Toney J. Straw Real Estate Agency Celebrates 100th Anniversary

The Toney J. Straw Real Estate Agency is celebrating its 100th anniversary in business this year and it’s continuing to prosper with Joan Straw at the helm. Joan is the daughter of the original owner, Toney J. Straw, who began working in real estate for his uncle at the tender age of nineteen in 1915. The company itself was founded in order to sell houses that the owners were constructing. From there, the business quickly grew as family members joined the business, including Toney’s wife and daughter. Today Joan Straw runs the business as a sole proprietor and works with her son, Tom Crawford, who received his real estate license in 1991. After four generations in the Straw family, the business is still going strong.

Representing Both Buyer and Seller

Joan Straw loves every minute of her work with clients. Her methods are slightly unorthodox - she is the only real estate agent in the area who doesn’t use the multi-list. Instead, she is a dual agent, representing both the buyer and seller in all her real estate transactions. Although they buy, sell and list a variety of properties, the Straw Agency specializes in commercial properties. Timing is critical when selling commercial real estate, and Joan Straw is proud of the company’s solid reputation.

“In many cases,” she says with pride, “we list a property one day and it sells the next day. We go beyond what is the norm in the real estate business. Regardless of the size or value of a property, every owner gets the same attentive service and support. Our success lies in our willingness to go the extra mile for both buyers and sellers so that everyone is satisfied with the outcome.”

“I’m very proud of the continuing success of Toney J. Straw Real Estate Agency over the past one hundred years,” Joan Straw acknowledged. “We’ve weathered plenty of storms. The fact that we are still in business through multiple business and real estate cycles is a testament to how we do business. Despite the fact that the Ellwood City area has lost some of its industries over the years, we have been able to thrive while some agencies had to close their doors or move.”

Continued on Page 2
Scaling the Ladder of Success

Joan Straw didn’t start at the top of the business. Like every other member of her family over the years, she started at the bottom and worked her way up. In 1963 her father hired her as a secretary for the Toney J. Straw Agency. In 1972, Joan received her broker’s license and began the journey toward becoming a successful real estate agent and business owner. She was a co-broker with her father, Toney J. Straw, until his death in 1975.

Joan begins each work day at 8:00 am and often doesn’t finish her work until 8:00 pm. Each day the “crew,” as she calls her friends, shares lunch in the office. She values the friendly, family atmosphere of her office and notes that it is a part of her company’s success. “When you love what you do and you value who you work with, the job is a pleasure rather than a chore,” Joan noted.

The Power of Purple

When asked about her distinctive purple real estate signs, Joan Straw explains, “Years ago our signs looked pretty bland. They were beige and white – nothing that stood out. Then a friend suggested that we switch to a color that better reflected our company. I love purple and it’s an attention-grabbing color that draws the eye. So we tried out some real estate signs in purple and they were a success. Everyone knows that if the “For Sale” sign is in purple, it’s a Toney J. Straw Real Estate Agency property. Our sales increased almost immediately.

Joan Straw suffered a massive stroke in 2014, but it didn’t slow her down for long. When a prospective buyer contacts her, she doesn’t need to refer to the paperwork on her commercial properties. She can quickly rattle off the details of multiple properties, including square footage, the type of furnace or boiler, type of flooring and more. The stroke obviously hasn’t slowed her down or interfered with her memory. When asked how long she would continue to run the Toney J. Straw Real Estate Agency, she replied with a smile, “Ask me again in ten years. I’m enjoying myself too much to stop any time soon. What would I do with myself?”

The Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce congratulates the Toney J. Straw Real Estate Agency on 100 years of success!
Please Welcome Our Newest Members to the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce:

**Office of Vocational Rehabilitation**  
100 Margaret Street  
New Castle, PA 16101  
Telephone: 724-656-3070  
Email: lorkennedy@pa.gov

**THE GYM at Ellport**  
516 Jamison Avenue  
Ellwood City, PA 16117  
Telephone: 724-201-0701  
Email: dzthegym@zoominternet.net

**Out of the INBox**  
4702 Ellwood Road  
New Castle, PA 16101  
Telephone: 724-758-0854  
Www.OutoftheINBox.com

Meet Bestselling Author  
**Beverly Lewis!**  
Book Signing & Discussion

**Tuesday, March 24th at 7:00 pm**  
Ellwood City Public Library  
415 Lawrence Avenue  
Ellwood City, PA 16117  
724-758-6458

Copies of her latest novel, “The Love Letters,” will be available for purchase.
Survey Says....*

Family owned businesses continue to thrive even in today's global economy. Here are some statistics about family owned and operated companies:

- 35% of Fortune 500 companies are family-controlled.
- Family businesses account for 50 percent of U.S. gross domestic product.
- Family businesses account for 78% percent of all new job creation.
- Family businesses are less likely to lay off employees regardless of financial performance.
- Family owned businesses donate more to charity and are more involved in their communities.
- Small businesses produce 10-16 times more patents per employee than large firms.
- The number of family businesses run by women have grown 37% in the past five years.
- Recent evidence indicates that women-owned family businesses are better prepared for transition scenarios and have higher success rates than businesses controlled by their male counterparts.
- The oldest family owned business operating in the US is the Zildjian Cymbal Co. of Norwood, MA. It was founded 1623 in Constantinople and moved with the family to the US in 1929. They have successfully passed down to Zildjian heirs for fifteen generations (Zildjian.com, 2011).

*Information from familybusinesscenter.com; sbecouncil.org; gaebler.com.
THE GYM at Ellport Offers Affordable Fitness for All Ages

One of the newest members of the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce is THE GYM at Ellport, located at 516 Jamison Avenue, Ellwood City, PA. Owned and operated by Dave Zagorski, it has been open for less than two months and already has loyal members. Zagorski is a hands-on owner who is present most days to give members advice and support while helping them develop a comprehensive program to get them into shape.

The gym is a full service commercial facility featuring Cybex strengthening equipment, free weights, elliptical machines, treadmills, both traditional and recumbent exercise bikes and stair steppers. THE GYM also offers several fitness programs and martial arts in the classroom, which features a padded floor for comfort and safety.

“We want to offer something for everybody, no matter what their age or relative level of fitness is,” Zagorski explains. “We offer several of the most popular fitness programs for seniors, including Silver Sneakers and Silver & Fit. We also offer the Active & Fit program which, like Silver Sneakers and Silver & Fit, is often paid for by health insurance providers. If someone comes in and isn’t sure whether their gym membership is covered by their health insurance, I will be glad to do some research and find out for them. In many cases, I can tell them when they walk into THE GYM the first time. We also have an impressive list of classes for all fitness levels, including Pilates, Yoga, Zumba and more. If someone is interested in a class, they can give us a call to find out when it’s offered.”

When asked what he was most proud of at THE GYM, Zagorski responded, “We offer our members the lowest prices in town without sacrificing the quality of our staff or equipment. Everyone who works here is backed by years of education and experience so that they can help our members. A large part of our success is due to the amazing people who comprise our membership as well as the friendly, qualified staff. We’ve endured numerous changes over the past few years while under previous ownership, but we are continuing to grow and thrive. At one point, we weren’t sure whether we would have to close our doors, but we landed on our feet and I was so proud to be able to tell every one of our staff and members that THE GYM was here to stay.”

A Grand Opening Celebration and Ribbon Cutting Ceremony are planned for THE GYM in the near future. Visit the Chamber website to find out when those events will be scheduled.

THE GYM in Ellport’s Hours

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A Bella Boutique’s Success in Ellwood City Helps Launch New Consignment Shop in Hermitage

When Genine Brooks started her high-end consignment shop at 503 Lawrence Avenue in Ellwood City, she hoped it would be a success. In fact, it has been such a success that she has since launched the purchase and reopening of another boutique, Classy Cat Consignment, in Hermitage, PA. Brooks is confident that her second store will not only be popular, but will give her current consignors here in Ellwood City an additional outlet for their gently used and nearly new clothing, jewelry and accessories. A Bella Boutique opened in January of 2014. Just over a year later, Brooks assumed ownership of Classy Cat Consignment Boutique in Hermitage, PA.

Brooks explains, “We partner with our consignors to offer only the best, brand name and designer clothing, accessories, jewelry and current home décor to the particular buyer. Our inventory is a cut above at a modest price. We also offer absolute service in our shops so that each customer feels like she is shopping in a boutique atmosphere.

The Ins and Outs of Consignment

Brooks explains how consignment works. “Consignors for either of the shops agree to a 60 to 90 day contract, during which time they receive a percentage of the sale price of the items they’ve consigned. Upon termination of the contract, all products become inventory of the store to be either sold or donated to multiple charitable organizations.”

“The beauty of consignment is that there are no two items in the store that are alike. You won’t find multiple sizes of the same item, so you’ll be able to confidently purchase an item knowing that no one else will have the same clothing or accessories as you do. For those of us who enjoy variety, each piece is desirable because it is one of a kind. At A Bella Boutique and Classy Cat Consignment we also carefully inspect our inventory for damages, odor and cleanliness, accepting only the best, gently used items to offer our customers. No matter what business you are in, the bottom line must be building and maintaining healthy and productive relationships with customers.”

Brooks continues, “Our success can be attributed to many things, including a great relationship with the leadership in town, Mayor Anthony Court, the help of our local Chamber of Commerce under the direction of Lori Hilliard, the support of our neighboring businesses, the faithful and expanding consignor and customer base, and the will to succeed. We are proud of this because it is a three-fold win for our consignors, our customers and our communities!”

Many Proud Moments for Shop Owner Genine Brooks

Brooks described several proud moments over the past two years, including the day she first opened the doors of A Bella Boutique on January 31, 2014 and the February ribbon cutting ceremony that followed. In April of 2014, she was asked

Continued on page 7
Unique 5K Race Affords Runners a Chance to “Run Outta’ Our Mine”

Wampum Underground Commerce Center recently hosted its 5th annual “Runnin’ Outta’ Our Mine 5k,” held entirely underground in a limestone mine 150’ below the surface.

For nearly 50 years, Wampum Underground Commerce Center – formerly known as Gateway Commerce Center or the Wampum Mines – has been the quiet home of some interesting items and efforts such as Cold War Government Fallout Planning – Deep Storage of the Original Star Wars Trilogy – Cutting Edge Laboratory Applications – State of the Art Archival Records Centers – Break Bulk Centers and Warehousing.

Conversations around corporate citizenship and teambuilding led the local owners to pursue yet another unique effort at Wampum Underground. On Saturday, February 21st, Wampum Underground held a unique 5K race event where the entire course was underground. Regardless of the freezing temperatures and inclement weather outside, the geo-thermal properties of the mine ensure that the race course remained at a relatively warm 55°F Fahrenheit.

It provided a unique experience for over 400 runners, with this year’s winner, Matt Lipsey, providing an event record – a 5:15 minute pace! Another surprise this year was a marriage proposal with the prospective groom on one knee at the finish line waiting for his bride to be to pop the question! (She said “Yes!”) This event will donate the net proceeds to local charities including New Beaver Borough Food Bank, New Beaver Borough Volunteer Fire Department and participating Lawrence County Youth Organizations.

Wampum Underground is a 2.5 million square foot subsurface facility carved from the Vanport Limestone Shelf. Wampum Underground’s business offerings include 3rd party warehousing services, custom warehouse real estate solutions and vehicle storage. Over 60 people are employed at the Wampum Underground and associated businesses.
AMP Shines Spotlight on Ellwood City

Ellwood City Borough is being highlighted by American Municipal Power, Inc. (AMP) in the organization’s Member Spotlight. In the article, AMP describes Ellwood City as a scenic and friendly community at the forefront of LED technology. “Ellwood City is a great community where the residents are loyal and supportive,” said Ellwood City Borough Manager Bob Villella. “The Borough has tremendous assets that have kept us a secret; we have a network of municipal parks and recreation programs, public services that are responsive to our businesses and residents, and an outstanding team of employees committed to a job well done and public service.”

AMP’s members represent a broad cross-section of the public power community. The AMP Member Spotlight provides more in-depth information about the history and operations of individual members. In the article, AMP lauds Ellwood City for its sense of community and commitment to efficient energy use.

“If people want to find a good and affordable community to raise families within a short commute to major traffic arteries and roadways – Ellwood City is a place where people will be proud to locate,” said Villella.

AMP is the nonprofit wholesale power supplier and services provider for 130 member municipal electric systems in the states of Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Virginia, Kentucky, West Virginia, Indiana and Delaware. Combined, these public utilities serve more than 635,000 customers. AMP members receive their power supply from a diversified resource mix that includes wholesale power purchases through AMP and the open market and energy produced at AMP and member-owned generating facilities utilizing fossil fuel, hydroelectric, wind and other renewable resources.

The organization is focused on sustainability and increased use of renewable generation resources. AMP currently has four run-of-the-river hydroelectric projects under construction on the Ohio River. Combined, these four projects will add 300 MW of new hydro capacity to the region. AMP is pursuing additional hydro, solar, wind and landfill gas projects.

Join the American Cancer Society Relay for Life of Ellwood for a Family Friendly Night Out with Magicman TJ Hill, Friday, March 20th at The Loft

Magicman TJ Hill has been one of the top entertainers in Pittsburgh for over 10 years. He currently holds three weekly Pittsburgh performances in addition to his busy private performance schedule. TJ Holds the title of official magician of the Pittsburgh Penguins, and has performed at numerous player events. He’s shared the spotlight with stars like Christina Aguilera and Alec Baldwin, and last year made as many as 250 live appearances. Prepare to laugh and be amazed by his unique brand of comedy magic.

Tickets just $10
At the door
Proceeds benefit
The American Cancer Society
Relay For Life of Ellwood

For Information call
724.654.5577
www.relayforlife.org/paellwood

Contact your American Cancer Society at
www.cancer.org
800-227-2345

Basket Raffles, Prizes, Family Fun! Let's help make cancer disappear!