



'The grass is greener here'

Small businesses are invested in this area

By Natalie Gelb Solfanelli

Economic development is a major topic on everyone's minds these days. LHVA is one of many organizations that strive to create programs and projects that enhance the quality of life in our communities. The better the quality of life, the more people will be attracted to the area, both to live and to visit. That brings economic development.

We pay attention to the efforts of our cities and counties, as well as the Chambers of Commerce and entities like NEPA and the Great Valley Technology Alliance that dedicate themselves to recruiting businesses and creating employment opportunities. We watch as buildings go up, malls and industrial parks are developed, and new recreational facilities are constructed.

Often, however, we miss the significance of small start-ups or established businesses that are reinventing themselves to keep pace with a changing marketplace. While we might notice a new store or restaurant and poke our heads in the door to check it out, once our curiosity has been satisfied we often return to old patterns of shopping behavior and fail to return a second time. Thinking that the grass is greener, we seek out the big city or the monster suburban mall and disregard the opportunities that are under our noses.

Anyone who says there is "nowhere to shop" need only travel to downtown Scranton to see the proliferation of new stores, trendy boutiques, coffee shops and restaurants of every ilk that have opened within the past few years. How short-sighted we can be!

As newcomers arrive and come to love this area, all of us should take a cue from them. They recognize what many of our long time residents fail to see....that the grass is greener HERE. Crime is lower, living is cheaper, the weather is better (no earthquakes, mudslides, tornadoes, killer hurricanes), the seasons are more fun,(skiing, skating, boating, swimming, fishing, hiking, biking, hunting, camping), the water tastes better, the food is delicious, the people are friendlier, there are plenty of stores, restaurants, historic and cultural activities, and the AAA Yankees have arrived! Not only have we become geographically desirable, but also you can get everything you need at better prices, without fighting crowds, close to home or work. In fact, people are traveling HERE to spend their money and leisure time. And more and more frequently, when they discover the quality of life and the lower cost of living, they choose to explore business opportunities and

relocate to this area because it is a great place to live and raise a family and a welcoming place to retire!

Sure, we love the jobs that a large company brings. But the small businesses and individual entrepreneurs with a handful of employees are truly investing themselves here. They sometimes get lost in the shuffle when the big box store or giant new building is completed. There are no press conferences for the independent business person, and he or she can't compete with the growing number of circulars or ads in the daily newspapers. The new boutique, fitness center, technology company or restaurant doesn't get the benefit of free advertising or media attention. Yet they are the ones who hang in there from day to day, contributing to Little Leagues, fraternal organizations, and every manner of charitable endeavor. They also are the ones who go the extra mile to provide personalized service. They give our towns character and they appreciate our business.

Just as our ancestors joined together through church groups, mutual aid societies and labor unions, our small business owners collaborate through organizations like the Scranton Business Alliance (SBA) of Scranton Tomorrow. Their slogan is "eat, shop, play and stay," in Northeastern PA. Or groups like POWER, (Professionals Organized and Working to Enrich the Region) who are "young and young thinking."

The most important step we can take for economic development is to patronize locally owned businesses in our neighborhoods and towns. We must support the people who invest in Northeastern Pennsylvania. They represent our future. They follow in the footsteps of those who "came to build a new life and ended up building a new nation."

At the Lackawanna Heritage Valley we extol our historic, cultural, and natural resources. Our themes are "land, people, industry." The people who created our great industrial past were ordinary people. Most of them started as entrepreneurs who used the resources of the land to build a rich economy. The people who open and run businesses here in the 21st Century are the industrialists of today and tomorrow. They provide the true capital...they invest their time, hard work and money. Their successes bring excitement and vitality to our communities. Our region is having a renaissance. Let's make sure it continues!

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