

Westwoods Lodge Pub & Grill



PHOTO BY TERRY FARMER

Mick Wanless opened Westwoods Lodge Pub & Grill in Springfield back in March 2000. As the former owner of Northern Lights, a bar in Springfield, Wanless decided to expand into the food industry. "We have always been about the wings, but we have picked up on the wild game now and are one of the only places to offer that in town," he said.

"Mick truly cares about his employees and is the best local owner," said Zachary Hulcher, an employee of Westwoods Lodge. "Mick is more of a father than he is a boss. If I ever needed anything, he wouldn't hesitate to help. He's very kind and generous to his employees, especially during these trying times."

"We are a well-established business with an amazing customer base," said Ashley Bruley, a longtime employee. "We are on a first-name basis with a large portion of our customers. We have employees

that have been here 10, 15 and 18 years. The restaurant business is not easy, but Mick continues to be innovative and build Westwoods up to be bigger and better, not just for himself, but for the employees as well."

Bruley has worked at Westwoods since she was 21 years old and has nothing but fond memories of the business. "I personally have worked for Westwoods for nearly 16 years," she said. "Mick has always been amazing to me, my family and now my two little ones. He has allowed me to grow in the company and shared his business knowledge and know-how. I'm proud to say I work here and proud to call Westwoods my family."

In March 2020, right as the pandemic was taking hold, Westwoods celebrated 20 years in business. While the restaurant industry was one of the hardest-hit sectors, Westwoods was able to weather the

storm.

"The business was able to make it through COVID, mainly due to our amazing customer support and a lot of hard work from Mick," said Bruley. "Mick is always looking to grow the business. Whether it's unique menu items, local beers or an amazing bourbon, we are always willing to be just a little different."

"Last year was a doozy," said Wanless. "But it is a good business, and we have made it through all of the economic crashes and have come out of it, even through all the difficulties." He took advantage of the time that the restaurant had to close to do some interior remodeling.

"I appreciate all of the loyal business customers and employees over the years. They have made this place great," he said. "And what also makes us great is the atmosphere at Westwoods. No one else has the character that we have."



PHOTO BY TERRY FARMER

BJ Grand Salon



BJ Grand Salon & Spa has been a popular destination in Springfield for more than 40 years and currently operates out of two different locations, 3300 Robbins Road and 3055 Professional Drive. Customers have flocked to the salon to experience hair, makeup, body treatments, massages, nail treatments and custom facials. Clients can choose from six levels of experience, ranging from new talent salon stylists to creative directors. The company provides its staff with ongoing education, including learning the latest in techniques, services and trends.

"We try to provide a culture where we appreciate and assist every person working in the salon, at every point in their career," said Gail Lorenzini, a co-owner of BJ Grand Salon along with her husband, John, and son, Nick. "The best part of being a part of the BJ work family is having so many people who are at every level in their career, whether a licensed professional just out of school, or a senior provider who has an established career, or one of our essential support staff of assistants, receptionists and management."

Lorenzini is proud of what BJ Grand Salon offers its employees. "We provide a foundation of support when it's most needed," she said. "We cover the obligations of the everyday work challenges, like supplies, appointment booking, building maintenance - the often-unnoticed work that makes it possible for a top-level professional to come into their workplace and enjoy sharing their talent and positive spirit with their clients - knowing they can turn it off at the end of the day and go home to their family."

As a leadership team that listens and responds, nothing has given the Lorenzini family more opportunities and challenges than the year 2020.

"During the periods of shutdown, we shared the concerns from both clients and workers, and found ways to keep our company and our team strong so we were prepared to come back and open the doors to serve our clients with trust for the safety of all of us," said Lorenzini.

Numerous companies have struggled since the pandemic began, but according

to Lorenzini, BJ Grand Salon has been able to weather the storm and come back as strong as ever.

"Our best accomplishment in the past year was our ability to be flexible and provide a safe, stable workplace for 100% of our workforce to come back to when they were ready," she said. "We were able to do this with no layoffs, or cuts in pay or hours. The peace of mind lets our team have the best of everything where they can keep the work-family balance the best it can be for each individual."

BJ Grand Salon has a number of goals for the coming year. "We want to continue to build our menu of new and enhanced services - think hydrafacials and hair treatments - and bring national educational teams to our staff to bring back the excitement of being inspired by new ideas and high-level talent in our industry," said Lorenzini. "It will be a year of opportunity to be stronger, more loving and caring with our friends, as well as being healthier and busier than ever and more appreciative of the little things."

University of Illinois Springfield



PHOTO BY CLAYTON STALTER
*Photo was taken pre-COVID.

Employees at University of Illinois Springfield (UIS) are united in one mission: to provide a uniquely student-centered educational experience.

"Regardless of our individual roles, students come first. Having such a clear-cut purpose makes working at UIS fun and rewarding," said Jessie Burrell, director of marketing. "From an employee perspective, there's a place for everyone and every expertise. Our team includes talented groundskeepers, food service experts, brilliant faculty, visionary leaders and so many others leading the field of higher education. It's an exciting place to work, where you're always supported to grow and flourish."

UIS just celebrated its 50th anniversary in academic year 2020-21. The college began as Sangamon State University in 1970 and transitioned into the University of Illinois system in 1995, spending 25 years as each institution.

Over the past year, UIS has celebrated a number of major accomplishments. *U.S. News & World Report* ranked UIS the number-one public regional university in Illinois and number four in the Midwest. This was the second year in a row for both rankings. The online bachelor's programs at UIS were ranked in the top 10% in the country.

Other accomplishments in 2020 include opening the Center for Lincoln Studies, a national base for scholarship, teaching and public history about Abraham Lincoln's life, leadership and legacy. The university also created and successfully implemented weekly COVID testing on campus, which provided peace of mind for the campus community and a rolling positivity rate well below the county-wide average. "This allowed us to continue providing face-to-face classes and a safe working environment, in alignment with local, state and national guidelines," said Burrell. "As a national leader in online education for more than 20 years, UIS assisted private higher ed institutions, community colleges and state agencies in their transition to remote learning."

In addition to the rewarding mission and connecting students to their goals, one of Burrell's favorite parts of working for UIS is the focus on employee well-being. "UIS prioritizes the wellness of employees with robust benefits, such as wonderful time off options to rest, relax and recharge," she said. "We also have many opportunities for personal and professional development. Since employee travel is now limited, the university made available an online

professional development catalog chock-full of webinars, synchronous trainings and recordings on myriad topics." UIS also places a high level of importance on employee recognition, including the Employee of the Month/Year program, University Scholar Award and Rising Stars program.

In spite of all the challenges over the past year, employees worked hard to create and launch new programs, and several will debut this fall. UIS is waiving fees and required testing for application for anyone who is considering pursuing their education goals. In addition, UIS has expanded the non-degree offerings for certifications and licensures to better serve the professional community, along with hosting community roundtables and webinars to improve access to health information and community engagement on many different topics.

UIS has a number of strong goals for the future, and despite the challenging times brought on by the pandemic, things are moving in an exciting direction. "The university is guided by our Strategic Compass, and we're always considering ways to better serve our students and community," said Burrell.



Prairie Cardiovascular



PHOTO BY TERRY FARMER

In 1979, Prairie Cardiovascular began treating patients with heart and vascular disease across Springfield and the surrounding communities. Founded by Dr. James Dove, the business philosophy of Prairie Cardiovascular centered around all physicians and colleagues being called to do “anything that wasn’t illegal, immoral or unethical” to ensure the highest quality care was afforded to their patients, according to marketing director Lori Harlan. Now, more than 40 years later, Prairie Cardiovascular still maintains a high level of care for its patients, and this dedication to being the best all starts with the employees.

In 2008, when Prairie Cardiovascular merged with Hospital Sisters Health System, that sense of accountability and pride in caring for patients and each other was further exemplified with the core values of respect, care, competence and joy. Ensuring that those core values are embodied in every interaction helps to foster a collaborative and team-based work environment. With eight full-time locations and 52 community clinics, Prairie Cardiovascular covers an expansive geography, but is intentional in trying to keep employees feeling close and connected.

“One of the factors that ensures Prairie Cardiovascular is a great place to work is being accessible to one another,” said Dr. John Scherschel, an electrophysiologist and president of Prairie Cardiovascular. “Taking care of nearly 200,000 patients a year requires tremendous support, and I am consistently amazed by the level of teamwork within our organization. Our colleagues take pride in what they do and the level of quality care we provide to our patients, and they take care of each other in the same manner.”

The past year has been difficult for most industries, but especially those in health care, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. “To say it has been a challenging year would be an understatement. The pandemic changed our ability to see some of our patients in person, and we had to act quickly to ensure that they could reach us and we could continue to treat them,” said Scherschel, who said that everyone worked together to ensure that the staff was able to connect with patients through various telemedicine technologies.

“It is hard to accurately reflect how extraordinary it is to work with a team of people

who never shy away from challenges,” Scherschel said. “We have about 350 employees, and when things are rough, their first response is always: ‘How can I help?’ It is quite humbling.”

The pandemic has reshaped how patients are seeking care. Prairie Cardiovascular’s goals for the future focus on new ways to always be conveniently accessible to patients across central and southern Illinois.

The staff of Prairie Cardiovascular lives in the communities that they serve, and most of the new direction and strategies comes directly from them.

“Instilling that sense of home and community into the work they do with us helps to keep us closely connected to the needs of the patients and communities we serve,” said Scherschel, who said the best ideas come from employees, whether it’s online scheduling or educational programs with local first responders.

“By working in teams, by valuing every member of the team, and keeping respect, care, competence and joy at the center of all we do, I am confident Prairie Cardiovascular will continue to be a great place to work long into the future,” he said.

MB Heating & Cooling



PHOTO BY TERRY FARMER

MB Heating & Cooling, 1555 W. Jefferson, has been serving the Springfield area for more than 30 years. John and Erin Wyss purchased the company in 2012. The client-focused HVAC and plumbing company has earned its clients' trust in heating and cooling service, installation and maintenance due to the exceptional services provided.

Being named one of the Best Places to Work in Springfield has everything to do with the guarantee that the company gives its employees.

"We have a strong commitment to employee development," said general manager Doug Gholson. "We concentrate on training and commit to helping our employees professionally and personally." Gholson noted the company has focused on developing an attractive benefits package for its employees, including adding an additional week of vacation, health insurance, paid dental and vision insurance and a company-matched IRA plan.

Gholson said, "MB Heating & Cooling is a clear example of growing a small family business in the community." The business started with just two people and has now grown to over 35 employees. The company encourages personal

growth and budgets more than \$80,000 a year for training.

"Our commitment to training is a testament to our desire to have the best, most knowledgeable employees," said Gholson. He also noted the team environment at the company. "Co-workers often trade times to work in order to help with family events, and in times of need, MB has stepped up to pay employees that were unable to work during illness." For Gholson, the best part of working for MB Heating & Cooling is solving the problems of its customers, as every day is different. He also enjoys getting to know everyone's families.

MB Heating & Cooling has been busy outside the office as well. For the past two years, the company has hosted Camp Out for Homeless Veterans to raise money for Fifth Street Renaissance. Other charities that MB Heating & Cooling supports include Sparc and the Market on the Hill project in Mt. Pulaski. Altogether, MB Heating & Cooling supports dozens of organizations every year through volunteerism, monetary donations and in-kind gifts. There is a high level of employee participation, which shows that charitable commitment plays a fundamental role in the company's values.

"MB is a great place to work and will continue to grow as it is committed to serving the people in the community," said Gholson.

Despite a pandemic that hurt businesses all over the world, MB Heating & Cooling still achieved several major accomplishments in 2020.

"We were able to not only maintain our staffing levels during the pandemic but were also able to add staff members in the service department and electrical department," said Gholson. "Our solar department recently installed one of the largest solar arrays in Springfield."

In addition, when employees began to have scheduling conflicts last spring due to schools switching to remote learning, the company hired a tutor to work with the children of employees and converted a space in the building into a tutoring center.

Looking toward the future, MB Heating & Cooling hopes to increase education on indoor air quality to show people the benefits of clean air.

"We want to expand our plumbing, electrical and solar departments while increasing our role in community involvement," said Gholson. "Finally, we want to make MB the employer of choice in central Illinois."