

Everything you didn't know you needed at the Chrome

By Myra Meyer
News Intern

ALGONA - The Chrome Truck Stop has evolved vastly since it first opened in 1938. The building has changed hands and names and gone through substantial renovations, but it persevered as a staple in Algona, even withstanding the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The truck stop, currently owned by Michael Hjelmeland, goes by two different names: Chrome Truck Stop and Chrome Travel Plaza, which serve to represent the two different sides of the gas station. Since his purchase seven years ago, Hjelmeland has made considerable improvements to the business, paving the lot and incorporating a total of 22 gas pumps on both sides of the building. In the last year, The Chrome added an IHOP onto half of the building.

Chris Shaffer, manager of the gas station, pointed out, "one thing about IHOP is they have zero corporate stores. They're all franchise owned, so the Chrome Truck Stop owns it."

The Chrome Truck Stop continues to expand with construction already underway for a two bay car wash and the items kept in stock have expanded so customers can meet nearly all their needs in one stop, or as Shaffer put it, "The Chrome Truck Stop always has what you need and things you didn't think you need."

Even through COVID-19, the store worked hard to provide the community with everything they need. As stores had to close down, The Chrome Truck Stop

brought in additional merchandise to fill in those losses in the community. Shaffer said of the gas station's perpetual evolution, "don't close your eyes because there'll be something different."

The Chrome Truck Stop is ever-evolving, but it has remained consistent in its ideals. Hjelmeland and Shaffer pride the gas station and IHOP on its employees who try to create a positive atmosphere for customers in a fast-paced environment, and they appreciate the customers who keep coming back to be a part of the community they have created.



Chris Schaffer, second from left, stands with some of the employees at the Chrome. Submitted photos



Entrepreneur of the Year

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Cakes to brighten a child's day

A special project Watnem is a part of is Icing Smiles, a nationwide nonprofit organization that connects bakers with children who are critically ill.

"I volunteer as a sugar angel and donate custom cakes to critically ill children and their families. My most recent call to action was for a little girl celebrating her 10th birthday. I made her a two-tier custom cake and delivered it to her in Mankato," Watnem said.

What advice would Watnem offer to someone thinking about starting their own business?

"My biggest piece of advice would be to research, research, research! There are many aspects and behind the scenes things people don't realize. From tax planning, bookkeeping, licensing, state requirements, there really is so much to learn in order to hit the ground running and be successful," Watnem said.

Possible expansion on horizon

Watnem said when she is not working in the kitchen, she is usually traveling with her family.

"We enjoy road trips to small towns and take time to enjoy mom-n-pop restaurants along the way," she said.

Watnem has dreams of business expansion in the coming years, that may even include moving her business out of her home.

"I love being able to work in an industry that I love and am truly passionate about. A big perk is the personal satisfaction from putting my skills and talent to use and seeing customer reactions to their one-of-a-kind dessert," she said.

"Sweet Snax has grown exponentially during the short year it has been open. I am quickly outgrowing my space and would love to have a store front within the next two years."

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