

# Business 2021

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||||||| **WORK FROM HOME** |||||



SUZETTE WENGER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Employees of Lancaster’s Make/Films, most of whom are working remotely these days, get some face-to-face interaction during a recent monthly Zoom lunch.

## STAYING ENGAGED

*Telecommuting forces businesses to find new ways to keep employees connected*

**REBECCA LOGAN** | FOR LNP | LANCASTERONLINE

Accidental office encounters are important to Hunter Johnson. They’re a huge part of why TONO Group’s headquarters looks like it does, says Johnson, CEO of the Lancaster architecture, design, building and development group.

“We designed it so that you’d have these impromptu, casual encounters. You overheard conversations,” Johnson says. “It not only fostered creativity and sharing of ideas but also learning through osmosis.”

Then came COVID. “Now, to some degree, we are having to make these encounters happen. Make them intentional,” he says. “You schedule a Zoom meeting or GoTo. These things are not happening by accident.”

Welcome to one of the ways business leaders are having to change tack to ensure that their employees stay engaged and working together as a team when not in the same space. Clear expectations are essential for keeping everyone on the same page when so many are working from

home, says Bobbe Baggio, CEO of Advantage Learning Technologies in Lehigh County’s Coopersburg.

“The Pajama Effect” and “Virtual Touchpoints” — books about teleworking that Baggio published a few years ago — have seen renewed interest this year. She has a new book coming out before year’s end called “#WFH.”

“In a remote environment it’s extremely important that people know what the deal is — what they are going to be held accountable for,” Baggio says.

Many companies are rolling out remote employee agreements, she says, adding that might include hours that employees are expected to be available — not chained to a computer, but reachable.

“It might say that we expect you to get back to us in a reasonable period of time and then outline what is considered reasonable,” she says. “And we promise we won’t text you at 10 on a Sunday night. Once you leave at 7 your private life is your life. We’ll see you again in the morning.”

Telework has changed tradition, she says.

“It used to be you came in early, you stayed late, you’re a great worker,” Baggio says. “That doesn’t work in this environment.”

“The people who are the least happy in the virtual workplace are those who are asked to sit in front of their computer from 8 to 5,” she says. “People who can blend their private life and work life and still get everything done seem to experience the most satisfaction, more joy and less stress in both aspects of their life.”

Still, Baggio suggests using visual clues in the home office to signal the brain when it’s time to focus on work. To that end, a framed picture of the team might make a great holiday gift for bosses to give employees this year, she suggests.

In any other year, a bunch of grin-

ning employees gathered in a conference room might have been Derek Dienner’s clue that something unusual was up one day.

Instead, when the Make/Films founder logged onto a videoconference, he noticed more “Brady Bunch”-esque boxes than usual and asked, “What’s happening with all these random people joined in?”

Turns out Dienner was being notified of his selection as the Lancaster Chamber of Commerce’s Entrepreneur of the Year. Employees waved hand-drawn signs and balloons at their screens.

Dienner says celebrating accomplishments large and small is important for morale these days. Make/Films recently set up a “kudos channel” to share positive things that clients say or other welcome news.

“Right now we don’t always see all the good things going on because we’re focused on the crazier, heavier and harder things,” he says. “We’re focused on all the ways to fix things and to grow in all of this. And we might not recognize the wins.”

Dienner says an upside of forced



# OPEN FOR BUSINESS

*How these Lancaster County entrepreneurs are facing the challenges of COVID-19*

**KIMBERLY MARSELAS**  
FOR LNP | LANCASTERONLINE

As the U.S. approaches 200,000 businesses lost since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, a brave few continue to launch brick-and-mortar operations or start up service-based companies.

Even in good times, entrepreneurship is risky. About 20% of all new businesses fail within their first two years, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

So what convinces some people to put their money on the line during this recession, one brought on by a kind of public health threat not seen in 100 years?

LNP asked several local business owners and a small business expert to talk about the unique challenges — and even some opportunities — this time period presents.

“I think, for those who have the stomach for it, now is the best time to be in business,” says Doug Taylor, owner of Taylor Chip Cookie Co. “It’s in times like these that you can really grow and make a lasting impact.”

His stand at Lancaster Marketplace has remained open, and during COVID, Taylor Chip added an e-commerce operation capable of shipping its distinctive cookies and cookie cakes to all 50 states. The company has expanded from two team members to more than 20.

“With the support of our community, help of some technology, and leveraging social media, we never had to lay anyone off and were able to grow pretty fast,” Taylor says. “Even now seven

months into COVID, it feels like the early years on social media. Organic engagement is up incredibly, and ad costs are almost as cheap as when I first started running ads on Facebook in 2014.”

Tina Campbell is co-CEO of ASSETS, a Lancaster non-profit organization focused on supporting local business through training and financing. The number of local businesses opening has definitely slowed, Campbell says. Instead of would-be owners, ASSETS is hearing more often from those who already own a business that need help to survive.

“For every business, this time is going to be different,” she says. “There are still some out there, of course, who want to open, especially food businesses.”

The key is knowing what people want and need — and how they want to purchase it and receive it — as the pandemic marches toward a new year.

“You have to make sure your online presence is up-to-date,” Campbell says. “The other thing we’re working with people on is financial planning. It’s not the fancy stuff you think about when you’re starting a business, but it matters.”

The median small business has more than \$10,000 in monthly expenses but only about two weeks of cash on hand, economists reported this summer in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Scientists. Without reserves, it may be harder for new businesses to recover from additional shutdowns or limited services.

Previous federal stimulus

funding was only available to businesses that existed before the COVID crisis began in the U.S. New businesses can’t count on future bailouts.

### A healthy idea

The owners of Berks County-based Good Life Organic Kitchen decided the middle of a pandemic would be a good time to open a second location.

Their Lancaster café opened Monday, Oct. 19, at the corner of Queen and Walnut streets, offering a menu that is nearly 100% organic, non-genetically modified and locally sourced whenever possible. Think nutrient-dense smoothies and smoothie bowls, grain bowls, and hearty soups with vegan and gluten-free options.

The Kitchen is backed by Good Life Companies, a financial advising firm committed to good investments and good health. The pandemic, says Joel Mocerri, co-founder and managing director of Good Life Organics, underscores the business’ mission to build community and educate on healthy eating.

“People are thinking about immunity protection, what they can do to strength their health through all of this,” Mocerri says. “That’s essentially what we’re serving.”

Opening as the weather cools in a city with light foot traffic due to the coronavirus will present challenges, Mocerri acknowledges. He’ll spend “a hundred dollars here and there” to promote social media buys that get



SUZETTE WENGER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Good Life Organics co-founder Joel Mocerri in the new Good Life Organic Kitchen, which opened Oct. 19 at Queen and Walnut streets.

opening news and menu specials to the right crowd. And he plans to move paper menus on foot, stopping by salons, gyms and college campuses, “where they love this stuff.”

One concern has been hiring. Despite higher-than-usual unemployment rates, Mocerri says he had trouble staffing the new location and has many first-timers. Another concern: building community in a café with a fireplace and lounge chairs while many people are still more comfortable grabbing food to go. Good Life launched online ordering and delivery through its Berks location and will be able to offer the same in Lancaster.

Mocerri is also trying to improve visibility with better signage. He is undecided yet whether he will apply for temporary sidewalk use to allow outside dining, but he’s tempted to place picnic tables he purchased outside just so folks realize something new is happening inside.

“There are definitely strategies that we can pursue,” he says.

### Professional services

In general, professional service providers and solo proprietors — including lawyers, real estate agents, accountants and the like — continue to fare relatively well. In a Yelp survey re-



Mila Pilz

leased in September, they represented less than 3 out of every 1,000 closures nationwide.

Mila Pilz finds herself in this category as a first-time business owner this year. Pilz has held a variety of positions in the mediation and counseling fields, including leadership spots with the Lancaster Mediation Center and Advov. Last fall, she participated in ASSETS’ incubator program to prepare to launch her own mediation service to help improve or resolve issues in personal or professional relationships.

As she was looking for office space in late winter, the coronavirus arrived. The pandemic slowed her plans — with state offices closed, she couldn’t even get help filing for her tax ID number — but Pilz officially launched Pangea Mediation this fall.

Among her biggest challenges: “Learning how to adapt to the technology online and see if people really

will be comfortable with it and how to sell my service in a market that is a little bit of a different market than it was.”

Her services are for now offered solely by phone or videoconference. She’s also spent more time than she imagined trying to get the word out about her services. She is using targeted social media ads and cold calling attorney and mental health practices hoping to earn her way onto more referral lists.

“I’m trying to open mediation up and take it more mainstream to show people the practical uses,” she says, adding that her services can help divorcing partners, co-parents, adult children helping elderly parents and others who need to feel empowered during life-changing situations. Those don’t stop during a pandemic, and in fact, Pilz expects more people are feeling anxious and overwhelmed as too much time together reveal underlying relationship issues. Those conditions could lead to more mediation needs, and Pilz says she is working to identify would-be clients and work with them on pricing during the economic downturn.

Two things Pilz has going for her: She never committed to leasing an office, meaning she has not had to worry about learning and adhering to in-person COVID-19 protocols or paying monthly rent.

## Job-hunting tips during COVID-19

### METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

The economy has struggled during COVID-19 and people are concerned by what the future may bring. Many have found new jobs during the pandemic, and these strategies can help.

### Update your resume

A resume that emphasizes skills over linear job experience is a good choice because it can gloss over gaps or frequent job changes. Remember to fill the resume with the same verbiage used in the job posting.

### Update social media

If you use a social media application like LinkedIn, Plaxo or Jobster, be sure to keep your profile current. It also may be helpful to join industry networking groups and organizations.

### Research the industry

While travel, hospitality and event planning have been hit hard, other industries like online shopping, delivery, health care, grocery stores, cleaning services and more, have experienced growth. Do not assume that the pandemic has stalled all

job prospects.

### Prepare for an interview

Even after businesses have reopened, remote interviews will likely be the norm. Set up an interview spot in your home with good lighting, a neutral background, limited distractions and a desirable camera angle. Practice being interviewed digitally. Master various meeting applications by downloading necessary software in advance. Place a paper or whiteboard in front of you with notes or talking points.

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<b>APRIL-NOVEMBER</b> <b>Oxford Produce Auction</b> 200 Union School Rd, Oxford 8am—12pm <b>Valley View Hardware</b> 280 Township Rd, Lincoln University/ Oxford 12:30—pm—5pm	<b>FRIDAY</b> <b>AB Martin Roofing Supply</b> 82 Garden Spot Rd, Ephrata 9am—5pm <b>RH Rohrer and Sons</b> 16 E State Street, Quarryville 9am—5pm
<b>WEDNESDAY</b> <b>Vibrant Church parking lot</b> 125 W Main St, Terre Hill 9am—5pm	<b>DECEMBER-MARCH</b> <b>Oxford Produce Auction</b> 200 Union School Rd, Oxford 8am—12pm <b>Valley View Hardware</b> 280 Township Rd, Lincoln University/ Oxford 12:30—pm—5pm

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# 2020 lessons hold promise for 2021

**LAURA KNOWLES**  
FOR LNP | LANCASTERONLINE

If there is one thing area business leaders agree on as they look toward 2021, it's that no one has a crystal ball.

The most they can expect in the upcoming year is that they need to be prepared for the unexpected.

Recovery of local businesses has varied widely depending on whether or not they could move to a virtual format during the pandemic. Some businesses have been able to seamlessly move to a remote business model, with employees working from home during the shutdown. Businesses such as restaurants, hair salons, spas, fitness centers and others that involve in-person interaction, have not been able to get back on track as quickly.

Many restaurants had to shut down completely, and if they didn't quickly and shift to a carryout format, they struggled. Then as the weather warmed up, outdoor dining became their salvation.

"Now that cold weather is on the way, we won't be able to use our deck. That will make it more difficult to serve our customers following the indoor dining guidance," says Rose Billas of Fiorentino's Restaurant.

For many restaurants that will be depending on indoor dining and bar business, safety restrictions mean that they don't know what to expect for the holiday season. Looking ahead to 2021, when business typically slows in the cold weather months, restaurants are trying to come up with creative

ways to offer carryout and delivery services.

## Unexpected opportunities

Some businesses that might have expected a drastic fall in revenue have been surprised by new opportunities that the shutdown brought.

Shauna Ensinger of Ensinger Graphics focuses on providing one-stop shopping for all printing and promotional items. Many of these are used at business expos, trade shows and other in-person events. Those events obviously had to be put on hold for the shutdown.

"Business dropped off at first, but then it started to pick up," Ensinger says.

With the business model switching to Zoom meetings and working at home, Ensinger has noticed that her business is switching gears, with more creative ways of marketing with promotional materials.

There are Work at Home survival kits that are being put together, with products such as Zoom meeting backgrounds, custom face masks, hand sanitizer, coffee mugs and other products. Ensinger had a huge demand for hand sanitizer, of course. Face masks with company or sports logos have been a huge seller.

Looking toward the holidays, and then 2021, Ensinger is seeing a demand for gift boxes filled with promotional items like cocktail kits, birthday party kits and other ways of keeping connected.

Even trade shows are being adapted, with business expos and corporate events being held in larger venues that provide a semi-outdoor setting, such as Clipper Stadium.

## Getting creative

"Businesses are finding new ways of networking and I expect that to continue into 2021," says Ensinger, who is involved in the Northern Lancaster County Chamber of Commerce.

Representing more than

280 members, the chamber has focused on providing membership benefits, services and events that involve business, community and government.

In recent months, the chamber has sponsored online seminars, meetings, coffee breaks and other online networking opportunities that cover everything from relief funding to employment recruitment.

"We have been able to reach out to our members in the business community in innovative ways," says

Liz Ackerman, executive director of the Northern Lancaster County Chamber of Commerce. "We have taken lessons from 2020 to implement as we move to 2021."

Ross Kramer, CEO of the Lititz-based digital marketing firm Listrak, agrees that being innovative has made all the difference in surviving — and even thriving — during this pandemic.

As an established leader in the cross-channel marketing and eCommerce industry, Listrak works with more than 1,000 retailers and


brands by providing leading-edge email, SMS and behavioral marketing solutions.

"From an operational standpoint, moving to an all remote work environment was fairly easy for Listrak. All 300-plus employees were already familiar with communication platforms like Zoom, most were using laptops, and many were already working remotely from other parts of the country," Kramer says. "We essentially went home one afternoon and were all back

LESSONS, page 4




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## Women in BUSINESS

**Melanie B Scheid,**  
Owner/Funeral Director

"A licensed Pennsylvania funeral director since 1995, Melanie B. Scheid has devoted nearly 25 years to helping local families through the most difficult times in their lives. Melanie is the owner of Melanie B. Scheid Funeral Directors and Cremation Services, which includes The Gundel Chapel in Conestoga and a second location at 317 E. Orange St. in downtown Lancaster. She is also president of Porterfield-Scheid Funeral Directors & Cremation Services and Lebanon Valley Crematory. Melanie is an active member of her community, whether it's hosting a backpack giveaway for local children or the annual Conestoga Classic Car Show benefiting the Conestoga Volunteer Fire Company. She brings that dedication to community and her neighbors to her work as a funeral director as well, taking the time to get to know families in their time of need and helping them prepare a fitting tribute that honors the lives of their loved ones."



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**Jack Smith, MD**  
Pain Medicine

## PAIN MANAGEMENT

For Dr. Smith, considering each patient on an individual level and creating a customized plan of care is key to his patient philosophy. "My approach is: listen to the patient first, and then consider all options, keeping in mind the final goal of them living happier, more fulfilled lives." he said.



**Esther DiGiacomo, MMSc, PA-C**  
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# Engaged

Continued from 1

telecommuting was a recognition of possibilities. A key employee recently moved to Florida to follow his wife's new job. He will still work for Make/Films and possibly expand its presence in the South.

"He's continuing to work remotely because we learned from COVID that he can work remotely," Dienner says.

Staying connected will be key for him as it is for those Make/Films employees still working from homes in and around Lancaster, he says. Finding the right way to do that is an ongoing process.

"In the very beginning we were doing remote lunches and remote happy hours all the time. And in the beginning they seemed to be working well," Dienner says.

He even had Blazin J's delivered to employees' homes for one of those events. But excitement faded and those dropped off.

"We all just assumed that by now we'd be doing more in-person lunches," he says. "But because that hasn't changed, we're putting it back."

The plan now calls for about one remote lunch and one remote happy hour each month.

"I think at the end of the day what works is intentionality, making things special," he says. "It's about leaders setting some sort of precedent for everyone staying connected."

Sharing that sentiment is last year's chamber Entrepreneur of the Year, Jim Schultz, founder and president of Applied Educational Systems Inc.

That Lancaster company has lately been collecting fun facts about its employees to share at meetings. Simple steps like that can matter in an online meeting



Make/Films employee Aaron Dienner chats with coworkers on a Zoom lunch call.

— especially for more introverted members of the team, Schultz says.

AES for years now has had some employees teleworking one day per week. They had always been part of the quick, daily 9:47 a.m. huddle.

"Before COVID we had 22 people around a big TV and had our three remote people joining in on Zoom," Schultz says. "On March 18, all 25 people showed up on a Zoom screen from home."

The AES office has reopened to those employees who want to work there with just under half choosing the in-person route, Schultz says. Keeping close contact with those who didn't is essential, he says.

"I do it. And I've seen other managers do it. Once a week I'll reach out and say, 'Hey, let's have a Zoom chat for 15 minutes, one on one,'" he says.

It's a little more awkward and forced than pulling up a chair at somebody's desk, Schultz says. But it's needed.

"It's about reaching out and feeling connected," he says. "The thing is, we've all worked from home now. We all know that it's different and that it can be very lonely."

It's impossible to overstate the amount COVID has moved the needle on tele-

commuting, Baggio says.

"Companies and really whole industries that were reluctant and resistant to the virtual workplace are starting to see the benefits big time," she says. "It's not that they don't ever want to see face-to-face meetings again. But I see coming out of this a lot more blended approach."

At TONO Group, Johnson is trying to roll with the changes. But he misses more frequent in-person discussions. Computer screens don't always cut it.

"People are not two dimensional. We're not used to interacting with a static, flat image," he says. "We like that human connection."

Yet he's going to max out what he's got to work with. Johnson says he was shocked to learn from his son — who has a new job with Microsoft — that most of the time his son never actually sees coworkers on video calls.

That wouldn't work for the elder Johnson.

"Maybe for the first week or two we did not require people to have their cameras on," he says. "We changed that. We have to at least see each other's faces."

# Lessons

Continued from 3

up and working at 100% the next morning."

Surprisingly, some aspects of their business are more operationally efficient as a result of working from home. Meetings with remote offices and remote employees have become more efficient and engaging. A major contributor to the efficiency is that everyone is remote. There are no longer some people in-person at headquarters with a few others on the phone.

"It may not be the same as in-person, but it's created an experience equality that leads to higher engagement and higher connectiveness for our team members across the country," Kramer says. "While there is no substitute for face-to-face interactions, we've done Zoom happy hours and breakout rooms to try to keep the personal connections alive while we're apart."

Listrak is still functioning at 99% remote, with a handful of people working in the Lititz headquarters. They expect that the situation will continue into 2021, and consider the company blessed to be able to function remotely. It's not quite the same for their clients.

"All of our clients are retailers or brands selling direct, and almost all of them have been impacted negatively in some way, ranging from supply chain disruptions to full bankruptcies," Kramer says. "We really focused our energy on being a good partner. We gave away millions of dollars

of our marketing software to customers so that they could bounce back from the pandemic."

Customers that took them up on the offer have benefited and are grateful for the support. As Kramer reports, "We're getting through these tough times by creating sustaining relationships with customers."

## Zooming into the future

Greg High, founder and president of GH Family Business Consulting LLC, works with families who own businesses by helping them focus on improving their communication, education and governance of their family shareholders.

"Fortunately all of my clients are in essential industries so they have continued to operate," High says.

Prior to the pandemic, High had a potential client family that really wanted to work with him, but the family lived in two different states. At the time, the pandemic introduced businesses to the world of Zoom meetings. High was able to use Zoom to keep himself in touch with his clients and work with new clients in different locations.

Some of his clients are in the food distribution business, and while grocery stores saw a major increase in demand, restaurant demand went to almost zero. That required them to pivot quickly to meet those changes as production and packaging are quite different for those two industries. It brought significant changes to office workers, who started working from home and required increased cleaning procedures in the plants.

"Most of my clients have seen an increase in productivity from office employees working from home and also from those working in the plants. Their team members really understood and embraced the importance of their jobs during the pandemic and they worked hard to meet customer demand," High says.

Learning to adapt to the demands of the pandemic have made it possible to prepare better for whatever 2021 may bring.

"The video conference technologies of yesterday were not reliable. Today it is a very different story. Discovering this has expanded my consulting business geographically from near Lancaster to being able to cover the entire United States," High says.

Tom Wallace, business development director for the Lancaster Chamber, agrees that dealing with the pandemic has given many businesses a better ability to be flexible and innovative as they look to 2021.

Many of the mixers, meetings, conferences, and seminars are being held remotely. The Chamber is able to provide information and networking to its members in a virtual format helping them learn about legislative policy, the CARES Act, human resource opportunities and Recovery Lancaster.

"Being forced to quickly shift to a virtual format has helped to plan for 2021," Wallace says. "No one knows what will happen next year as they set budgets and goals, but being able to communicate better remotely will help in the recovery process."

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