Openings grand!

Three longtime dreams become reality in one day

By William V. Feley
For The Chamber

ELLWOOD CITY — Upon an unusually mild February breeze, the summery aroma of pork being barbecued, an olfactory masterpiece, drifted toward that red, white and blue "OPEN" flag flapping and snapping outside a second-hand boutique on Lawrence Avenue.

Toward that new sign casting a long shadow across a Park Avenue lawn, home to a law firm's first branch office.

It's eight days after ribbons were sliced as part of grand openings for Smokin' Dave's BBQ, 366 Circle Way; Konsignment Kollections, 503 Lawrence Ave.; and Cusick & DeCaro, P.C., 510 Park Ave., and spirits are as high as the brilliant blue sky above Ellwood City on this Friday night.

Chamber officials and business owners cut ribbons Feb. 7 at Smokin' Dave's BBQ, top, Cusick & DeCaro P.C., and Konsignment Kollections.

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CHAMBER CELEBRATES THREE FEBRUARY RIBBON-CUTTINGS

Openings are grand!

February Saturday.
Just ask Dave Hunter, of
Smokin’ Dave’s BBQ, Rochelle
Spagnolo, of Konsignment Kon
nections, and John DeCaro, of
Cusick & DeCaro P.C.
“God,” Hunter says, “is amaz
ing. He has put so many people
in our lives to help us with infor
mation, knowledge, equip
ment and friendship. Without Him in our
lives we wouldn’t be where we are today.”

That would be on Circle Way,
where he and his wife, Ann, left
full-time unrelated jobs to realize
the dream of creating a takeout,
catering and vending business.
“I have been barbecuing
around 20 years as a hobby for friends and family,” Hunter says,
adding that he initially rejected
their suggestions to open a busi
ness.

Business decision:
Close or go “full time”
He then met Ann, and when asked by
friends to cater two graduation parties
and a 50th class reunion golf outing, they decided to establish a home-based busi
ness in 2015.
“We went from the first week
end in June to the first weekend
in October with two to four events
every weekend,” Hunter says
— except for two weekends in
July, when he and Ann were mar
ried.
At season’s end in October, “I
told my wife that we either had to
close up the business,” Hunter says.”or go full time.”
Dave in May quit his job of 22
years in Fombell, and Ann, in
September her job of 18 years in
Elliwood City.
The Hunters began to work on
the building at 366 Circle Way
in January 2016. In June they
opened a portable mobile unit
in the parking lot of their current location.
“I see them at car cruises, and
they partner with Pitt Race,” says
Raymond Santillo, executive
director of the Ellwood City Area
Chamber of Commerce. “They
bring action to town.”
He and Ann, Dave says, remain
catering events
through New Year’s Eve, and
opened Smokin’ Dave’s BBQ on
Jan. 20.
“It was just over a year since
we had started working on the
building that we opened,” he says.
Since then, “We haven’t looked
back.”
“Their barbecue is growing
fast,” Santillo says. “They are on
the move. They do unbelievable
meats.”
Among the sandwiches on
the menu are pulled pork, pulled
chicken and beef brisket. Smokin’
Dave’s also offers smoked meat
loaf and baby back ribs — none
of it purchased as precooked,
Hunter says. “All the meat is smoked low
and slow,” he says. “There are
times we run out of food. It takes
so long to cook that we make a
certain amount and when it is out,
it’s done for the day. Ribs are the
big thing that runs out on us most
of the time.”

“I love, love, love
my new space.”
Patience ran out on Rochelle Spagnolo
during her career sell
ing insurance.
“I’ve always loved
thrift stores and consignment
stores,” she said. “Ever since I
was young, I always wanted my
own store.”
In fall 2015, she told several
people she was trying to
start a business. A friend
left her a
business
listing

WHAT’S NEW?
• What: Smokin’ Dave’s BBQ
• Where: 366 Circle Way, Ellwood City
• When: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays; 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sundays.
• Web: smokinлавesbarbq.com

• What: Konsignment Konnections
• Where: 503 Lawrence Ave., Ellwood City
• When: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays through Thursdays; 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Fridays; 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturdays.
• Web: Facebook.com/KonsignmentKonnections

• What: Cusick & DeCaro P.C.
• Where: 510 Park Ave., Ellwood City
• When: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays; by appointment Fridays.
• Web: cusickdecaro.com
CHAMBER WELCOMES NEW EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

From monkey business to chamber business

By William V. Foley
For The Chamber

ELWOOD CITY—Jillian D’Amico, hired Feb. 13 as the executive assistant of the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce, says it’s time to come clean about her past.

Not that she once worked as a dietary aide in high school, oversaw a demolition project in Charlotte, N.C., as an environmental field engineer following her graduation from Allegheny College, likes to make craft greeting cards or collect a stray cat here and there.

Nope. D’Amico is only now fessing up that she was the original Shammie T. Gorilla, the woman inside the ape costume and promoting products and services at The Car Wash of Ellwood City beginning in 2011.

“It was something for fun,” D’Amico says. “I would hand out car-wash coupons to customers in line.”

Dressed like a gorilla?

“Yep.”

“From top to bottom?”

“Yes.”

“Not inside that costume?”

“Yes.”

Her new job, fortunately, is cool.

“Organization is the key!” says executive assistant, D’Amico says she is looking forward to meeting new people and learning about all the businesses that are part of the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce and expects to be performing a number of tasks. “Social media, marketing our events, event planning, finances, customer service and more,” she says. “Organization is the key!”

The Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce is the second for which she will offer her talents since returning to Ellwood City in

ABOUT JILLIAN D’AMICO

What does she hope to learn as executive assistant of the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce? What there is to do in the Ellwood City area. I want to find new shops and restaurants that I have never been to.

Her high school: Lincoln High School, Class of 2009

Her college: Allegheny College Class of 2013 with a bachelor’s degree in environmental science and a minor in history

About those cats: I have collected cats while working for Brandenburg Industrial Service Co., one in Monaca and one from the human society in Charlotte, N.C. Maybe I’m fated to collect an Ellwood City cat next?

And: I enjoy going to National Grind.

September from Charlotte, where as an employee of Brandenburg Industrial Service Co., based in Chicago and Bethlehem, Pa., she had to make sure Brandenburg was following environmental protocols in its demolition of the Duke Energy Riverbend Steam Station.

“Happy to be back”

In November she became coordinator of Ellwood City Community Engagement, which stages Earth Day, the concert series at the Community Plaza on Lawrence Avenue, and a storytelling festival at the Ellwood City Public Library.

“Jillian D’Amico is the vibrancy of the Ellwood City Area that speaks so loudly that it would make you shudder,” says Raymond Santillo, executive director of the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce. “She is a very intelligent, organized woman who left Ellwood City and is happy to be back.”

D’Amico, of Wurtzberg, says she also wants to be a part of the revitalization efforts of the Ellwood City area “and I feel like the chamber is a great place to help through the great community events in town.”

The environmental science major says she would like to “go green” in Ellwood City by “creating a community garden plan and showcasing more green environmental practices throughout town.” She would also like to establish a co-op store like the Meadville Market House.

“This would allow local artisans to sell their goods,” she says. “This would be a unique addition to the Ellwood City area.”

As is she, now that she has returned to her hometown and spends time at Ewing Park, where she likes to play tennis on its courts and walk under the ever trees that will provide canopy and shade when she conducts Lawrence County Earth Day on April 22.

Don’t expect to see her representing The Car Wash of Ellwood City on that Saturday and wearing the Halloween costume her mother hand-sewed for her as a high school sophomore.

“While I still do sometimes,” she says, adding that she portrays Shammie T. Gorilla in the Ellwood City Christmas parade, “we need to find someone else to be Shammie on Earth Day.”
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"It's a one-stop shop for the entire family. It's super organized. No more digging to find your sizes. I know what I have or I can try to get it. Very reasonably priced."

"A one-stop shop"

"Konsignment Collections is a really wonderful addition to Lawrence Avenue," Santillo says. "Rochelle’s energy is contagious. She and her mother ‘Inky’ (Janet) have the store looking beautiful and it is super organized."

Ellwood City. Spagnolo says, is a "working-class town and a lot of folks don’t have the means to go to department stores and pay full retail prices."

"It's a one-stop shop for the entire family. It's super organized. No more digging to find your sizes. I know what I have or I can try to get it. Very reasonably priced."

Her shop on Lawrence Avenue, with that red, white and blue "OPEN" flag waving to potential customers, is the culmination of a lifelong dream.

"I'd rather regret trying it," she says, "rather than not trying at all."

A firm decision

"Like Hunter and Spagnolo, John DeCaro realized a dream. I always wanted to have an office in Ellwood City," he says.

DeCaro and law partner Charlie Cusick, anchor their practice at 100 Decker Drive in New Castle, and added a satellite office at 510 Park Ave. — an expansion considered since 2014, DeCaro says.

"Being born and raised in Ellwood City, I always wanted to have a practice based here," DeCaro says.

"I consider it an honor and privilege to be able to use my skills and experience to help those in our community. The residents of the Ellwood City area are always supportive, as has been Borough Council and other local businesses."

The law firm — which welcomed attorney Adrienne Langer in 2015 — handles a variety of matters, DeCaro says, including estate planning and administration, family law, business planning, school and municipal law, civil litigation and personal injury.

"Our firm’s goal," DeCaro says, "is to provide long-term effective solutions for our clients."

Santillo says he has known Cusick and DeCaro for many years.

"Charlie likes getting involved with events. He times and runs races and is a very active man."

DeCaro has been a tremendous partner to the Ellwood City Public Library. Santillo says, "He is the Ellwood City Area School District solicitor and stays involved in our community in many ways."

Santillo says, "Adrienne Langer is very sharp. They have great personalities and they will do very well."