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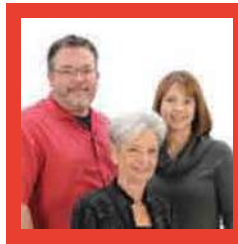
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A message from chairman of the board



Welcome to the 2017 issue of the Solon Connection Magazine! This is our sixth year of providing this informative publication and directory to the Solon community. You'll find it useful as a reference throughout the year to find Solon businesses, government offices and local organizations, so please keep it handy.

The Chamber's biggest challenge is reaching the employees of member businesses. Do you work for a business that is a Chamber member? If so, you are entitled to all of same benefits as any other member. That means all kinds of discounts, luncheons with interesting speakers, after-hour events, the golf outing, Taste of Solon, NEO 5K GLO run and over 100 other events each year. You can also join any of our committees, like Solon Young Professionals, Solon Women in Business, Social Media, Sales and Marketing Connection Group and more. Please help us spread the word.

Here are a few of the ways that we touch the Solon Community:

- Last year the Chamber awarded a record \$24,000 in scholarships to deserving Solon High School students, bringing our total to over \$335,000 since our Solon Chamber of Commerce Scholarship Foundation was first created.
- Each month there is a luncheon event with an interesting speaker and good food. They are open to the public and are a great opportunity to learn what's happening in Solon. Visit business.solonchamber.com/events for a listing of upcoming events.
- The Shop Solon First initiative continues to invite Solon residents to check out businesses before going elsewhere. Why leave town when Solon offers so much? Check out the new website at shopsolonfirst.com and make sure your business listing is current.
- The Telemedicine benefit, open to all members, provides online access from your phone or tablet to diagnoses and prescriptions for up to 900 common ailments from a board-certified physician in as little as five minutes. This program offers treatment 24/7/365 without leaving home and with no copays. Visit solonchamber.com/telemedicine-2/ for more information.
- The annual Taste of Solon event draws more than 500 of people to share in the great food and entertainment provided by over 20 area restaurants. This year's Taste is on Sunday, Nov. 12, 2017 at Signature of Solon.
- Finally, consider participating or watching our second annual NEO 5k GLO run to be held on Saturday, Oct. 14, 2017. Registration is open now on our website www.solonchamber.com. With many prizes and giveaways to all entrants, this nighttime event is guaranteed to sell out, so register soon.

On behalf of our more than 500 member companies and their 19,000 employees, I invite you to participate in our activities and ask that you always try to Shop Solon First and support our local economy.

*Cary M. Root
2017 Board Chair
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Polymer leader

Saint-Gobain, 'the largest company you never heard of'

By PARIS WOLFE

Among Saint-Gobain's first clients was the eccentric 17th century French King Louis XIV. The infant company, based in Saint-Gobain, France, supplied reflective glass for the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles. More than 350 years later, Saint-Gobain technicians still maintain mirrors in the historic landmark in France. And, they do so much more.

Originally a European glassmaker, Saint-Gobain has become a global giant with a myriad of products manufactured in 66 countries for a broad range of industries. One division, Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics Corporation which has its world headquarters in Solon, is the world's leading producer of engineered, high-performance polymer products. Its engineers design products using resins such as fluoropolymers, silicones and high-temperature thermoplastics to serve aerospace, food and beverage, construction, industrial, transportation and safety markets. Annual sales are more than \$1 billion.

"We're the largest company you never heard of," said Eric Licht, marketing and communications manager. "Our technology is all around you. We make the key ingredients in improving daily life."

In 2015, the Performance Plastics subsidiary moved its world headquarters from Aurora to a four-story glass building tucked away on Solon Road. There, a team of 120 manage and support 6,300 people in 57 plastics manufacturing facilities around the world. The building houses executive management, innovation, finance, marketing, communication as well as a "museum" of history and product displays.

If you've ever flown in an airplane, you've likely benefited from the company's radomes. Made around the corner at Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics in Ravenna, radomes are protective housing for communication devices.

For example, the nose cone on a jet is a radome that protects the weather system radar so pilots know what's ahead. Another radome may sit atop the fuselage to protect equipment that handles satellite signals for telephone, television and Wi-Fi.

Continued on page 10

Photographs
by Peggy Turbett

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As a covering, the radomes allow appropriate frequencies to pass through, yet are strong enough to resist bird or lightning strikes. And, they are easily repaired and maintained.

“We have highly specialized engineers who design them,” said Rae Presz, human resources manager at Sheergard in Ravenna. “They determine materials, run analysis and test for clarity of transmission. We have to be certain they allow telecommunication devices to communicate without interruption.”

On any given workday, 160 people are working at the 75,000-square-foot Ravenna manufacturing facility preparing or repairing radomes for new or existing aircraft.

Meanwhile, in Akron, another team is charged with making plastic tubing for soda machines. Throughout the United States, Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics division also makes drywall, roofing, decking, medical tubing and so much more. It boasts an average of 260 new patents each year with 20 percent of sales coming from new products. ■



Radome production is a manual, labor-intensive craft, with laminators layering pre-impregnated quartz composite material into egg-shaped dark-wood molds at the Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics production plant in Ravenna.



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Kids at play

Photographs by
Alana Clark

Indoor park designed through eyes of a child

By SUE REID

Bright green tiles line the entrance counter at Play Day Café in Solon – mirroring the cheery atmosphere that abounds. Nearby, parents hurriedly deposit shoes in perfectly lined cubby holes, while youngsters in their stocking feet make a beeline for the indoor playground.

Chagrin Falls resident Alex Hamerstone is a regular, enjoying all of Play Day’s offerings with his two young children, Elizabeth, 9, and James, 5.

“I love the indoor environment because it gives the kids a chance to run around and have a good time even when it is frigid outside,” Mr. Hamerstone said. “I also really like the fact they have healthy snacks available, and that I can enjoy a cup of coffee while the kids play.”

The indoor playground with a café opened in Solon on Enterprise Parkway in August of 2016. It is the vision of owner Nate Riles, who sought ways for his two young children to stay active in Greater Cleveland’s unpredictable weather.

In just under 15,000 square feet, Mr. Riles,



Nate Riles, a former Canadian Football League player, created the indoor playground, Play Day Café, in Solon. He envisioned an indoor play area that would keep kids active in Greater Cleveland’s unpredictable weather.

a former Canadian Football League player, brought that vision to life.

Play Day Café, designed for families with children up to age 11, features five play areas, including a multi-level playground, a gated toddler playground, wiggle track, ball blaster zone and an interactive game floor. All of

these offerings are custom designed through the eyes of a child.

On a recent afternoon, Bainbridge resident Kevin Vonzah watched over his young son Vincent, who walked onto the interactive game floor, perfecting movement and laughing

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all the while.

"Due to the weather in Northeast Ohio, it can be challenging for my son and me to find fun things to do together," said his mother Tina Vonhaz. "Vincent and I truly love the Play Day Café, and it's quickly become one of our new favorite things to do.

"This is the perfect place for our energetic 20-month-old son to go to blow off steam," Mrs. Vonhaz continued. "He absolutely loves climbing and running around the entire place."

Some of his favorite parts of the playground are the kid-friendly zip line, which

Vincent can hang and glide from one side to another while mom stands below.

"He thinks he is a big shot when I let him do this," Mrs. Vonhaz said.

In creating the Play Day Café, which also boasts a colorful and exciting configuration of tubes, slides and climbers, Mr. Riles' goal was to be more of a high-end indoor play yard. He wanted it to be a celebrity client type look and feel, but in a down to earth atmosphere.

"I love that it is clean and well-maintained," Mr. Hamerstone added. "A lot of those types of places are not."

While walking through the meticulously kept playground, Mr. Riles described the



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roots of Play Day, recalling being a first-time father with a toddler who met all the milestones, both socially and physically, as well as in the area of maneuverability.

"But there is only so much you can do," Mr. Riles continued, "especially when you are confined to the indoors.

"Toys can only do so much," he said.

Mr. Riles did find a soft play space inside a mall once, with a coffee kiosk nearby for the adults. He would go there regularly with his children, but one day thought, "I am going to make this bigger," he said.

"I wanted to design a fun play center for kids to burn off energy, but also a place that parents would enjoy and want to hang out, too," he said.

To this end, the Play Day Café features comfortable, lounge-style seating for caregivers and a coffee bar. The café is complete



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Play Day Café in Solon is a high-end indoor play yard complete with slides, zip lines and tubes. The space also features a lounge-style seating area for parents and caregivers as well as a café with healthy offerings.

with healthy offerings, like a variety of salads, fresh wraps and sandwiches. Kid's fresh snacks also include fruit cups and veggies and dip, as well as parfaits.

"After running and jumping, they can refuel in the café," said Mr. Riles, who grew up in Akron.

The Play Day Café also boasts three party rooms, available to host birthday celebrations and other group events. It has been used by Girl and Boy Scout troops, as well as for family and sports outings. Mr. Riles noted that Play Day Café takes care of all the details to ensure a stress free party.

Open Tuesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., Play Day has about 20 employees.

Mr. Riles said he is proud to have created a sense of community with his business where parents and children can socialize and make new friends.

There are even conversation pieces, like the seats lined with "knock knock" jokes.

"These little touches keep it fun for children and classy for adults," Mr. Riles said.

"We are a place of designation," he said. "It's a place you can sit and relax while children play. There is a great line of sight to the playground."

The custom playground boasts primary colors of purple, green and yellow. A climbing area extends the whole facility.

"We get great feedback," Mr. Riles said. "Kids are using their imagination, dexterity and mobility to learn the ins and outs of the playground."

"It's a place where kids can roam and parents can relax," he said. "We've grown fast. It's been great." ■

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Solon MVP

Former major league player hitting home run in world of business

By RYAN DENTSCHIEFF

Maurice Samuel “Mo” Vaughn, once feared by pitchers across Major League Baseball in the 1990s, has swapped the jersey he used to wear while hitting 500-foot home runs for auto-graphed gifts hung on the walls of his Solon office from the likes of Cal Ripken Jr., George Brett, Tony Gwynn and Ken Griffey Jr.

Living with his wife Gail and two children Grace, 12, and Lee, 4, in Gates Mills, the former first baseman and 1995 American League MVP has put baseball behind him and made a seamless transition into the world of business.

His home office is at Mo Vaughn Transport in Solon, which is a third-party logistics company and warehouse he started in 2009. The business began with just one truck and an 800-square-foot office and has grown to 50 trucks and tractors and operates out of an 8,000-square-foot facility.

Before embarking in the trucking business, Mr. Vaughn, 49, entered the world of affordable housing in 2004. That company, OMNI New York, began with 289 units and is now



Maurice Samuel “Mo” Vaughn, the 1995 American League MVP, now lives in Gates Mills and runs a third-party logistics company and warehouse, Mo Vaughn Transport, in Solon.

Photograph by Alana Clark

more than 14,000 units handling all aspects of the affordable housing process including securing, underwriting, constructing, managing, and syndicating residences. Today, OMNI owns and operates units in eight states.

Mr. Vaughn grew up in Connecticut and played college baseball at Seton Hall University. He was drafted in 1989 by the Boston Red Sox, where he spent the bulk of his career. He made his Major League debut in 1991 and played for the Red Sox until 1998,

during which time he made three All Star appearances and won the league MVP in 1995 when he hit for a .300 average, drove in 126 RBIs and launched 39 home runs. He then played two years for the Anaheim Angels, sat out the 2001 season due to injury and then ended his career playing his last two seasons with the New York Mets.

Mr. Vaughn last played in the MLB in 2003, but knew he wanted to segue into business long before he laced up his cleats for the final time.



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"I always knew that there was more than baseball," he said while sitting behind his desk at the Mo Vaughn Transport office on Station Street in a recent interview. "I was always interested in the afterlife beyond baseball and knew there had to be one. You can't play ball forever."

Shortly after retiring from baseball, Mr. Vaughn partnered with Eugene Schneur and started OMNI New York. He said that early partnership with Mr. Schneur laid the foundation for the rest of his life after baseball.

"That partnership between Eugene and myself has taught me everything about business.

And he's been vital to my overall growth as a man," Mr. Vaughn said. He said another OMNI partner, Rob Bennett, also played a major role in his success. "I think that was the base of how I was able to make other choices in life in terms of business transactions."

After OMNI was established for a few years, Mr. Vaughn partnered with Mark Cuccia and started Mo Vaughn Transport. Mr. Cuccia is the vice president of sales. His more than 25 years in the business helped establish a customer base and get the business off the ground, Mr. Vaughn said.

"I've enjoyed this business," he said. "It's the same but different every day. I enjoy the customer relationship and the working relationship I have in the main office. Everybody is very much a part of the process and everybody has to work together. It takes a big team effort to be successful in this business."

His business endeavors don't stop there. About 11 months ago, Mr. Vaughn – who according to baseball almanac measured in at 6-foot-1, 275 pounds during his playing years – partnered with Diane Cutuli and established a big and tall clothing line called MVP Collections. The line, he said, has been steadily growing over the past year and they recently signed a deal with DXL clothing.

From affordable housing in New York to fashionable clothing for large men, Mr. Vaughn said each of the three businesses he is involved in fulfilled a need within the marketplace.

"For me to say that I planned on being in affordable housing when I retired would be a lie," he said with a laugh. "I just saw a concept and I thought the concept was right. New York City was a place that needed it and we went from there. You never know where you're going to go and usually where you think you're going to go is not where you end up."

He said the same path led him to Mo Vaughn Transport and MVP Collections. But the key to his overall business success, he said, has been surrounding himself with the right people. He could not explain exactly how he has selected the right people to partner with, but when pushed, chalks it up to his athletic instincts.

"Baseball is a game of instincts and anticipation," he said, comparing the game to business. "You can anticipate what a pitcher is going to throw, your instincts make you react a certain way and you come to a conclusion and you go with it. And overall, I was pretty successful at it.

"So I think when I got out of the game, my instincts took me to who to roll with in business. How they treated me and the feeling that they gave me in other circumstances made me choose these partners."

He admitted to making some mistakes over the years.

"Everybody I've picked hasn't worked out right, but the majority have," he said. "That's the type of thing, as long as you're above the curve on that you should be all right in life."

He still loves the game of baseball and even owns Indians season tickets. But he has no desire to go back to the major leagues as a coach or sportscaster.

"The game gave me a lot of great things. Let

somebody else have a chance to be in the game. I played at the highest level. I played against the best. I played with the best. That's what we athletes need to realize, when it's time to move on. And it was time to move on for me."

He moved to Gates Mills in 2011 since his wife is from greater Cleveland.

And people do remember him having played for the Red Sox in the American League against the Indians during the mid-90s when Cleveland enjoyed some of the best years in its franchise history.

"People treat me great here. It's like being in Boston a little bit," he said. "It's really been a great place to be." ■

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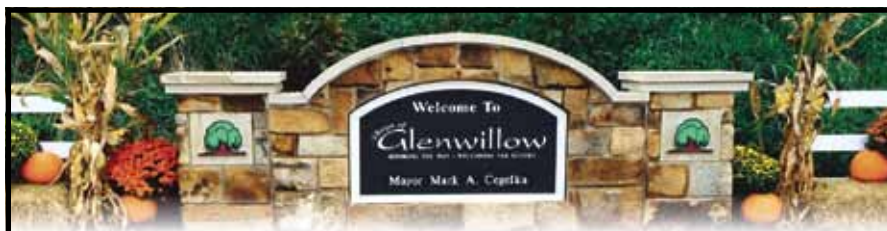
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Photographs by Alana Clark

From left, Leah Kundla, Studio Manager Soly Marengo and Kayla Gholson work out on rowing machines that have water resistance at Orangetheory Fitness in Solon. Working out at Orangetheory is a family affair, said Ms. Marengo, noting that spouses and mother-daughter pairings often exercise together.

A place to tone those muscles

Exercising your options at Solon's many fitness facilities

By Lauri Gross

Hey Solon: Wanna work out? Huh, do ya'?! Wanna hit the weights, try some yoga, swim laps, shoot hoops, dance, run or anything else under the sun you can possibly think of that involves moving your body for fun and health?! Don't even bother to catch your breath before you answer because no one in Solon ever stops to catch their breath. They're having too much fun working out!

But seriously. Solon is a mecca for fitness enthusiasts. Plain and simple. Or maybe not so plain and simple, since Solon's fitness offerings including everything from pickle ball to boxing to working out on a ballerina's barre.

There are so many fitness facilities in Solon that if you ran from one to the other, you wouldn't even get much of a workout. So, you better go inside and actually see what

Continued on page 20



Orangetheory fitness is just one of many workout studios in Solon. Orangetheory's hour-long classes include intervals of cardiovascular and strength training.

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Continued from page 18

they have to offer. Spoiler alert: What they have to offer is everything anyone could think of and plenty that most people would never have considered.

Why Solon?

Solon attracts fitness-minded companies for many reasons and the people who use those facilities appreciate them all. "A lot of our members already come to the (Solon Uptown) plaza for other things, so it's convenient to get several errands done after working out," said Soly Marengo, studio manager at Orangetheory Fitness.

Orangetheory Fitness offers 60-minute workout sessions split into intervals of cardiovascular and strength training. Devotees say they keep burning calories for 36 hours after the workout, in what they call the afterburn.

"A lot of our members like that we are centrally located," said Planet Fitness Manager Megan Bogacki. She added that many "don't live in the area but they work in the area. With all the businesses, there are tons of

people who come in (to work out) at lunch or before work, and some come in before work, during a lunch break and after work."

Planet Fitness is open and staffed 24/7 and offers classes that target specific body parts, and welcomes members who just want to work out on their own. It's known as a judgement-free zone where members enjoy well-maintained free weights and cardio equipment, low membership fees and the ability to go at your own pace.

Vicki Giancola, owner of Barre3 in Solon said, "There is no other location I would rather be in! This is a great community filled with families, friends, local and corporate businesses. There are no other barre fitness studios (in the area) and there are perfect demographics for Barre3 Solon."

The Barre3 website describes their workouts as functional training with a twist. It is rooted in ballet barre, pilates and yoga and members like that the workouts leave them feeling strong and balanced inside and out. "We're known for building lean muscles and a strong core, and for helping people achieve long-term postural benefits," said Vicki.

"We don't believe in a one-size-fits-all approach to exercise. Instead, we empower each individual to modify postures and develop body awareness for lasting results."

Sonya Bapna Patel owns ZenWorks Yoga, a nonprofit committed to changing children's lives by teaching skills based on the practice of yoga. ZenWorks provides yoga and wellness programming for children and families in under-resourced schools and community organizations.

"It has been amazing," Sonya said of working with the Solon Branch of the Cuyahoga County Public Library. "The families that come there have been super responsive. And BDO (a Solon-based accounting and consulting firm) sponsors us by providing yoga classes for their employees and they in turn sponsor one of our school programs. I am enthused by the community and how welcoming Solon has been to yoga and our program."

Solon's Title Boxing Club offers technique training and full-body boxing workouts. Nichole Frato, director of operations for all seven of Ohio's Title Boxing Clubs, including the Solon facility, said Solon is amazing. "Ever since we



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Solon seniors

Solon is also home to a popular community center that offers programs, classes, activities and events for all ages. The facility features indoor and outdoor swimming pools, a gymnasium, jogging track, meeting and banquet rooms, aerobics studio, free-weight room, rock-climbing wall, a fitness area brimming with exercise machines, plus a kid zone, arts-and-crafts zone, teen lounge and juice bar.

Membership is open to Solon and Glenwillow residents and people who work in Solon, regardless of where they live. Considered the nucleus of the Department of Senior Services, the Solon Senior Center is on the same campus as the Solon Community Center.

Jill Frankel, director of Solon's senior services, said the Community Center and Senior Center log at least 7,000 monthly visits from seniors participating in fitness activities.

"They do it all," she said, as she pointed out that pickle ball is extremely popular. (It combines elements of tennis, badminton and ping pong.) Word of mouth helps many seniors discover the programs of the senior center as do insurance companies that offer "Silver Sneakers" benefits.

"Some doctors and nurses encourage active aging," added Jill, "or seniors read about the senior center in the paper or find it online. We primarily serve Solon residents but non-residents can join the senior center for a nominal fee, and anyone in the Silver Sneakers program is eligible."

The campus is surrounded by walking trails, woods and many other amenities, making it even more desirable. Adventure seekers can participate in trips sponsored by the Department of Senior Services, including canoeing and hiking trips in area parks.

"Some seniors think they will just use the fitness equipment and then they meet people and socialize and expand into scheduled activities," said Jill.

Better with a friend

This social aspect is important to fitness enthusiasts of every age. Soly of Orange Theory agreed. "Very often we get spouses joining together or moms and daughters signing up."

Vicki of Barre3 said, "We have noticed a trend of families becoming more active and healthy together."

Nichole of Title Boxing Club sees families coming in together. "Or friends who work in different offices come in to work out together," she said.

Megan of Planet Fitness added, "A ton of people come in together from work. Friends always meet to change up workouts or to teach friends who have never been in a gym how to work out. People who meet here now hang out together outside of here." ■



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Constellations afoot

Stars to shine during second Solon chamber NEO 5k GLO

By RYAN DENTSCHIEFF

With momentum from the spectacular success of the inaugural event last year, the Solon Chamber of Commerce is bringing back the NEO 5k GLO once again this fall.

But the second annual 5k is no ordinary 3.1-mile race. It combines a health and fitness activity, a running competition as well as business and community camaraderie and puts it all under the stars. The event starts and finishes at the Solon High School track with running taking off at 7:30 p.m. Oct. 14 and meandering through the surrounding city neighborhoods. It was organized by the Chamber's Solon Young Professionals group, headed by Tom Erb.

The young professionals group focuses on developing young professionals in their 20s and 30s in the Solon area through mentoring, networking, and seeking out engagement opportunities by connecting with local busi-



Photo courtesy of Solon Chamber

The Solon Chamber of Commerce's Solon Young Professionals organized the NEO 5k GLO for the first time last year. A total of 200 participants raised more than \$10,000. This year, organizers expect both numbers to double.

nesses, business leaders, dynamic entrepreneurs and local culture.

Mr. Erb, who also serves on the chamber board of directors, said the goal last year was to start a unique, fun, after-business-hours event geared towards health and wellness that would


serve as a great networking activity for the business community and young professionals.

Nighttime was a perfect backdrop for a 5k because it perhaps could get businesses that don't normally cross paths during the day to be running on the same track at night.



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“Things have changed in the last 10 years or so where business and personal life is mixing a little bit more,” he said. “The health and wellness trend is not all about just having a successful business, you have to stay healthy too. And what’s more fun than when you’re meeting and networking and sharing business ideas, than doing it at a healthy and community-based event?”

The event last year had about 200 participants and raised more than \$10,000, and organizers are expecting those numbers to both double this fall. A portion of the funds raised go to the Solon Chamber Scholarship Fund and the rest toward the Chamber’s educational programs.

“NEO 5k GLO is truly an experience,” said Solon Chamber President Jennifer Natale. “Participants will find there is something for everyone at this event no matter what age. It is amazing to see how our group of Solon Young Professionals created this idea and transformed it into an annual community event that brings people together of all ages from all areas of Northeast Ohio.”

She added that the feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive and it is the chamber’s goal to recreate the relaxed and communal atmosphere at the second annual event this October. Participants liked that the event was unique and not too competitive, she said.

Chris Latkovich, who is a sales finance manager at Nestle, doesn’t think of himself as a competitive runner, yet he won the 5k last year. The event was more about the experience and enjoying the night with other members of the Solon community and less about the competition of the race, he said.

“It brought people together and had less of a competitive edge and had more of a fun, community feel,” he said. “It was more about the community. It wasn’t the hard-core, 5-minute mile people out there. It was just a good event on a great summer night.”

People ran and then they socialize making it fun, he added.

After the 5k – which features about half runners and half walkers – visitors gather for a post-race party with plenty of food and activities.

Amber Shulman, who has been a chamber member since 2013 with her business Candid Virgo Communications, said the night run and all of the activities were enjoyable and she plans to do it again.

“I really think it’s a fun event to come out to,” she said. “I think having the glow sticks and running and walking at night is interesting and different.”

People shouldn’t feel intimidated, she added, because there’s a walk portion and some runners were out pushing strollers. They were being passed up by the serious runners, she added.

Chamber officials thanked their sponsors including Brian Alquist, owner of ActionCOACH, the world’s largest business coaching company. ActionCOACH has more than 1,200 coaches in 61 countries, he said.

Mr. Alquist said the run gave him a way to promote his business and meet others with

similar interests. It was a perfect mix of competition and social engagement.

“We had a lot of laughs, and of course it was great having the opportunity to get to know other business owners in the community and to get some great exercise that evening,” Mr. Alquist said. “It gave us the perfect opportunity for accomplishing all of our objectives for the event.”

He plans to sponsor the event again this fall.

Mr. Latkovich said because Nestle has a strong presence in Solon, the company is always looking for ways to interact and engage with the community. He said the NEO 5k GLO put all of this on track.

“Getting people out and active fits the Nestle profile and fits what I, in addition to being

a sale finance manager, am trying to champion with the health and wellness initiative.”

Registration is available by visiting www.neo5kglo.com. Price for entry is \$25 now through Sept. 30, and goes up to \$30 until the day of the race, when entry will be \$35. Each runner will receive a complimentary pint drinking glass, T-shirt, entry to the post-race party, glow sticks and live chip timing. Prizes will be awarded for first, second and third place in all categories.

“If you want to live a healthy life, mind, body and spirit, you have to experience it,” Mr. Erb said. “And this whole NEO GLO race from the Solon Young Professionals standpoint provides that experience.” ■

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Neighborhood spot

56 Kitchen brings locally sourced American fusion to the table

By SUE REID

Enter the front door of 56 Kitchen in Solon and prepare to be blown away. That is the exact effect owner Izzy Schachner wants to have on his customers.

“Our goal is to make the experience come alive,” said Mr. Schachner, who owns the American eatery with partner Jay Leitson. “The moment you walk in, you don’t expect it.”

The low-key spot, tucked away in the Solon Square Shopping Center, marks one year in business in June. Featuring an open layout and show kitchen, the restaurant prides itself on responsibly and locally sourced food, fresh ingredients and many vegan and gluten-free options.

Menu aside, the aesthetics of 56 Kitchen speak for itself.

From concrete floors, distressed tables from reclaimed wood to local artwork and handcrafted pendant lights and chandeliers, the rustic ambiance, with new-age, industrial elements, is nothing short of a big city feel.

“Jay and I had a vision for this place,” Mr. Schachner explained. “It looks like we belong on East 4th (Street in downtown Cleveland), but we’re fine here in Solon. We are not interested in being on East 4th.”

From the slew of regulars and the packed house, 56 Kitchen is doing more than fine.

They have amassed a following and have



Photo by Peggy Turbett

At 56 Kitchen, Salmon Parka is seared salmon with cranberry orange chutney and served open face on house-made focaccia. The restaurant, owned by Izzy Schachner and Jay Leitson offers many gluten-free and vegan options.

become a true neighborhood spot in Solon.

“It’s amazing,” Mr. Schachner said, while enjoying a kale salad of cranberries, shaved carrots and shaved butternut squash and house-made maple orange vinaigrette of agave nectar, honey and olive oil.

Fresh approach

The cuisine at 56 Kitchen is “new Ameri-

can, bistro-style fusion,” Head Chef Drew Slane chimed in.

It’s a combination of Italian, French and Asian dishes, a Mediterranean diet of sorts, but not specific to a region, said Mr. Slane, who graduated from the Arizona Culinary Institute and was former chef at fine restaurants throughout Cleveland, including the Intercontinental Hotel.

Some of the restaurant’s more popular dishes include the house-made veggie burger, the wide variety of salads and gourmet artisan pizzas, among other offerings.

“The veggie burgers get great reviews,” Mr. Slane noted, and are a blend of quinoa, legumes and brown rice.

“We know exactly what is going into people’s mouths on a day-to-day basis,” Mr. Slane said.

Another top choice is the Love Bird sandwich, featuring marinated chicken breast, Swiss cheese and fried Brussels sprouts.

“You want everything to be more than one note,” Mr. Slane said, “making the dishes as symphonic as possible.”

56 Kitchen prides itself on throwing some complexity in its dishes, and gets as many ingredients as possible from local sources.

Salads such as the French Kiss, featuring mixed and wild greens, caramelized pears, crumbled goat cheese and white balsamic, also boasts fresh, local high-quality berries that are seasonal, with the most recent topping being fresh blueberries.

Free form, artisan pizzas cooked in a hearth oven with no added oil are also a top choice of

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customers at 56 Kitchen, with the Spesso pizza one of the more popular choices. It is topped with house-made meatballs, house-made fennel sausage, plum tomato sauce, pepperoni and a mozzarella and provolone blend.

Vegan choices are also the restaurant's claim to fame and Mr. Schachner proudly describes the spaghetti and meatballs, with meatballs made from bulgur wheat, quinoa, barley, herbs and spices.

"It tastes like grandma's meatballs, but with no meat," he said.

It is served with zucchini and squash and coriander as well as tomato coulis.

"We try to get customer's interaction," Mr. Slane noted of the open kitchen format. "We want people to feel part of it."

He is known to often ask if customers want to throw on an apron and come back on the line, Mr. Slane added with a laugh.

Solon remains the perfect spot for the restaurant, Mr. Schachner continued. Customers come from the surrounding areas like Bainbridge, Twinsburg and Chagrin Falls. But some travel from as far away as Rocky River.

"It's all word of mouth," he said. "Customers are looking for places to go in Solon and we saw an opportunity.

"This became the perfect spot."

Business of food

Mr. Schachner, who holds a degree in business from the Ohio State University, ended up getting bit by the restaurant bug while helping a friend in high school who was in the business of cooking, and went on to attend culinary school at Cuyahoga County Community College.

He later partnered up with Mr. Leitson at 56 Café about five years ago, as they both knew one another growing up in the Jewish community of Beachwood, he explained.

Mr. Schachner went on to open three restaurants in downtown Cleveland and in 2010, bought the mobile catering business, a food truck that served the local movie industry in Ohio.

In dealing with many of the actor's "West Coast palates," including gluten-free, vegan options, the idea for 56 Kitchen grew.

Solon was ultimately chosen as the location for the restaurant because Mr. Leitson also had a catering business on the east side of Cleveland called 56 Catering. The 56 has become a brand name of sorts, and refers to the 56 salad options offered at 56 Café.

"That name and number took on a life of its own," Mr. Schachner said.

"We wanted something on this side of town with the same name but taking it to the next level," he added.

"Solon is a health conscious area, and we wanted to focus on healthy aspects" of food, Mr. Schachner added.

56 Kitchen has 35 employees and seats about 100. The restaurant boasts a full service bar and daily happy hour drink and food specials Monday through Friday from 4-6 p.m. Operating hours are from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Saturday. ■

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Rofail family warms soul of Solon's Zoup!

By KRISTA S. KANO

There's a reason the book series "Soup for the Soul" isn't "Sandwich for the Soul" or "Pie for the Soul." Soup is a comfort food that carries so much emotional weight. Just about everyone has a memory of being sick and receiving a cup of chicken noodle soup or visiting their grandmother and diving into a piping hot bowl of her secret recipe.

Even though Zoup! in Solon is a franchise, the feelings of coziness are still evident in the ever-rotating list of soups. Top seller Chicken Potpie, garnished with a heap of crumbled pie crust, tastes just like my mom's homemade chicken potpie and the Lobster Bisque, with giant chunks of lobster and crawfish, reminds me of the kind I would order in fisherman's shacks in Plymouth with my aunt and uncle. But the feeling of family and comfort go beyond the soup. At Zoup of Solon, the family feeling stems from its owners, George Rofail, 38, of Westlake and his new bride, Engy Rofail, 29.

The newlyweds were married in September of 2016, but have known each other since childhood when Mrs. Rofail's family immigrated to Ohio from Egypt. Their parents met at St. Mark Coptic Orthodox



Photos by Alana Clark

The Turkey Club and the Chicken Potpie soup are two of the most popular items at Solon's Zoup!, owned by George and Engy Rofail. Zoup's menu includes rotating soups, fresh sandwiches, and salads that can be made into wraps for easy to-go options.

Church in Seven Hills and Mr. Rofail's parents were Mrs. Rofail's parents' first friends in America.

"I've been chasing her for years. It's about persistence" Mr. Rofail said.

Both of them worked at their family businesses. Mr. Rofail began working at Sam's Food and Beverage, the family business, when he was 7 years old ("Legally, I started working when I was 16," Mr. Rofail joked.) He was in charge of the Pepsi cooler, and his brother, who now owns and operates the business, was in charge of the 7-Up cooler and every night they had to make sure each cooler was full. Mrs. Rofail periodically

helped out at her uncle's dollar tree and at her family's furniture manufacturing business in Egypt when she would visit. She also worked at Dairy Queen as an assistant manager for six years.

Mr. Rofail took a break from business at Case Western Reserve University, where he earned a degree in engineering.

"Engineering makes you think logically and it develops your way of thinking. It's a difficult degree to get, so it was a nice challenge. My goal was never to open a business after college. I wanted to go into the field in corporate America and get some experience. I got my MBA during that time and then I

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Solon and Westlake locations were opened as the Rofails were planning their wedding. The only thing the couple ate the day of their wedding were Zoup sandwiches in the limo.

Since opening the new locations, the Rofails have gone from 15 employees to 60, and they credit store managers, their catering manager Lamar Bullock and their regional manager Ron Fugate, and of course, Mrs. Rofail, who serves as part employee, part accountant and part outreach.

“We want to expand for our team. They want to beat the other people who own four stores,” Mrs. Rofail said.

But right now as they pay off the loans from the acquisition of the two new locations, they’re focused on building a strong team and the best possible product they can deliver.

“Our employees make us want to work harder. We want to grow for our team and give them more opportunities. High school students have become shift managers and assistant managers and it’s nice to see people progress. They develop work ethic and management skills for future jobs and we want to know that we’re a good stepping stone for their careers,” Mr. Rofail said.

Mrs. Rofail agreed, “It’s so nice to see college kids come back for breaks. It means they like us and they like working here and it’s very humbling. It’s a family business and we operate as a family.” ■



Engy and George Rofail acquired Solon’s Zoup! in the summer of 2016. The Rofails now own four Zoup franchises in Northeast Ohio.

started looking into franchises,” Mr. Rofail said.

He knew he wanted a newer franchise with a great product and that was still growing, so there would be open territory. He found everything he was looking for at Zoup, and opened his first franchise in 2013 in Warrensville Heights. Middleburg Heights soon followed in 2015, and in the summer of 2016, he acquired the Solon location and the Westlake location, making Mr. Rofail one of three franchisees to own four locations. Both the

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The Smash Burger at Station 43 in Solon contains five different kinds of prime-cut beef and is only offered on weekends. It is just one of many unique burgers offered at many Solon restaurants.

Photographs
by Peggy Turbett

Biting into a burger

Sensational offerings from savory to sweet abound

By KRISTA S. KANO

Solon residents like to stay fit and active. Within the city there are 520 acres of city parks and recreational areas, 214 acres of city-owned green space, 446 acres of Cleveland Metroparks, 5.2 miles of bike lanes and 8.9 miles of multi-purpose paths.

But even when staying fit, cheat days are necessary for the soul and what better way to indulge than that great American classic: the burger.

When it comes to burgers, Solon offers plenty of unique options. It's impossible to sample the many restaurants and all of their offerings, so I asked three burger joints to choose their best and most unique burgers to try, and they did not disappoint.

Station 43, 39910 Aurora Road

After a long day of golfing on Grantwood Golf Course unwind down the street at Station 43, a firehouse-themed restaurant known for its diverse menu filled with bar food favorites like wings, giant sandwiches, and of course, hearty burgers.

As soon as I asked Station 43 Manager Anthony Fiorelli for a recommendation, he knew exactly which burger I should try: the Smash Burger, a blend of five different types of prime-cut beef mashed into one juicy burger that is only available on Saturdays.

When I went on a Saturday afternoon in March, the parking lot was packed, but there was still plenty of seating inside the restaurant. I was seated quickly in a booth surrounded by photographs of Solon from the 1960s and earlier. Above me, mannequins dressed in firefighter suits crawled across a wood ladder balanced from rafters covered by area fire and police badges. Teddy bears wearing red suits drove miniature fire trucks and fire hydrants and Dalmatians dotted the walls.

There was so much to look at, including big screen TVs playing the day's basketball games, I hardly noticed time pass and soon the Smash Burger was sitting in front of me with a pile of crisp sweet potato fries and

Continued on page 32

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The Salmon Cali Burger at Burger Fresh is served with red pepper salsa, avocado, baby greens and chipotle mayo. Customize the burger by asking for a brioche or pretzel bun, or by replacing the salmon burger with a black bean or Angus patty.

Continued from page 29

thick-cut onion rings. Always one to start on the fried fixings, I dug in to the sides. The fries were crisp on the edges and soft on the inside and perfectly salted. The onion rings were lightly battered and full of flavor.

And the burger: perfectly charred on the outside and pink and juicy on the inside. I opted for cheddar cheese and the standard lettuce, onion, tomato and pickle and the burger was so juicy, I didn't even bother with condiments.

Burger Fresh, 6134 Kruse Drive

Normally, a burger joint wouldn't make sense next to Vitamix store, but in this case, it fits. Burger Fresh uses all fresh ingredients prepared daily. The shop, which has a layout similar to Chipotle, doesn't even have a freezer, and orders are up quickly, even during the afternoon lunch rush.

Kitchen Manager Nate Ferruso recommended the Salmon Cali Burger with red pepper salsa, avocado, baby greens and chipotle

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mayo. The salmon burger, made freshly that morning, was hot, pink and delicious, but it was the red pepper salsa that really made it for me. It was sweet and crunchy with a little bit of a kick, and would have been complimented nicely by the guacamole (my avocado allergy is the most tragic of all my allergies). I had it on a toasted brioche bun, though pretzel was also an option.

For a side, Mr. Ferruso recommended the healthy fries. Like an overweight gangster nicknamed Skinny, the healthy fries were layered in gooey cheese and crunchy bacon bits. The fries were salty and crisp, even under the mountain of real, melted cheese (no golden cheese sauce here) and the bacon bits that were clearly fried and chopped that day. Even if you make it to the bottom of the pile, and that is a challenge worthy of "Man. V. Food," there's still plenty of cheese and bacon waiting for you at the bottom.

The Cali burger, as is the case for any burger on the menu, can be on a classic angus burger or a black bean burger.

Burgers 2 Beer, 33003 Aurora Road

When I decided to eat at Burgers 2 Beer, I didn't need a recommendation. I knew exactly which burger I would tackle: the Luther. The burger you eat so that you can say you ate it, is served on a glazed donut with honey pepper bacon and American cheese.

Like the Smash Burger at Station 43, no condiments are needed on this juicy burger, and the glazed donut added a fun, sweet touch. The burger was a size big enough to fill you up, but not so big that you'd have



The Luther burger with honey pepper bacon and American cheese is served on a glazed donut at Burgers 2 Beer in Solon. They recommend pairing it with a Deschutes Black Butte Porter.

any trouble finishing it, and the fries were covered in big hunks of sea salt and fresh ground pepper. Like all the burgers at Burgers 2 Beer, it came with a beer recommendation and I indulged in the recommendation, a Deschutes Black Butte Porter with coffee and chocolate notes that paired perfectly with the donut. Unlike some porters, this one was crisp and cut through the savory burger.

The burger came out with a knife and fork, which is great if you want to keep clean, but I went all in with my hands and relished in licking the sweet glaze off my fingers.

Burgers 2 Beer offers plenty of eat-it-so-you-can-say-you-ate-it burgers like the Eifel Toast, served on French toast and a side of

maple syrup, and paired with a Rogue Shakespearean Stout; the Side Chick, featuring a chicken patty with honey butter hot sauce, pecans, honey-pepper bacon, crispy onion straws and maple syrup with a Wells Banana Bread beer; and the Like Butta Baby, loaded with truffle butter, honey-pepper bacon, brie, onion straws and a caramelized onion jam with a Guinness.

The atmosphere is what you'd expect from a burger and beer joint, with HDTVs lining the walls playing every available game, and a touch-screen juke box that plays everything from 21 Pilots to "I am the Walrus," and Barney to Weird Al Yankovic. ■

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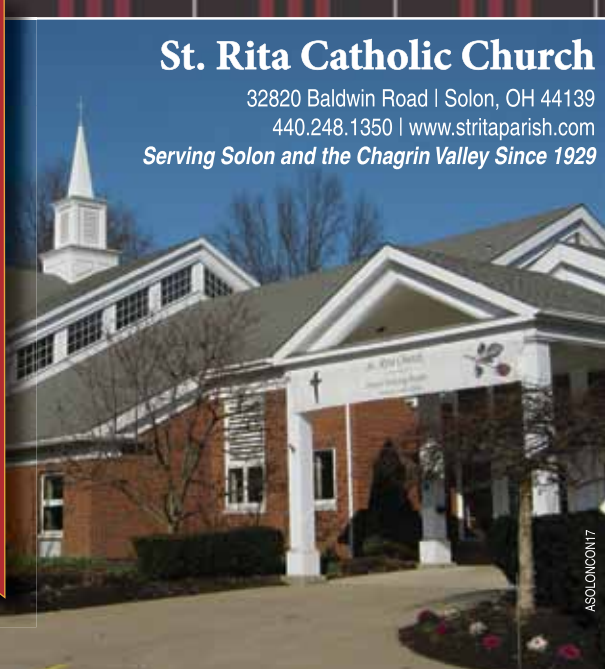


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Photos by Peggy Turbett

The organic produce section includes an array of different varieties of lettuce at Mustard Seed Market and Cafe in the Uptown Solon plaza. The locally owned health food store was started in 1981 in Akron by Margaret and Phil Nabors, and the Solon location opened in 1999.

Fresh and natural



Gabe Nabors, left, and his brother Abraham are second generation co-owners of Mustard Seed Market and Cafe in Solon. Mustard Seed was one of the first grocery stores to feature a full-service restaurant.

Family operation grows from hippie health food store to organic mecca

By SUE REID

Now a staple source of organic and unique foods, Mustard Seed Market and Café in Solon got its start as a “hippie health food store” in Akron.

That’s according to Abraham Nabors, son of founders Margaret and Phil Nabors. Abraham represents the second generation of store operators, alongside his brother Gabe. His parents are retired.

Mustard Seed Market has been a familiar sight at the Uptown Solon plaza since 1999 and continues to be the only organic, locally owned health food store in Solon, featuring a vast selection of high-quality meat, fresh seafood and homemade prepared items from its kitchen and bakery.

Mustard Seed opened its first store in Akron in 1981, explained Abraham Nabors, 34,

director of education and standards for the store.

"The original Mustard Seed fit inside a to-go pizza place," he recalled with a laugh. His mother worked on her own, running the store, with just one or two employees.

"Health food in 1981 was not on people's minds," he said.

Mrs. Nabors began the store while pregnant with her oldest child, Marcella, because she was looking for healthy food options for her baby, Mr. Nabors said.

"She started reading labels for the first time and researching ingredients," he continued. "She basically threw away her pantry."

The Nabors were considered "early adopters" of the natural, organic lifestyles, with Mrs. Nabors wanting to give other mothers the same opportunities she discovered.

The Nabors began learning the world of vitamin and other food supplements, with Solon's Mustard Seed boasting a vast selection.

Equipped with knowledge of food and health and its relationship to the body, the Nabors started on their own, "doing a Hail Mary" when opening up shop, Mr. Nabors said.

Difficult in the early days was educating people about what natural food was and why it was important, Mr. Nabors added.

Educating customers remains a mission of the Mustard Seed, he noted.

"That's the genesis of the company."

See them grow

Mustard Seed saw its first growth spurt in 1989, when it transplanted from its 2,000 square foot digs to an 11,000 square foot store in Montrose, outside of Akron. Mustard Seed was one of the first to put a full-service restaurant in a grocery store.

All of the food it serves to this day stands by "golden ingredient standards," Mr. Nabors noted, meaning they are free of artificial flavors, colors and trans fats.

Mr. Nabors said the store grew, and continues to grow, from word of mouth.

Another expansion occurred in 1997, with the store growing to 31,500 square feet.

Mustard Seed opened its second store in Solon in October of 1999 and encompasses 56,000 square feet. Mr. Nabors said that at that time, it was the largest independent natural food store in the country. A second floor is used for meetings, banquets, Bat and Bar Mitzvahs, wine tastings, conferences, weddings or any type of gathering up to about 300.

In Solon, the idea was to create a modern grocery store that was the "one stop shop" for all things natural and organic, Mr. Nabors explained.

The store's produce department, bursting in color and variety, boasts one of the largest organic produce selections in the state, highlighting a robust local organic network.

Mustard Seed purchases its produce from many Amish farmers who focus on soil health and nutrient density, Mr. Nabors said.

"In season, up to 60 percent of our produce department is local and organic," Mr. Nabors said, which, by percentage, is larger than most farmers markets.

The store is also plentiful in the area of meats and fish, with the highest standards for both. Choices are hormone and antibiotic free.

"Your animal protein products are the first area we recommend people to start," Mr. Nabors said of making a switch to natural meats and fish.

At the Mustard Seed, customers will find unique items they won't find elsewhere, Mr. Nabors assured, such as those which are raw, sprouted, organic and non-GMO.


"We always look for those attributes" in products, "but what we find in ingredients is tragic" which is why they go the opposite direction.

Mustard Seed offers "from-scratch kitchen" dishes where everything is made on site. In the artisanal bakery, selections are made the traditional way – by hand – and baked in a traditional French bakery oven.

The store has the largest selection of vegan desserts and baked goods and even makes customized wedding cakes.

The store's "anti-inflammatory" food line


Continued on page 36



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Continued from page 35

features complete dinners which give people healthy meal solutions each night.

“Inflammation is the gas pedal of many chronic diseases in America,” Mr. Nabors said. “People are into meal solutions these days.

“We feel (ours) is a superior option” in that it is not only 100 percent natural but includes some of the best ingredients to make it that way, he continued.

“Mustard Seed has one of the largest supplement selections in the state, with highly trained employees to “de-mystify that crazy world,” Mr. Nabors said.

“We help customers navigate the selection,” he said.

Solon’s Mustard Seed employs 100, with the three stores employing a total of 350.

It has a dedicated following, Mr. Nabors noted, with core customers who care less about convenience and distance and more about quality and selection. Mustard Seed is visited by customers as far away as upstate New York and Pennsylvania.

“Our core customer base understands our commitment to organic and local,” Mr. Nabors said, and that they are leaders in that category.

While Mustard Seed is on the cutting edge, there are still challenges, Mr. Nabors said.

“It’s harder and harder every day to survive the more and more options that are out there,” he said. “Our plot to change the world



is working. We now have to live with it.

“We used to be the weird grocery store, the health nerds,” Mr. Nabors continued, “now we are a leader.

“Most people don’t flip over and look at ingredients.” There are produce with pesticides or genetically modified and other products include such artificial ingredients like high fructose corn syrup.

“We feel that health food is on the cusp of becoming main stream,” Mr. Nabors said. “If we can serve our core customers the best, that’s our strategy to win.”

They look to convert occasional shoppers

to tall basket shoppers, he added.

“We honor everyone has freedom to choose what they put in their body,” Mr. Nabors said. “We just encourage high information food choices.

The name of the store came from the leap of faith his parents took years ago, he said.

“My parents often say, ‘Pinch us, is this real?’” Mr. Nabors said of what the store has become. “It has grown beyond their wildest expectations. They had this passion and spark and ran with it as fast as they could. They had faith that if you build it, they will come.” ■

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Blue Ribbon

Program for people with special needs gets first-place award from state agency

By SUE REID

Solon resident Jeanne Sydenstricker moved to Solon in 1996. Her sons, who both have a genetic disability on the autism spectrum, were teenagers and nearing graduation from Solon High School.

For a mother of children with special needs, that time can feel like “falling off a cliff,” Ms. Sydenstricker said.

“Suddenly, this support system and educational opportunity is gone,” she continued. “For typical kids, they go to college and work and become independent.

“For our kids, there was nothing.”

Instead of sitting back, Ms. Sydenstricker took the matter into her own two hands – and her heart.

She began Blue Ribbon, an adaptive recreation program that provides high-quality community recreation and leisure activities for people with developmental disabilities.

“I had an opportunity for early retirement from TRW,” she said, “and decided what I wanted to do was spend the rest of my life creating sustainable initiatives for people with disabilities.”

The hard work has paid off in many ways. “It’s become a model for other communities,” Ms. Sydenstricker noted. Blue Ribbon this year was awarded first place for special needs programming in the state from the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association.

Founded in 2002, Blue Ribbon now serves nearly 2,000 individuals annually, ranging in age from teenagers to adults, providing recreational opportunities for all.

Activities include karaoke, dance classes, trips to the movies, organized baseball games and much more.

“It is a wonderful thing,” Ms. Sydenstricker noted. “I look back at how it’s evolved from the beginning and so many people have such a great time at that.”

Linda Creviston, who coordinates the Blue Ribbon program on a part-time basis, said the program serves mostly people with a cognitive disability.

“It’s just like recreation for anyone else,” Ms. Creviston said. “It’s a great release for



Photo by Alana Clark

Solon Resident Jeanne Sydenstricker began Blue Ribbon, an adaptive recreation program for people with developmental disabilities, after she found that the support system and educational opportunities would be gone for her two sons, Stephen, left, and Brent once they graduated from Solon High School.

getting rid of stress and it also adds stimulation and has emotional benefits.”

Ms. Creviston’s goal is to offer a wide range of activities, many of which include movement or spectator activities.

For example, groups can be seen at Solon High School basketball games, enabling them to feel part of the community.

“Socialization is a big thing,” Ms. Creviston noted.

For Solon resident Mollie Kalk, 19, dance has become her favorite activity through the Blue Ribbon program, her mother Amy said.

“It’s very challenging to find appropriate

adaptive recreation programs that fit your child and that are available at a time and location that can fit your schedule,” Mrs. Kalk said.

Mollie, who has autism and a chromosome disorder and speaks with the aid of an augmented device, has enjoyed participating in arts and crafts classes, swimming, music, cooking classes, the annual Fun Fest and summer camp, Mrs. Kalk said.

“The Blue Ribbon program has developed into such an asset to our community by offering so many different types of programs on different days and at different times so that

“The Blue Ribbon program has developed into such an asset to our community by offering so many different types of programs on different days and at different times so that there is something for everyone.” — Amy Kalk

there is something for everyone.

“We are incredibly thankful to live in a community that values our special needs family members and sees the need for their recreation, social and leisure programming,” Mrs. Kalk said.

Ms. Sydenstricker’s sons, Stephen, 37, and Brent, 33, still participate in Blue Ribbon activities, their mother said. Stephen rides his bike to the Solon Community Center to participate in programs and Ms. Sydenstricker still volunteers.

Her objective all along, though, was to create “sustainable programs.”

Ms. Sydenstricker noted that Ms. Creviston is exceptional when it comes to developing innovative programming.

“What we are shooting for is fun,” Ms. Creviston added.

The name Blue Ribbon is derived from the desire to have a program that was the best, Ms. Sydenstricker explained.

“We sat around one day and didn’t want it called a program for people with disabilities,” she said. “We wanted something upbeat and someone suggested ‘Blue Ribbon.’”

Ms. Sydenstricker said there was a need, but not a demand for this program when she first sat down with city officials.

“We decided to throw a party, and over 250 people came,” she said. This allowed her to envision bigger and better things.

The Blue Ribbon Annual Fun Fest, presented at the Solon Community Center each March and featuring a carnival like atmosphere with games, music and food, now draws over 400 attendees.

“I’m just thrilled,” Ms. Sydenstricker said of what Blue Ribbon has become. “I’m excited that this vision that I had has actually come to fruition.”

Blue Ribbon is known throughout the area and the number of people participating continues to grow.

“I think one of the biggest differences for so many families with kids with disabilities is that we have to create it if our kids are going to have it.”

“This program is her heart,” Ms. Creviston added of Ms. Sydenstricker. ■



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Family business aims to keep customers warm in winter and cool in summer

By SUE REID

For more than 80 years, P.K. Wadsworth had prided itself on making sure its customers buy their heating ventilation and air condition “the right way,” President Paul Wadsworth said.

“It is not common or customary for people to buy HVAC units,” Mr. Wadsworth explained. “It’s a foreign thing.”

As a result, staff at P.K. Wadsworth takes the necessary time to evaluate their customers’ needs and finds the best long-term, most cost effective HVAC solution, he said. They help customers navigate the challenges of new HVAC codes, cost efficiencies and solutions for older home.

That has been the backbone of the family run business since the early days, Mr. Wad-

sworth continued, when most people heated their homes with coal.

“My father started contracting doing heating services in the 1950s,” Mr. Wadsworth said. Cooling started to come in movie theaters and drug stores, but air conditioning was an expensive proposition at that time.

“In the early 1970s, they were trying to make cooling more affordable for the masses,” Mr. Wadsworth explained.

The early days of P.K. Wadsworth involved Mr. Wadsworth’s father, also named Paul, running the HVAC portion of the business and his mother, with six children, doing the office work.

With a background in engineering, Mr. Wadsworth eventually took over the company in the 1980s.

“With my background, I wanted it to be



Photo by Alana Clark

Paul Wadsworth, left, and his son Tyler own P.K. Wadsworth, a heating ventilation and air condition company on Solon Road.

a business that would serve clients first,” he explained.

Mr. Wadsworth runs the business alongside his son Tyler, who serves as sales manager.

P.K. Wadsworth focuses primarily on residential work, concentrating the bulk of their business in the eastern suburbs. The business

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"Replacing units really is our forte," Mr. Wadsworth noted. "We really do a good job of working with people and maintaining their systems."

The company can handle any HVAC need, including furnaces, boilers, air conditioning, air quality, hot water solutions and more. They can work on any type of HVAC system, regardless of its age and make.

They also pride themselves on being "problem solvers," Mr. Wadsworth said.

Having the right amount of people and experience on staff is key to that end, Tyler added.

"It's about being able to handle this type of market in newer or older housing stocks," he said.

"The nice thing about being 81 years old is we have been around for a while," Mr. Wadsworth said, and have a great deal of knowledge.

P.K. Wadsworth serves about 20,000 clients and gets much of its business through word of mouth.

"We work with generations of families in Cleveland," Tyler said.

"That's very satisfying when that happens," his father added. "We have been a multigenerational business serving generations of families in the Cleveland area."

Mr. Wadsworth noted that HVAC and the energy business is a rapidly growing area, and staff members continue to keep up on changes. The company boasts dedicated service technicians as well as dedicated design consultants.

"It's not just about the equipment, but how do we approach putting equipment into homes," he said. It all starts with the proper design and consultation with a homeowner.

"We try to make the process simple and transparent," Mr. Wadsworth said. To that end, they have created seven different pre-tested solutions and present those to clients.

"Our job is to educate you to make a good decision."

They also find it important to reach out and direct homeowners to third-party sources where necessary, Tyler continued.

"You have to have a passion for it," Mr. Wadsworth concluded of the industry. "We have a great business."

P.K. Wadsworth is no stranger to accolades, earning the Super Service Award through Angie's list for nearly a decade; the Air Conditioning Contractors of America Contractor of the Year award, Ohio Chapter; as well as the contractor of the year for the Unico System. An active member of the Solon Chamber of Commerce, P.K. Wadsworth has been recognized for excellence and quality of performance in the marketplace by many manufacturers, including Mitsubishi, Honeywell, Carrier and Goodman, among others.

Both father and son agreed that their Solon location, which they came to in the late 1970s from Cleveland, is ideal.

"We love Solon," Mr. Wadsworth said, noting that the freeway system is key to accessing its Cleveland clientele. "It's a great place for us." ■



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Photos by Alana Clark

Where health meets fashion

Vision centers focus on good care and good looks

By SUE HOFFMAN

Two locally owned and operated vision care practices had their eye on Solon when they were established decades ago. Berris Optical, situated in a strip shopping center at 33532 Aurora Road, opened its doors in Solon in 1986 and moved to its current location in 1990. Gale's Vision Source, located across the street at 33541 Aurora Road in Solon Square Shopping Center, moved to Solon in 1984.

Both establishments offer a full range of vision care, including optometry, vision correction, care of medical eye problems, laser eye surgery co-management, contact lenses, new options in eyeglass lenses and the latest fashions in frames.

Berris Optical

Having worn glasses since she was 5 years old, Berris Optical owner Anne Marie Castelli Mulcahy became fascinated with the world of vision care early on.

"My mom let me pick out what I wanted, but there wasn't a lot to choose from," Mrs. Mulcahy, a lifelong resident of Solon, recalled from her childhood. "In high school, I decided to be an optician and have my own store." Her parents advised her to start working and attend school to achieve her goal. The 1985 Solon High School graduate attended a two-year program at Cuyahoga Community College to become a licensed optician. For her second year of college, she received a prized scholarship from the Ohio Optical Dispensers Board.

When she was being considered for the scholarship, she met board member William Berris, who operated several optical centers

in the Cleveland area over the years. Mr. Berris and Mrs. Mulcahy co-owned Berris Optical in Solon as equal partners for 19 years. In 2009, Mrs. Mulcahy became sole owner. "Bill gave me the foundation to establish a great business," she said.

"We try to be full service, from offering eye exams for all ages, to consulting for Lasik and cataract surgery. We have frames for every age, contact lenses, sports glasses and fashion frames in all styles, from Oakley to Tom Ford.

"It's a personal business," she said. "Your eyes are the first thing people see when they talk to you. Your glasses should reflect your style, match your outfits, be dressy or casual, along with giving you 20/20 vision and protecting your eyes. Everyone here wants to have a hand in picking out glasses. It's fun, and it should be."

For Mrs. Mulcahy, who played varsity vol-



Anne Marie Mulcahy, owner of Berris Optical in Solon, is a lifelong resident of the city. Glasses protect a person's eyes and reflect their style, she said.

leyball while attending Solon High School, there's nothing more thrilling than seeing a classmate or longtime customer walk into the store. "Forming relationships and good customer service are important," she said. "So much today is e-commerce." Yet when purchasing glasses at a store, a customer receives personal treatment and the relationship continues, she said. "You can come in to have an adjustment or just to say hello."

Solon's residential, business and industrial communities generate a variety of customers, said Mrs. Mulcahy, who lives with her husband, Dan, and their rescue dog, Abbey. "It's transient enough that you're always meeting new people, yet I still take care of my high school friends. We draw people from industry here with a nice selection of eyewear."

Some customers continue to make their purchases at Berris years after they've moved away, she said. "I just sold a pair to a customer who has lived in Chicago and Washington, D.C. for 15 years. It's a nice compliment."

Like Mrs. Mulcahy, Dr. Joy Stoler, one of Berris Optical's two optometrists on staff, has also enjoyed working with many people who live and/or work in Solon.

Dr. Stoler and her husband, Karl, who is an optometrist in Mentor, have lived in Solon since 1992, raising two children who recently graduated from Solon High School and are now in college.

"Because my kids went through the school system, I knew so many of my patients as my kids' friends and their siblings and parents. I see a lot of Solon teachers as patients as well."

Dr. Stoler said she knew she wanted to be an optometrist from the time she was 16. Her career decision, she said, "coincided with my mother being diagnosed with glaucoma and my being fitted with contact lenses." She took part-time jobs through high school and college as an optometric technician, helping optometrists with pre-testing and showing patients how to insert contact lenses. She received her degree in 1992 from the Pennsylvania College of Optometry in Philadelphia, where she met her husband.

"I love what I do," Dr. Stoler said. Her work ranges from complete eye examinations to co-management of laser surgery and cataract surgery patients, eyeglass prescriptions and contact lenses.

Berris Optical's other optometrist is Chester Township resident Dr. Christine Russo, who has her degree from the Ohio State University College of Optometry. The staff also includes two licensed opticians, an apprentice optician and receptionist.

Customers with glasses usually have an everyday pair and prescription sunglasses, Mrs. Mulcahy said, but there are other new options available. "With today's technology, many people have a pair for using the computer." Filters are available that block out the blue light emitted by computers, tablets and other electronic devices. The effect of blue light on body rhythms and sleep has been documented, she said.

The selection of frames has changed drastically since Mrs. Mulcahy, the youngest of seven children, wore glasses as a youngster. "Nowadays, the sky's the limit. We offer hundreds of designer frames, along with non-glare coatings and filters, transitions and all types of progressives. This is a medical industry and a fashion industry combined."

Continued on page 44



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Carol Gale, a licensed dispensing optician, and her husband Dr. David Gale, an optometrist, co-own Gale's Vision Source.

Continued from page 43

Gale's Vision Source

Carol Gale, a licensed dispensing optician, and her husband Dr. David Gale, an optometrist, co-own Gale's Vision Source. The couple met at Ohio University and married in 1969. A native of Beachwood, Dr. Gale obtained his degree in 1972 from Illinois College of Optometry in Chicago.

The couple are joined by five other staff members at the eye care store, which started in Solon near the former Reider's Stop-n-Shop and moved to its current location about 24 years ago.

"It's a changed world from when I started doing this," said Mrs. Gale, a Cincinnati native and former home economics teacher with 25 years' experience in the eyewear business. "We're very high tech."

Through state-of-the-art software, customers, whose vision is less than perfect without their lenses, can clearly see themselves modeling up to four eyeglass frames at a time. The vision center offers special lenses for both computer work and reading, often with special filters that block out the blue light of electronic devices. The blue light can cause macular degeneration, Mrs. Gale said. "We like to start the filters on young kids to start the protection."

For customers who come in with a pair of broken glasses, Gale's offers instant laboratory service to provide single vision lenses. "We can make an emergency pair while they're here. We



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also have loaner lenses while people are waiting for their permanent lenses to come in."

Customers can choose from a wide range of frames. "People are finding (eyewear) is not only a medical device but a fashion statement," Mrs. Gale said. "I have always approached it that way. I love to help people enhance their appearance. Some people like glasses to be a 'wow' factor and others like them to blend in."

As an optician, Mrs. Gale said she first looks at the prescription to assure that the lens fits correctly in the frame. She also considers the person's facial structure and coloring to provide a complementary look.

"The look of today is whatever you're comfortable with because everything is out there," she said. "There's a wide variety. We offer designer frames such as Dolce & Gabbana, Burberry, Coach, Nike, Calvin Klein, Cole Haan and Ray-Ban, and a lot of designer-like lines that carry the style but not necessarily the price of the designer frames. Roundish frames are coming in strong in either plastics or metals. They offer an advantage to people with high prescriptions because the lenses are not as thick.

"Children's styles follow the adult styles," she said. "I like them to have spring hinges for durability. Children tend to take them off with one hand, and with the spring hinges, they won't stretch out of shape."

Dr. Gale is one of more than 3,000 members of Vision Source, a network of independent optometrists located throughout the United States. He was the 78th optometrist to join the organization in 1998. He is board certified in the treatment and diagnosis of ocular diseases by the International Association of the Boards of Examiners in Optometry.

"I enjoy working with people and I like how the technology has changed since I started practicing," Dr. Gale said. Advancements include new testing methods, computer systems, and computerized refractive instruments. "There are quicker and easier exams, allowing us more time to evaluate patients and discuss the results with them."

Dr. Gale emphasizes the need for regular comprehensive eye health examinations, which allow optometrists to evaluate eyes for diseases such as glaucoma, cataracts and dry eyes, in addition to checking vision.

With more than 30 years of experience in contact lens fitting, Dr. Gale has been an investigator for contact lens and solution manufacturers to help in the development of new products. He has also been actively involved in laser vision correction and refractive surgery.

One of his specialty interests is laser eye surgery co-management. Dr. Gale, who has served as the chairman of the Cleveland TLC Laser Eye Center's advisory board since 1988, offers personal experience in this field. He had had refractive surgery in 1994 and still enjoys 20/20 vision without corrective lenses.

The Gales Vision Source mission is to "strive to provide each patient with excellence in eye care. We recognize our patients' trust. It is our mission to exceed patient expectations." ■

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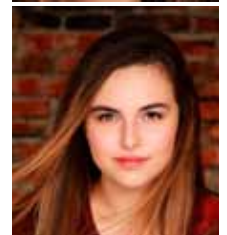
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O'Brien Construction 30625 Solon Road, Unit J Solon, OH 44139 (440) 519-9891 <http://www.ocincnet.com/>

Protect-O-Seal 38323 Apollo Pkwy., #9 Willoughby, OH 44094 (440) 946-9494 <http://www.protect-o-seal.com>

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Wild Bill Shirt Co. 21375 Alexander Road Walton Hills, OH 44067 (440) 487-3774 <http://www.wildbillshirtcompany.com>

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Planet Fitness 33605 Aurora Road Solon, OH 44139 (440) 349-1600 <http://www.planetfitness.com/>

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Title Boxing Club Solon 33351 Aurora Drive Solon, OH 44139 (440) 498-7002 <http://solon-aurora.titleboxingclub.com/about/>

WHYM Dance + Movement + More 32901 Station St., Suite 112 Solon, OH 44139 (330) 618-0783 <http://www.danceatwhym.com>

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Grantwood Golf Course 38855 Aurora Road Solon, OH 44139 (440) 248-4646 <http://m.grantwoodgolf.com/m/index.html>

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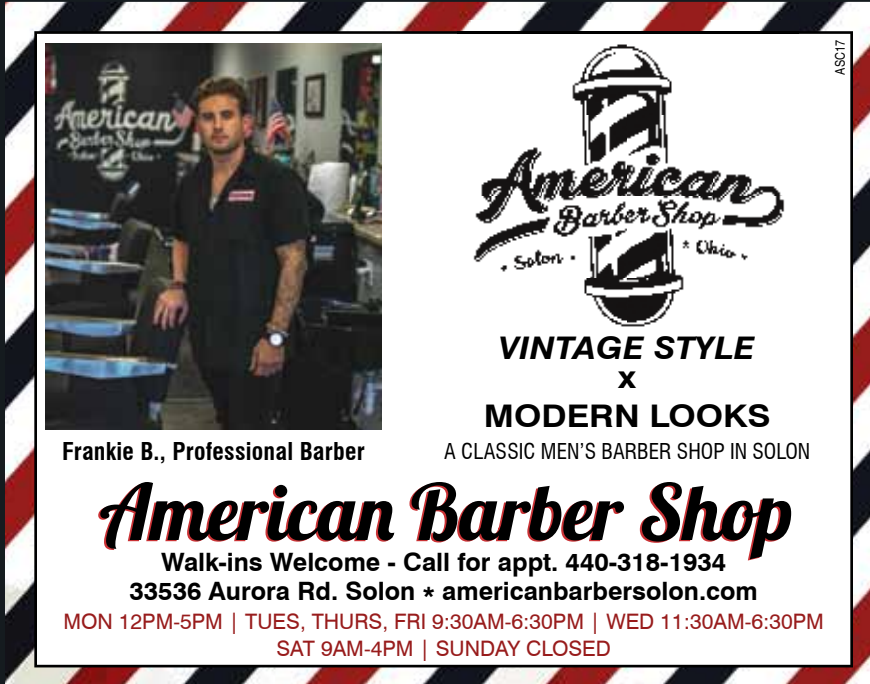
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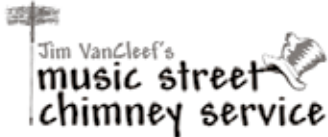
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Solon TIMES

April 9, 2013 - 79c
Volume 38 | Number 38

asket, fill that Easter basket



seventh-grade Juliana Dorsett of Bedford collects eggs from volunteers during last year's Easter egg hunt at the Solon High School Football Field. About 1,200 people staffed by the Solon Indian Club for the annual event. More photos on A16.

Solon TIMES

November 8, 2014 - 79c



Solon TIMES

April 18, 2013 - 79c
Volume 38 | Number 38

Celebration of love Black alliance honors women who help youths

By BEE BEE
Traditionally a pillar of strength, Solon Middle School's...
...the district made me feel so welcome." ...
...the district made me feel so welcome." ...
...the district made me feel so welcome." ...



couple celebrate wanderlust while living in South Africa



Solon residents Liu and Jack Chopacki spent nearly a decade living in South Africa. The experience has their passion for travel and exploration.
By BEE BEE
Solon residents Jack and Liu Chopacki said they have a lot of wanderlust - a whole lot to boot. Chopacki, an insurance sales executive, and Liu, a graphic designer, moved to South Africa in 2004. The couple not only saw the lion's mane of the world through their eyes...

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