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Passing the baton with confidence.



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Private schools 'roll with the punches.'



# ROCHESTER BUSINESS JOURNAL

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## Pandemic doesn't slow IEC's growth spurt



IEC Electronics Corp.'s new headquarters, located in Newark, Wayne County. Despite the pandemic, which is causing major disruptions in many industries, IEC recently acquired an 86,000-square-foot facility on Jetview Drive that will house 150 employees.

### Wayne County company acquires facility on west side

By **VELVET SPICER**

In the midst of a pandemic that has wreaked havoc on numerous industries and the global economy, one area manufacturer is growing by leaps and bounds.

IEC Electronics Corp. has acquired a facility on Jetview Drive on Rochester's west side to ramp up hiring in light of improved sales and customer growth. The 86,000-square-foot facility eventually will house 150 staffers, a threefold increase from the number of employees currently at the company's precision metals operation on Emerson Street.

"One of the things we've experienced as our customer demands

increase, we've either been winning new programs with existing customers or winning new customer awards," said IEC President and CEO Jeffrey Schlarbaum. "And the limiting factor for us in terms of how quickly we can produce for those companies we support is the human capital needs of those particular program requirements.

"We can buy capital equipment,

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## Cook Properties bullish on mobile home parks, storage space

By **KEVIN OKLOBZIJA**

When Jeff Cook sold his portfolio of rental property a dozen years ago, he turned his investment attention to office space.

He used a portion of the money gained from the sale of his apartments to buy a building in Greece. It was the first acquisition for what he figured would be a steadily growing portfolio of office properties.

But barely a year into the new venture, he made a somewhat significant shift in his investment focus yet again and started buying mobile home parks and storage units.

He hasn't stopped, either. Over the past 10 years, Cook and his brother Brian have purchased 26 mobile home parks in smaller communities across Upstate New York. Cook Properties — Jeff is the CEO, Brian the COO — also owns and manages six storage facilities; one in Bergen, two in LeRoy and

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## ABC pivots to keep its assistance rolling

Community action agency becomes part of the food distribution network

By **VELVET SPICER**

Action for a Better Community Inc. is not in the business of emergency services. But at the height of COVID-19, ABC did what many other non-profit community organizations did and stepped up to the plate.

"Our work to counteract poverty has been more systemic, working with families for the long haul," said ABC President and CEO Jerome Un-

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## Tydings Automotive: 70 years of keeping cars running

By **KEVIN OKLOBZIJA**

The year was 1950 and Joseph Tydings had just opened a brand spanking new Sunoco gas station along East Ridge Road in Irondequoit, a little west of Culver Road.

With only one station at the corner of Ridge and Culver and another much farther down at St. Paul Boulevard, it seemed the Sun Oil Co. had found an ideal location to sell its gasoline.

The competition, however, wasn't so keen on having a neighbor. One competitor even drove into the parking lot and told Tydings, "You'll be out of business in three years."

Let's hope that gentleman never played the lottery — for his sake.

Tydings Automotive celebrated its 70th anniversary on Oct. 5. Since Joe

Tydings pumped the first gallon of gasoline in 1950, either he or his sons, Kevin and Mike, have been the only operators of the business.

Kevin and Mike bought out their late father in the late 1990s, and Kevin took over sole operations when Mike retired in 2017.

While most privately owned gas stations have closed and a whole lot of small auto repair facilities have been unable to contend against national chains, the popularity of leasing and longer manufacturers warranties, Tydings Automotive remains a staple in Irondequoit.

Oh, a lot has changed over the years. Whereas selling gas and tires was once all the station offered, auto repair now rules. The gas pumps are gone, turned off in 1999 and torn out soon after, the

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## Two local women entrepreneurs help businesses navigate COVID

By **ANDREA DECKERT**

Two women-owned businesses in Rochester have been working to help companies and employees work through the changes brought on by COVID-19.

Jill Knittel, president of JK Executive Strategies LLC, and Christine Vargas, president of Vargas Associates Inc., wanted to do something to help their community during the global pandemic, and both are using their expertise in their respective fields to make a difference.

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**TYDINGS AUTOMOTIVE**

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victim of slim profit margins and stiff competition from convenience stores.

But the repair bays see a steady flow of cars, pickups and SUVs that need everything from brake jobs to oil changes, new tires to diagnosis of an electrical system issue. That's why Tydings Automotive still thrives.

"I love my job, I love my customers," Kevin Tydings, 65, said. "We're lucky because we have a lot of long-time customers and we've also had a constant influx of new customers. I've always tried to treat them how I would want to be treated and it seems to be working."

There's not much, if anything, he doesn't know about all 70 years of the family business. He started pumping gas when he was 14.

"Sunoco used to deliver 8,000 gallons on Friday night and they were back to refill on Monday morning," he said.

His father had been working at Gleason Works after World War II when he was presented with the opportunity to run his own business. Gerald Tydings, Joseph's brother, was a Sunoco salesman. He told him the company was building a gas station in Irondequoit and was looking for someone to lease it.

Joseph Tydings took the leap of faith and opened the doors on Oct. 5, 1950.

"For the first two years, my dad worked from 7 a.m. to 11 at night, seven days a week," Kevin said. "He took time off on Sundays to go to church.



Photo provided

**The Tydings family, husband and wife Kevin and Carla flanked by sons Daniel (left) and Brendan (right).**

Otherwise he was here."

Now Kevin is the one who opens the door in the morning at 8 a.m. and locks it at 5 p.m. at night, Monday through Friday. He at least has weekends to spend time with his wife, Carla, and his family.

"I couldn't be working here for over 50 years without her support," he said.

He employs two mechanics, Tom Capizzi and Tony Arcarese, both who have been on the payroll for more than 20 years.

"I owe a lot to Tom and Tony; they are good mechanics," he said.

The entire staff is continually taking courses on the latest automobile technology. Power steering fluid is a thing of past on many new cars. Brake fluid soon will be, too. The electrical systems become more sophisticated every year.

But it's not daunting, Tydings said, even those confounding check engine lights.

"In the '70s we were afraid when they came out with disc brakes and fuel injection," he said. "A lot of it now is diagnostic time. We have tens of thousands of dollars of diagnostic



Photo provided

**The Tydings' family business circa 1959, when they owned and operated a Sunoco gas station on East Ridge Road in Irondequoit. The gas pumps were removed around 1999, and Tydings Automotive now focuses on auto repairs.**

equipment."

Tydings is no longer doing repairs, but is in on the diagnosis and then makes sure when the job is completed that he can tell the customer everything is good to go.

"If the customer has a follow-up question, I want to be able to answer it," he said.

The coronavirus pandemic caused a lull in business late in the spring and early in the summer. Conversely, while fall is usually slow, he said he just had one of his best Septembers.

He said people are doing many more day trips and weekend trips by car, and they want to be sure there are no issues when they're on the road.

For a business that wasn't supposed to see 1955, let alone 2020, it's been quite a run. And Tydings has no plans to retire anytime soon.

"My customers aren't just customers," he said, "they're friends."

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**WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS**

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With the COVID-19 economy putting many out of work, Knittel and her team are helping companies with changes in the interviewing and on-boarding processes, as well as assisting job seekers find positions that best fits their qualifications.

Knittel, who has more than 20 years of experience in the industry, started JK Executive Strategies, a staffing agency, in 2017. She believes the work the agency does can have a significant impact on one's life.

"We are dealing with people's livelihoods, and we take that seriously," Knittel said.

While there is a perception among some that the job market is stagnant due to the pandemic, Knittel said that is not necessarily the case. Some industries have been hit harder than other, such as hospitality and dining, but other sectors are currently experiencing growth, she said.

The scenario is different compared to the two other major economic downturns Knittel has worked through, which were after 9/11 and during the 2008 global financial crisis.

During those previous times, industries across the board were impacted. However, that is not the case today, she said.

After an initial slowdown in late March and April, she noted there are many companies in various industries seeking employees, including executive and senior level management positions.

The fourth quarter is normally a busy time for hiring and Knittel said this year is no exception.

According to Knittel, skilled trades are hiring, as are the fields of information technology, finance, human resources and engineering. There is also an uptick in the mortgage industry due to low rates.

There are newly created opportunities due to growth or reorganization and also some open positions as parents leave the workforce to focus full-time on helping their kids with the hybrid learning models, she added.

"It's interesting because it feels slower, but not everything is slower," Knittel said, adding she had to hire an additional employee as demand increased. "There are companies now that are growing, evolving and hiring."

What is different is the way companies are going about conducting interviews, she added.

Interviews of late have been conducted virtually, using video conferencing platforms such as Zoom. Once hired, the on-boarding process has also been virtual, with company laptops sent to new employees' homes so they can begin the process and start working.

JK Executive Strategies is able to draw from its own experience of working with national companies who regularly use this technology to help businesses who may be more used to in-person interviews and orientations, Knittel said.

For job seekers, the firm is providing coaching to help them prepare for the virtual interviews. That includes offering tips on where they should look based on the camera's location, paying attention to their voice inflection and putting sticky notes on the laptop so they are reminded of points they want to make

during the interview.

Applicants may also want to seek out a quiet location at home, even if that's in their car, since homes are being used for more now, from work to school, Knittel noted.

The firm has also started offering resume writing and editing services to help job seekers.

Knittel expects some of the changes taking place during COVID-19 to continue post-pandemic, including flexible work arrangements.

"Employers are realizing employees can be productive at home," she said.

Job seekers are also finding new opportunities, with some finding a position they enjoy in a field they may not have thought about pursuing previously.

"People are finding there may be whole new careers that they may not have identified before," she said.

Like Knittel, Vargas wanted to lend support to others when the pandemic hit.

In response, Vargas Associates began

using its expertise in project management and interior design to help businesses understand and adhere to requirements now needed when it comes to office space.

Vargas said the firm, which has served Western and Upstate New York for more than 15 years, has the know-how to help firms design spaces that comply with federal and state regulations related to COVID-19.

"We can help businesses cut through the details," she said, noting they can use their experience in the field to view a

space through a "COVID lens".

Vargas and her team of 12 employees are helping companies prepare to safely welcome staff back into the office by conducting building-wide program assessments for businesses of all sizes.

They are also providing tools, such as webinars and online checklists, that can be used in any office to address factors ranging from capacity and furniture spacing to cleaning protocols.

"We can help reassure companies that they are taking the right steps and instituting the right protocols," Vargas said.

Vargas Associates can help companies not only meet those requirements when it comes to office space, but the firm can also recommend ways to reassure employees who may have reservations about returning to an office, she noted.

For example, Vargas recommends businesses have employees complete a survey to understand their level of concern when it comes to office safety, and then see what steps can be taken to help mitigate those concerns.

The project managers are also following the impact the pandemic has had in the field and how a project may be affected by delays in the supply chain as a result, she added.

"The entire supply chain has seen impacts," Vargas noted, adding that a delay in one area can lead to a delay in the entire project.

Patience and understanding of the situation are required, she said, adding that anyone who is undergoing or getting ready to start renovations should expect to add more time to the project's timeline.

"It's about adjusting expectations and being safe," Vargas said.

*Andrea Deckert is a Rochester-area freelance writer.*



Knittel



Vargas