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# **Owners of family businesses agree** the risk is worth the reward

Sheena Holland Dolan sholland@news-herald.com

"Never work with family" is a common warning but several owners of local family-owned and -operated businesses think that the benefits of working with their families outweigh the risks.

Fredon Corp. CEO Roger Sustar currently has three generations of his family working at his Mentor business which does custom manufacturing and machining for a variety of industries including aerospace, defense and locomotive.

He said that having multiple family members working at his business was his father's dream that was never fully realized. But Sustar did not start out with that goal when he founded Fredon almost 52 years ago.

"Let me tell you, I worked for my father for three days at his company and I quit," Sustar recalled. "But he had two partners, and one would say something and the other one would say something and my dad would yell 'You're my son, you've got to work harder' and all that stuff."

Given his experience, Sustar did not think his own children would end up working for him - but both his daughter Alyson Scott, now company president, and son Chris Sustar, now vice president, worked their way up through the company.

"To have the opportunity to work with my dad is just priceless, and to be with my brother (too), Scott said. "The dynamic between siblings and business or cousins and business, you know, it can be a sticky situation, but I think that the two of us are different enough that we have different skillsets and different areas of expertise, if you will. So we don't really butt heads as much."

Scott said that it can be challenging to keep business at the workplace when seeing her family outside of it, but she does her best not to discuss it too much.

They agreed that working with their family is a complicated but overall supportive environment.

"It's much more than just X's and O's," Sustar said. "It's much more than dollars and cents. It's a lot more involved, and that's the hard part of a family business that a lot of people don't understand."

Ross DeJohn Ir., the owner of DeJohn Funeral Homes and Crematory, agreed that being in a family business is a lot more intensive than simply clocking in and out each day.

"A family business is not an easy business to be in and, you know, you never get away from it," said DeJohn Jr. "No matter where you're at — holidays, days off, the business is always there in your face."

The DeJohns operate funeral homes in Lake, Cuyahoga, and Geauga counties with three of his family members as members of the full-time staff and several others working part-time. His wife and son, Ross DeJohn III, are funeral directors as is he.

DeJohn III said he thinks it is important to remember that the original owners of the first funeral home his father purchased were also a family business, so the rich history plays a role in their level of commitment and the legacy they hope to impart to future generations or future families.

"The reality is, hopefully in

**SEE PAGE 3** 



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We are blessed to have such a great community that will always support local small businesses. As such, La-Vera is trying to make life a little easier. We are now offering a new curbside family meal pickup program. We will offer this service every Monday, Wednesday & Friday and our menus will change accordingly. Our daily meal option will include a protein, starch and vegetable and will be good for 4-6 people and will cost somewhere in the neighborhood of \$36-\$40. We are also offering curbside takeout Thanksgiving dinner options!

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#### **OWNERS OF FAMILY BUSINESSES FROM PAGE 3**

another a hundred years, this will still be here — and it may not be our family, it may be another family at that point," DeJohn III said. "That's why I always say the business is bigger than us, even though it's our family, and it's our livelihood. "We put our heart and soul into it," he added. "We sacrifice our own family for the families that we serve a lot of times, but, the reality is the business is bigger than us. We're just stewards of this right now."

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Donald Sly II and his wife Mary Kay Sly, owners of Sly Family Funeral Home are both licensed Funeral Directors. They have four children and six grandchildren. Their funeral services are affordable, and the staff is both caring and professional. They promise to deliver what you expect: the highest possible quality and their personal attention to detail.

Be it pre-planning or a more immediate need, the Sly Funeral Home family will support you throughout the process. And, of

course, they are dedicated to paying proper homage to the life of your loved one.

The expanded Middlefield operation allows yet greater opportunity to meet and exceed your needs.

They are proud of the opportunity to serve you. The services offered include...

- Traditional Their traditional funeral services might include a one-day visitation and service and burial the next day. Variations to the traditional service are plentiful and based upon the desire of the family in handling the arrangements.
- Personalized Services Varia-

**SEE PAGE 11** 

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#### Dutch Country Restaurant and Banquet Room serving Middlefield and Burton

The Dutch Country Restaurant has been a family owned business serving the Middlefield and Burton communities since 2003. The Roth family started the business, and my family took it over in June of 2019. I worked for the Roths for many years as a server/manager, and with the guidance of Doug Roth and the love of my family we have successfully carried on the tradition of great homestyle recipes, large portions, and fair pricing.

A secret blend of herbs combined with our slow roasting technique is what makes our Prime Rib the best that you'll ever put a fork to! You'll have to stop in and try it someday, I am certain one of the three sizes will be perfect for you.

We're open for breakfast, lunch and dinner on Tuesday thru Thursday 7a – 8p. Friday and Saturday 7a – 9p and Sunday 7a – 8p., closed Monday. A very spacious restaurant, with a well-



Humming Bird Cake & Pumpkin Rolls

rounded menu, makes The Dutch extremely conducive for families. We feature 'cooked-from-scratch' dinner specials every night. A full-service bar with happy hour specials on Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 5–7. We even have a newly renovated Banquet room for events and parties up to 75 people.

I am so thankful because this truly is a 'family business.' My whole family helps out in one way or another. My sons are on the



dish brigade. My daughter, a hostess. My husband keeps everything running properly. The Dutch is a place where the staff is truly a family, related or not. We all work together and can truly say love is our secret ingredient! Presented by Gina Clifton-Sawyer, owner of the Dutch Country Restaurant. Located at 15015 Kinsman Road (Rt. 87), Middlefield, 44062. Phone: 440-426-0133



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Tom retired in 2007 leaving Jennifer to carry on his legacy. Jennifer continues to run the agency on her father's principles and treats all clients like family.

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Did you know? Consumers who want to support local businesses should know that positive product reviews can be a great and effective way to do just that. According to Business2Community.com, 88 percent of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations. In addition, customers are likely to spend 31 percent more on a business with "excellent" reviews, while 72 percent of consumers say that positive reviews make them trust local businesses more. The 2018 ReviewTrackers Online Reviews Stats report found that star ratings affect consumer behavior. as 80 percent of consumers say they trust 4-, 4.5- and 5-star ratings the most. The good news for consumers is that product reviews need not be long to be effective. ReviewTrackers notes that the average review is now roughly the size of a tweet and has gotten 65 percent shorter since 2010. That means it's simple, quick and effective to support local businesses via online reviews of their products.



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#### { FAMILY OWNED BUSINESS 9 }

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Enjoy the holidays by taking a trip down Rt. 20 in Ashtabula County and visit two of the areas most exciting and fun Christmas and Gift Shoppes. Find the perfect gift for the special person in your life.



#### Welcome to Catherine's Christmas

The area's largest gift shop. A beautiful century home filled with timeless treasures and shimmering trees. We are a family destination that you'll want to visit year after year. The perfect place where small town people can celebrate Christmas in a big town way!

#### Supporting local businesses benefits your entire community

Campaigns to "shop local" are often rooted in encouraging locals to support the small businesses in their communities. Consumers no doubt recognize that such support is vital to the survival of small businesses, but they may not realize just how much thriving local businesses benefit their communities. According to the Small Business Economic Impact Study from American Express, an average of two-thirds of every dollar spent at small businesses in the United States stays in the local community. That support can be especially valuable as the world tries to work its way out of a global recession brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Unemployment rates rose significantly within a month of the World Health Organization declaring a pandemic as the COVID-19 virus rapidly spread across the globe. While large international corporations were in better position to avoid lavoffs, small, locally owned businesses faced an uphill battle as they tried to remain in operation and retain their staffs. That's another way shopping local can benefit local communities. The Business Alliance for Local Living Economies reports that, for every \$10 million spent locally, 57 new jobs are created at local businesses. That's an important factor to remember as the world tries to recover from the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.





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#### **SLY FAMILY FUNERAL HOME FROM PAGE 4**

tions to the traditional service are plentiful and based upon the desire of the family in planning arrangements unique to their taste.

- Cremation Cremation services with multiple variations to accommodate the family are available.
- Merchandise offered Caskets, Vaults, Urns, Personalized Keepsakes, Stationery Packages and Monuments can be ordered and/or customized by Sly Family Funeral Home.
- Remember: There are no standard services. They take great pride in working with each family to create arrangements unique to their personal wishes.

**History of the Sly Family Funeral Home:** In 1945, the Russell family began the family funeral home on North State Street in Middlefield. In 1998, Charles (Rusty) and Marcia Russell expanded the funeral home and continued the tradition of family oriented funeral services at the current West High Street location.

The values and philosophy of the Russell family continued until the retirement of Rusty and Marcia. At that time the funeral home was acquired by Donald and Mary Kay Sly, who pledge to bring the same highquality service, values, and traditions that honor your loved ones from generation to generation.

#### **Pre-planning – VERY IMPORTANT**:

When it comes to your final arrangements, shouldn't you make the decisions? The arrangements you make will reflect your exact wishes and desires. Pre-arranging your own service will help to ease the burden of your loved ones. It will also alleviate any questions, problems or differences, which can occur among family members.

Pre-payment will protect you from the rising cost of prices, and it will not be a financial burden on your loved ones. When you plan ahead you know that your wishes will be fulfilled.

Arrangements can be made in the comfort of your own home. We'd be pleased to meet with you to discuss it.

Having the talk of a lifetime – VERY IM-PORTANT: Although we might have daily conversations with our loved ones, the most meaningful and deep ones don't always happen. Having this kind of conversation can make a huge difference — it can help us see our loved ones in a different and more positive light, it can teach us valuable lessons, it can give us a clearer picture of the things they love, it can bring us closer together, and it can help us reaffirm to them how much we love them.

Who should have the talk? We could have the talk of a lifetime with anyone we value, cherish, and love. It could be our grandparents, our parents, our siblings, our uncles and aunts, our cousins, our spouse, our children, our grandparents, or our friends. It also doesn't have to be done only when we feel we are or someone we love is at the end of their life. We'll never really know what the future holds, so let us take the opportunities we still have with them while we still can.

How do we start the talk? We shouldn't really wait for a special moment to start having these kinds of talks. We can do it anytime and anywhere, when we and our loved ones are comfortable — at home while we're having meals together, out for a walk, gathered as a family, or playing games.

We could also sometimes start with visual prompts, like a photo or an entire photo album, a memento, or a souvenir. We can open up about past experiences while we're at memorable place, such as a church, a favorite restaurant, or an old park. These can be great ways to start a story

May we always treasure every moment of our lives and have meaningful conversations with the ones we love.

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