city's monthly food pantry. Her enthusiasm grows even greater in recalling a table full of presents she and her friends helped assemble for children at a Cleveland homeless shelter recently.

At just 9-years-old, she is hooked on giving back, a quality shared by the nearly 10 members of the newly formed Kids2Kids, a nonprofit organization started by a group of Solon parents looking for a way to involve their young children in volunteerism.

"There was this shared sense of frustration that there wasn't a place where kids can volunteer hands on, let alone have a whole lot of say in the project," co-founder Irina P'Simer

explained.

After discussing it further, the parents decided to start their own organization, giving their children a meaningful opportunity and the ability to give back on a more regular basis.

"The main reason is to develop empathy," Solon resident and co-founder Ellen Friedman said of beginning Kids2Kids. "That doesn't come quick though.

"To live a fulfilled life, you have to have empathy," Ms. Friedman added. "For me, and for all of us, that is very important."

Kids2Kids took root late last year and as the title makes clear, it's about kids doing for one another, with the benefits going both ways.

"We wanted a name that encompassed kids helping kids," Mrs. P'Simer said. "We want both groups benefiting."



Valerie Kislyansky, 10, left, Adriana Friedman, 10, and Alexis P'Simer, 9, hold some of the treats available at a recent food pantry in Solon. They are members of Kids2Kids, a nonprofit formed to show youth how to give back to the community.

The plan was to start slowly, but the kids had other ideas.

Soon after the organization began in the fall of 2018, members decided that they wanted to help other children, especially over the winter holiday season.

"We had to get our act together pretty fast," Mrs. P'Simer recalled.

While the parents were thinking practical items like hats and gloves to help children in need, the Kids2Kids members decided upon presents, raising money on their own and choosing gifts they would enjoy opening themselves.

They created a holiday gift shop at True Freedom Ministries in Cleveland, purchasing gifts after selling their homemade chocolate door to door.

"We had this big table in True Freedom," Lexi described. "We brought a bunch of presents there and they could pick whatever they wanted."

"It felt really good to see that we were helping people who do not have as much as we did," said Solon resident Valeria Kislyansky, 10, a student at Hawken School.

Adriana Friedman, 10, a student at Dorothy C. Lewis Elementary School, said there was one child who thought he could only go around the holiday table once, so he got something for his mom. He was excited that he could go for himself a second time, Adriana recalled.

"It made me feel so happy because they didn't have anything and they got to get things," Adriana said of the selection of toys, necklaces and hats.

"I felt the boys and girls didn't get all that stuff and it made me feel happy looking at them knowing how I feel when I get presents," Lexi added.

Forming friendships

Fourteen-year-old Cameron P'Simer, a student at Solon Middle School, described the camaraderie he enjoyed with the kids at the shelter during the holiday gift shop.

"We were in the kitchen, and we had pizza set up and there were drinks, dessert and candy and we were all talking about our favorite subjects and sports," Cameron said. "All the kids were sitting around the table just chatting and getting to know each other."

Mrs. P'Simer said the interaction with all the kids "gives you goosebumps."

"No matter how many times you see it, you get a lump in your throat," she said.

In creating the foundation for Kids2Kids and figuring out which projects to undertake, it is important to be meaningful and impactful on both sides, Mrs. P'Simer noted.

There are about seven to eight members who volunteer on a regular basis, and new members are always welcome. As are new ideas.

"When we came out of True Freedom, the unanimous response is we need to do more," Mrs. P'Simer said. "It was from everyone, the kids and the adults. What can we do more?"

Kids2Kids' next effort was at the Solon

Rotary's monthly food pantry, where they put together a table to occupy young people while their parents selected their food.

"We did a slime table!" Valeria said.

They also helped pass out food.

"It was sad," Lexi said of the fact that people needed food, "but it made me happy we were helping them."

"They came and shopped," Adriana described of the experience at the pantry. "They got a shopping cart, and each table had different food.

"One had cookies and one had meat or bread," she said.

Valeria said they asked some of the shoppers how their day was and what was their name. They also equipped their "kids station" with coloring books.

"It felt really good helping others who could not help themselves," Cameron said. "It makes you feel like you have done something successful."

Mrs. P'Simer said that while Kids2Kids works to map out its future and how they wish to grow, they continue to lend a hand wherever is needed. They are funded by donations as well as supported by the parents themselves and also received seed money from the Solon Rotary.

A recent donation of books resulted in the Kids2Kids shipping 30 pounds of books to a school in Cambodia. Adriana also had the opportunity to visit there.

"There was only one shelf of books at the school," Adriana said.

The books the kids sent were on topics like science, mystery and adventure. Kids2Kids also sent pencils and erasers.

Another project will be on a larger scale, with the kids working to help a village in Uganda access clean water.

"There are many villages that have no plumbing and no running water," Mrs. P'Simer explained. "Our goal this year at a minimum is to buy a whole bunch of water filters for families there.

"The 'reach goal,' is potentially to work with the Solon Rotary and see if we can put in an actual water pump or a latrine, because that is also a luxury there," she added. "There are lots of schools that do not have water or bathrooms.

"That's our big, big project."

Small acts of giving

As that is in the works, so are the smaller acts of giving.

Lexi described Cards for Carter, a project where the Kids2Kids made cards not only for a little boy battling cancer, but also for his sister, who may be sad or not get as much attention, Lexi explained.

"We got her a bunch of candy and gave

them toys like Shopkins," Lexi said.

She noted that the cards were in shades of yellow and pink with happy faces on them.

Kids2Kids also will be traveling regularly to the Meeting Place Learning Center in Cleveland to tutor some of the youngsters. Kids2Kids took food bags to the children at the center to get them through the weekend.

Kids2Kids also recently delivered yarn to the Solon Senior Center where adults enjoy knitting scarves, hats and gloves.

"The seniors want to help the kids, so it's so great for the two organizations to be working together," Mrs. P'Simer said.

Mrs. P'Simer continued that the group is also exploring a read together program with Laura's Home, a domestic violence shelter, where kids will read and be read to on a regular basis.

Even older kids are helping out, with co-founder Julia Blumin's daughter Jeanette, 16, a student at Hathaway Brown, developing a website for the organization to spread the word about the group as part of her school project.

"Since I have older children, I was unable to find a place where they could volunteer without necessarily involving a parent," Mrs. Blumin said.

Mrs. P'Simer said she is receiving requests via social media regularly from parents wanting their children to become involved.

"We hope to slowly expand membership," Mrs. P'Simer said. "We will not turn down kids that want to get involved."

Lexi is already planning for Thanksgiving with an idea for the kids to make a holiday dinner for all of the kids at True Freedom Ministries.

Valeria talked about making care bags for those children in domestic violence shelters with their parent. She said they would include a bottle of water, hand sanitizer, lotion, a toothbrush and maybe a snack of Goldfish.

Mrs. Blumin said of the co-founders, who also include Marina Timush, of Solon, that they have all had a point in their lives where they were in need of different things. All four immigrants, they came to this country at different stages and ages in their lives, she said.

"That's where our empathy comes from because we know the struggle, maybe in different ways, but the struggle to fit in and want things," Mrs. Blumin said.

The kids, who hold brainstorming meetings every other week, said they are learning so much from their participation.

For Valeria, Kids2Kids teaches her to never underestimate what she has.

"It teaches me to be happy with what you have and not want more," Adriana said.

"I've gotten a little less selfish and thinking about others," Lexi added.

"Helping others is a lot more important than helping yourself a lot of the time," Cameron said of the main lesson he has learned.

"They do the big efforts, but also the small acts of kindness," Mrs. P'Simer said. ■

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Davis Automotive Group, www.bmwcleveand.com, 6135 Kruse Dr, Solon OH 44139 (440) 542-0600

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Solon Rd, Solon OH 44139 (440) 248-1113

BARBERS

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Cuts N Curls for Boys and Girls, www.cutsncurls.net, 6025 Kruse Dr Suite 112, Solon OH 44139 (440) 542-1750

BOOKS/AUTHORS/PUBLISHERS/NEWSPAPERS

Cleveland Jewish News, www.cjn.org, 23880 Commerce Park Suite 1, Beachwood OH 44122 (216) 454-8300

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The Becker Group, www.halbecker.com, (440) 542-9884

Findaway Books, www.findawayworld.com, 31999 Aurora Rd, Solon OH 44139 (440) 893-0808

Cleveland Magazine, www.clevelandmagazine.com, 1422 Euclid Ave Suite 730, Cleveland OH 44115 (330) 958-0316

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Shoppes of North Solon / The Lakes of Orange, www.azmanagement.com, 3439 West Brainard, Woodmere OH 44122 (216) 831-9110

BUILDING INSPECTION

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Leader Capital Group, www.leadercapitalgroup.com, Mike Gordon, 30285 Bruce Industrial Pkwy Suite #D, Solon OH 44139 (440) 248-3668

Barkett Consulting, Inc., www.barkettconsulting.com, Bob Barkett, 32025 Wooddale Ln, Solon OH 44139 (216) 406-0779

Grolistic Business Consultant, www.grolistic.com, Robert Schultek, 37173 O'Neill Dr, Solon OH 44139 (216) 272-4449

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Hyde Park Grille Steakhouse & ML Tavern, www.hydeparkrestaurants.com, 26300 Chagrin Blvd Suite #1, Beachwood OH 44122 (216) 514-1777

Miles Farmer's Market, www.milesfarmersmarket.com, 28560 Miles Ave, Solon OH 44139 (440) 248-5222

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Swirl Wine Bar LLC, www.swirlsolon.com, 33325 Bainbridge Rd, Solon OH 44139 (440) 349-6900

Honeybaked Ham Co. and Café, www.myhoneybakedstore.com, 33493 Aurora Rd, Solon OH 44139 (440) 349-0600

D & R Bagels, www.dandrbagels.com, 33567 Aurora Rd, Solon OH 44139 (440) 498-4555

56 Kitchen, www.56kitchen.com, 33587 Aurora Rd, Solon OH 44139 (440) 349-0056

Burntwood Tavern, www.burntwoodtavern.com, 33675 Solon Rd, Solon OH 44139 (440) 941-0290

Imperial Wok, www.imperialwok.com, 33825 Aurora Rd, Solon OH 44139 (440) 248-3833

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Mustard Seed Market & Café, www.mustardseedmarket.com, 6025 Kruse Dr, Solon OH 44139 (440) 519-3663

Hunan of Solon, www.hunanofsolon.com, 6050 Enterprise Pkwy, Solon OH 44139 (440) 248-8836

Chef Art Pour Restaurants, www.chefartpour.com, 12 W. Orange S, Chagrin Falls OH 44022 (440) 247-3030

Gionino's Pizzeria, www.gioninos.com, 33637 Aurora Rd, Solon OH 44139 (440) 349-4600

Domino Pizza, www.dominos.com, 33670 Aurora Rd, Solon OH 44139 (440) 248-2030

Solon Subway, www.subway.com, 34192 Aurora Rd Suite 3, Solon OH 44139 (440) 349-4060

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Bull and Bird Steakhouse, www.bullandbirdsteakhouse.com, 87 West St, Chagrin Falls OH 44022 (216) 514-1777

Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, www.rockhall.com, 1100 Rock and Roll Blvd, Cleveland OH 44114 (888) 764-7625

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Signature of Solon Country Club, www.signatureofsoloncc.com, 39000 Signature Dr, Solon OH 44139 (440) 498-8888

Solon VFW, Post 1863, www.solonvfwpost1863.com, 6340 Melbury Ave, Solon OH 44139 (440) 349-1863

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Solon Board of Education, www.solonschools.org, 33800 Inwood Rd, Solon OH 44139 (440) 248-1600

Epic Communications, Inc., 31225 Bainbridge Rd Suite H, Solon OH 44139 (216) 514-3336

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Primrose School of Solon, www.primroseschools.com/schools/solon/, 32995 Solon Rd, Solon OH 44139 (440) 914-4005

Kent State University, www.kent.edu/YourTrainingPartner,

1500 Horning Rd, Kent OH 44242 (330) 672-5828

Bryant & Stratton College, www.bryantstratton.edu, 33001 Solon Rd, Solon OH 44139 (440) 510-1112

Cuyahoga Community College-Eastern Campus, www.tri-c.edu, 4250 Richmond Rd ESS 2600, Highland Hills OH 44122 (216) 987-2001

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SpeedPro Imaging, www.speedprocleveandeast.com, Ron Levine, 26851 Miles Rd Suite 202, Warrensville Heights OH 44128 (216) 342-4954

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Titan Realty Group LLC, www.titanrealtygroup.net, (440) 248-4884

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Mont Surfaces Granite, www.montsurfaces.com, 6130 Cochran Rd, Solon OH 44139 (440) 287-0101

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Health Education 4U, LLC, www.healtheducation4u.org, (216) 544-2828

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Wellness Wisdom 4 Women, Christine Spiroch, (440) 821-4108

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Cleveland Clinic Family Health Center-Solon, www.clevelandclinic.org, 29800 Bainbridge Rd, Solon OH 44139 (440) 519-6800

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DoubleTree by Hilton Cleveland East – Beachwood, www.ClevelandEastBeachwood.DoubleTree.com, 3663 Park East Dr, Beachwood OH 44122 (216) 464-5950

Hampton Inn Cleveland/Solon, www.clevelandsolon.hamptoninn.com, 6035 Enterprise Pkwy, Solon OH 44139 (440) 542-0400

TownePlace Suites by Marriott, www.marriott.com/cleto, 6040 Enterprise Pkwy, Solon OH 44139 (440) 394-1270

Homewood Suites by Hilton, www.clevelandsolon.homewoodsuites.com, 6085 Enterprise Pkwy, Solon OH 44139 (440) 519-9500

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Wasson Insurance Agency, www.wassoninsuranceagency.com, Thomas Wasson, 32891 Popham Ln, Solon OH 44139 (440) 519-0067

Linda Myers State Farm, www.lindamyersinsurance.com/Linda Myers, 32901 Station St Suite 104, Solon OH 44139 (440) 349-9300

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OH 44131 (216) 214-6522

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A Kid Again, www.akidagain.org, 9347 Ravenna Rd Unit D, Twinsburg OH 44087 (330) 405-5437

Our Community Hunger Center, Inc., www.ochc-food.org, 9733 Ravenna Rd Suite G, Twinsburg OH 44087 (330) 963-3663

Solon Benevolent Fund, www.sbsolon.org, (440) 773-0237

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Securadyne Systems Security Services, www.securadyne.com, (330) 409-2761

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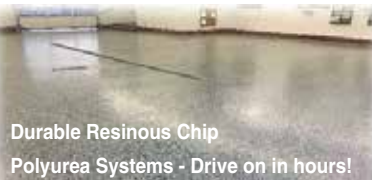
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Re-roofs • Repairs • Ice Removal
 BBB Accredited Business
 Member of Angie's List
 Insured & Bonded
330-487-5838

SOLCON12

REIL'S CONSTRUCTION, INC.

Specializing in Ice & Water Damage
Roofing • Siding • Gutters
 Ventilation, Insulation & Air Sealing
 Emergency Repairs
 Licensed-Bonded-Insured • BBB Accredited Business
 Local, Honest and Reputable Co.
440-735-1648

CSC13

Roofing



RICHMOND ROOFING INC.

440-394-8200

Residential Roofing
 New Roofs - Tear Offs - Repairs
 Ventilation - Iceguard - Gutters
 Fully Insured • References
 Member BBB & Angie's List
Quality Work Guaranteed!

CM16

Siding

See ad for
REIL'S CONSTRUCTION INC.
440-735-1648
 Under
ROOFING

CSC17

Tree Service

AMISH TREE COMPANY

Tree Removal & Trimming
 Logging
 Free Est./Fully Ins./Quality Work
JNS TREE SERVICE
440-321-9554

CSC14

CRAIG & BRUCE'S TREE SERVICE INC. COMPLETE TREE CARE

Bucket Truck Work • Stump Grinding
 Tree Trimming & Removal • **Firewood**
 Fully Insured • 43 Yrs. Experience
440-729-1932

ASOLONCON17

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 OPPORTUNITIES,**
 call Diana at
 440-247-5335, ext. 224



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