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Chobani invests in employees and community

SARAH GENTER

EVENING SUN

SOUTH EDMESTON — Chobani continues to lead as America's number one yogurt brand, and as one of the largest employers in Chenango County.

Founded in 2005 by Turkish immigrant Hamdi Ulukaya, Chobani now manufactures its yogurt and other dairy products in South Edmeston and Twin Falls, Idaho. The company employs approximately 3,000 individuals, with over 1,000 working at the South Edmeston plant.

In addition to creating delicious yogurt, oat milk, dairy- and plant-based creamers, and ready-to-drink coffee, Chobani also leads in employee and community care. The company places a big emphasis on putting people first, and that shows in their investment in their employees as well as their community.

Employee care

Chobani has always made a point to provide quality benefits and opportunities to their employees, and they continued



Chobani continued to invest in its employees in 2023. Representatives said the company increased starting wages for full-time hourly manufacturing and corporate employees, boosted 401(k) contribution matching, and partnered with Upwards to assist employees in finding quality childcare. (Submitted photo)

to improve employee care in 2023.

Chobani People Team Director Val Wasielewski said they implemented company-wide employee benefits last year, including a bump in the minimum starting wage to

\$20 per hour for all full-time employees in manufacturing and corporate hourly positions, which is a far above the country's average minimum wage.

Wasielewski said they also increased employee 401(k) contribution matching, and have

begun aiding with the challenge of finding childcare.

"Helping to alleviate the long-standing and growing issue of quality childcare so many are facing, Chobani also

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Rolling Antiquer's Old Car Club revs it up for 2024



The Rolling Antiquer's Old Car Club (RAOCC) has a 58 year history and is part of the Antique Automobile Club of America (AACA). Last year they put on a three day national show in Hamilton and every year on Memorial Day weekend they host the car show in Norwich at the fairgrounds. (Submitted Photos)

KELLI MILLER

EVENING SUN

NORWICH — The Rolling Antiquer's Old Car Club (RAOCC) is creating a lot of excitement with some of the largest car shows in Norwich

and the surrounding regions.

Former Rolling Antiquer's Old Car Club President Allan Strong said they have 58 years of history and are part of the Antique Automobile Club of America (AACA).

A major development in 2023, the club hosted the

Special Eastern Nationals Classic Car Show in July at White Eagle in Hamilton.

The free event attracted thousands of people and displayed about 150 vintage automobiles including rare Bentley, Cord, Pierce Arrow and Packard vehicles.

Traditionally, the group holds an annual show in Norwich on Memorial Day weekend. One of the largest locally and in the northeast, it also regularly attracts hundreds of automobiles and thousands of visitors

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Business SPOTLIGHT New York Central Mutual

SOPHIA ROOT

EVENING SUN

NEW BERLIN — The New York Central Mutual Insurance (NYCM) was founded in 1899, and the company is preparing to celebrate its 125th anniversary in 2024. NYCM offers insurance coverage for home & property, vehicles, businesses, valued possessions, and more to customers in the state of New York.

With a team of over 850 employees, and a network of over 1,200 independent agents, NYCM Insurance is dedicated to providing superior service and a quality customer experience to over 535,000 customers. In addition to their headquarters in Edmeston, NYCM Insurance has offices in Sherburne, Canajoharie, and Orchard Park. One thing NYCM has remained passionate about since their founding at the turn of the century almost 125 years ago, is demonstrating genuine care for customers and communities.

As a mutual insurance company, NYCM Insurance is owned by its policyholders. The company was founded in 1899 by VanNess Robinson and is currently under the direction of Robinson's great-great-granddaughter, Cheryl Robinson.

NYCM Insurance Spokesperson Stephanie Bader said, "Chenango County is a special place because of its sense of camaraderie and community. We're proud to help support community events and organizations that make Chenango County home. Small towns often foster a strong sense of community, where neighbors know each other and support one another. In some cases, neighbors are also your coworkers — which isn't uncommon at NYCM."

NYCM Insurance has had a great year for awards, they were ranked first in customer satisfaction among auto insurers in New York in the J.D. Power 2023 U.S. Auto Insurance Study for the second year in a row.

NYCM Insurance President and CEO Cheryl Robinson said, "Customer care is one of our biggest priorities and something we take very seriously. We're proud to offer award-winning insurance, and that our commitment to our customer's satisfaction is recognized."

In addition to these awards, NYCM Insurance has also been recognized with: Big I NY Personal Lines Carrier of the Year Award; Best Companies to Work for in New York; and A.M. Best Company's Standing the Test of Time Award for maintaining an A rating for over 75-years.

The company also engages with the community. Bader said: "We're fortunate at NYCM to have an employee base which actively seeks community participation on its own." Some of the ways NYCM helps encourage community participation is through their 365 Passport to Wellness Program and paid volunteering hours.

They are seeking candidates for positions in auto claims, customer service, and underwriting. NYCM Insurance encourages you to attend this event to learn more about their opportunities, make connections with the hiring team, participate in on-site interviews. Check out their Facebook event to learn more.

Recruiting Business Unit Manager Crystal Curpier said, "We are always seeking to employ enthusiastic and energetic individuals who enjoy an environment that offers challenging and rewarding opportunities with a potential for advancement and continued education."

To learn more about NYCM Insurance, visit their website at nycm.com.



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Chobani continues to lead as America's number one yogurt brand, with manufacturing plants in South Edmeston and Twin Falls, Idaho. The company employs 3,000 individuals, with more than 1,000 employed at the South Edmeston facility. (Submitted photo)

Chobani invests in employees and community -

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 proudly launched a partnership with Upwards, an organization whose mission is to make childcare accessible to all families," Wasielewski said. "All full-time Chobani employees throughout the U.S., including manufacturing, corporate, and remote workers, now have access to a network of childcare professionals and are eligible to receive backup care credits and an annual cash stipend to put towards childcare or elder care costs."

Chobani also finds ways to support employees whose first language is not English. Wasielewski said non-native employees are offered free English as a Second Language (ESL) training through the mobile app EnGen.

Moving into 2024, Wasielewski said Chobani will continue to invest in its employees through leadership development, supervisor training, and technical training initiatives for maintenance staff. She said they will also continue to evaluate their pay structure, and make adjustments as needed to remain competitive.

"As a people-first company, we are always looking for ways to improve our employee experience," said Wasielewski.

"We are focused on continued investment in our people and listening to ensure we meet the needs of our diverse and evolving workforce, and addressing key priorities we know are top of mind for our team and so many others in the workplace today."

Community support

The culture of investment and growth extends beyond the Chobani workforce. Chobani Community Impact Manager Don Brown said in the past year Chobani has had an impact on the area by combating hunger as well as investing in the local and surrounding communities.

The company extended its support to the Utica community last year by providing a \$250,000 grant to support the development of the World Market Gallery. The gallery is an exhibit in the Utica Children's Museum, which is expected to open its doors later this year.

"This was Chobani's first big investment in Utica, a community where over 40 percent of Chobani employees and their families live," said Brown. "This milestone is made even more extraordinary by the fact that we will fund the section of the museum that celebrates the music, art, food, and language

of regions of the world from where many of our employees come from."

The investment is just one of many in Chobani's history, including donations to support the development of the New Berlin Firehouse and Chobani Community Center, and the purchase of a new ambulance for the Sherburne Fire Department.

In 2023, Chobani also provided over \$100,000 in grants through the Chobani Community Impact Fund to help fund programs and initiatives that "increase access to nutritious food, address infrastructure needs, and aid in filling the gap for residents experiencing food insecurity in Central New York for over 4,000 individuals," Brown said.

"What's really special about this initiative is that our Chobani employee selection committee, alongside The Community Foundation for South Central New York, have a direct impact on their community as they carefully considered applicants' needs and how the organization plans to support the needs of the community using the grant," he added.

This year, Chobani Community Impact Fund grants were provided to

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Cornell Cooperative Extension Schoharie and Otsego Counties, Improve Norwich Now – Aunt Mary’s House, Norwich City School District, Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York, Rural Health Network Serving South Central New York, St. James Feeding Ministries (The Lord’s Table and Loaves and Fishes Food Pantry) and The Cooperstown Food Pantry.

Due to their constant investment in the local community, Chobani was recognized with the Commerce Chenango Manufacturer of the Year award in 2023.

To combat hunger, Chobani is partnering with local organizations to find ways to fight food insecurity and work toward eradicating hunger within the county.

“Rising food costs due to inflation are something we as a nation have been struggling with for over two years, and we’ll likely still feel those effects into 2024. Now more than ever, families are turning to food banks and pantries for the food they need to be properly nourished – and that’s happening right here in our own backyard,” Brown explained. “We’re up for the challenge and will continue to fight the good food fight, providing families and children with quality nutrition as we continue to support a community that we consider family.”

In October, Chobani launched its first ever Let’s Eat Week to help feed families in need.

“To mark World Food Day, we rolled out a week-long initiative across our hometowns where employees and commu-

nity members volunteered to assemble and distribute meals to feed over 8,000 children and families in need. We packed 2,000 meals to distribute right here in our own backyard of Central New York,” Brown said.

Chobani also donated refrigeration units to several food pantries, supporting the needs of over 1,000 individuals, according to Brown. He said the donation will help families that rely on food assistance to have access to perishable food items.

While Chobani is able to do a lot for their community, Brown said they can’t do it alone. He encourages local residents to share what they can, and join Chobani’s mission to serve the community and fight hunger.

“Donating resources and time goes a long way! If you are fortunate enough to have regular access to nutritious food, consider donating what you can to a local shelter, nonprofit, or school to help those who aren’t as fortunate,” he said. “We’re proud of the strong relationships we’ve built with our community partners and local elected officials in Chenango County, and hope to continue to work with them to better serve our people and the broader community in our collective fight against hunger.”

“No one sector can end hunger alone; we all need to work together to take care of our most vulnerable neighbors.”

Building the future

Chobani’s fight against hunger also reached Chenango County schools last year. Brown said the company will continue to combat child hunger through their existing initiatives, as well as efforts to eliminate school lunch debt, partnerships with local organizations to donate products, and support of backpack programs that help feed students.

Just before the holiday season, Brown said Chobani donated over \$32,000 to eliminate school lunch debt in 11 school

districts in local counties, benefiting over 1,300 families.

“This donation allowed us to have a direct impact in the communities where our employees live and work while simultaneously continuing our fight to combat childhood hunger,” said Brown.

Donations like these allow families and students to focus on education, Brown said, but it’s not the only way Chobani is investing in future generations. Wasielewski said Chobani has participated in the BOCES mentorship program, which she said “enables businesses to connect with students in the area to help them better understand and familiarize themselves with the workforce.”

Additionally, Chobani created the Workplace Experience Program in 2023. The program is a partnership with local BOCES technical schools that aims to provide “realistic on-the-job work experience for local students pursuing a college degree.”

Through this program, Wasielewski said Chobani has already had a maintenance intern join their team. She said they plan to continue to grow the program in the future.

In addition to partnerships with local schools and BOCES, Wasielewski said Chobani will also continue partnerships with local colleges and workforce development agencies to support future generations and shape the future of Chenango County.

“For over 15 years, Chobani has had the pleasure of operating in New Berlin,” said Wasielewski. “Since day one, we have developed such an admiration for the wonderful people who have welcomed Chobani with open arms when our founder landed here almost two decades ago, and who have since joined our one-of-a-kind team.”

For more information on Chobani, visit Chobani.com.

Business SPOTLIGHT

WCDO General Manager Craig Stevens



Craig Stevens sits at the studio control panel. (Submitted photo)

SOPHIA ROOT EVENING SUN

CHENANGO COUNTY – Do you remember that high school classmate who always did the loudspeaker announcements? Do you ever wonder where they are now?

In the case of the former classmates of WCDO General Manager Craig Stevens, their high school PA announcer was inducted into the New York State Broadcasters Association Hall of Fame in October of 2023.

Stevens, who has worked at WCDO for 37 years, was honored as one of the five broadcasters chosen to be inducted this year. The induction ceremony took place on October 26 at Rockefeller Plaza.

“For the first time in my life I was speechless,” he remarked. Many aspects of this distinction were surprising to him, like when he found out the vote to induct him passed unanimously. On the other hand, he is not surprised by the community support he has received.

Stevens is proud of his career, evidenced by the many stories of his successes and celebrity encounters he shared. From the time he opened for Ray Romano to when he met President Bill Clinton, Stevens reflected on the highlights of his career. His most impactful stories are the ones where he reinforces the integrity of mass communication and has a direct hand in benefiting the community.

He said was appreciative of the listeners and the community.

The appreciation for his legacy is obvious when in the WCDO office, containing a large cork board full of children’s drawings, thank you notes, and kindly worded Letter to the Editor snippets. Many of these letters came in for weeks at a time following the flood of 2006 to thank the station for their work in staying on air during uncertain times.

Residents may recall the flood in 2006, affecting much of the Sidney area for days at a time. WCDO (CDO standing for Chenango, Delaware, Otsego) was determined to continue to disseminate information to eager and frightened

listeners, but they had lost power in their studio. Stevens and his fellow staff members went to the FM transmitter site out on the edge of the woods to grab the signal and connect it to their music computers and equipment, stored in the back of an SUV.

They managed to conduct interviews using a tape recorder to grab the information and play it in the microphone, all to keep listeners informed. This included interviews with public officials and the location of safe sites. Stevens and his staff worked diligently to be as helpful and transparent as possible.

Stevens shared another memory from the flood: when police came to him and said they needed him to take action to settle restless community members. Days into the flood, people were wondering if they could leave their homes and resume their everyday routine. At the time, it was not safe, and Stevens was sent out to give them a visual and keep them at bay.

Stevens thought this was a bizarre request for a radio personality, but he agreed to help convey the magnitude of the situation. The best way for him to express this information was to go out on a rescue boat with a recorder and describe what he sees: vehicles and playgrounds underwater and the tops of street signs peeking above the flood line. “It was one of those moments where I wasn’t really thinking about what I was saying, it was just genuinely oh my god,” he said.

Stevens is also proud of the drive WCDO held for the local Toys for Tots in 2013 after the toy storage facility burnt down weeks before Christmas. WCDO was on the air raising money to replace the damaged items and ended up raising more than \$12,000 quickly. This made Christmas for the kids and reaffirmed the purpose of radio, to use their public platform for good.

However, when he looks back, Stevens is most proud of his staff. He is proud of them for not questioning the overtime hours and strange requests during the flood, and how efficiently they did their job and informed as many people as possible. Stevens still hears about the positive

impact and reassurance the station had during the flood to this day.

He praises Rob Ray, the WCDO Morning host, for having his own legacy as well. Stevens said that he has people come to him and say things like: “I don’t know what I would do without Rob in the morning, he’s like my alarm clock”.

WCDO truly is part of their listeners’ days, from playing oldies during lunch hour to doing giveaways on air to experiences like Water Safari and Broadway in Binghamton. When asked about the importance of Radio, Stevens claimed: “There are so many options to listen to music now, but radio is the only one that gives you constant information like weather and updates. When there’s a fire in Preston, can you ask Alexa for updates? Is Spotify going to tell you about the success of the Oxford Girls Basketball team?”

The tri-county heartbeat covers news and local sports. Stevens claims that often, both the home and opposing team listen to WCDO’s coverage of their game. The station also posts community events on their website calendar, visit: wcdonline.com to keep up to date with the station and to listen to the livestream anywhere, even outside the counties it broadcasts to.

Stevens has had a great career this far and makes sure that the radio maintains its status as a constant in the community. Not too many stations travel to report on sports games or share local events anymore. It disheartens him to watch broadcasting staff get cut across the country, and promises that as long as he is here, “radio will be live and local”.

Stevens said that he still feels a bit of nerve before he goes on air, just like he did behind a podium or a microphone speaking at his high school events. This nerve excites and motivates him to keep doing the work he does.

Craig Stevens’ career exemplifies the best that a small community has to offer, and he truly deserves to be recognized in this Hall of Fame. What a way to represent our community and continue to make it proud.



The Chobani plant in South Edmeston, where the company manufactures yogurt, oat milk, dairy- and plant-based creamers, and ready-to-drink coffee. (Submitted photo)

Rolling Antiquer's Old Car Club revs it up for 2024 -

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from across the region.

The Norwich shows featured a variety of old cars, trucks, military vehicles, muscle cars, motorcycles, tractors and old engines.

"We try and put on a show," said Strong. "We have a two day event now with the first day being Hot Rod Muscle Cars and the second day is Antique Classic Cars."

"One of the things we added to the show at the fairgrounds is 'Future Classics,' he said. "So if someone has a car that's pretty nice, come on and join the club."

Strong added, "One of the interesting vehicles we see at the show is a RatRod. Big Daddy Roth started this in the 60's or 70's. You take an older vehicle with a good frame but maybe the body isn't so great, tear off the body, start adding this, adding that, put in a different engine, transmission, different brakes and suspension, lights, etc. It all has to pass inspection so it's road worthy."

He said a lot of engineering and thought goes into it.

One of the good points of the Rat Rod is how accessible and inexpensive the hobby can be.

He said, "There's a lot of leeway on the hot rod muscle car side and for the other side we try and be more purest and yet, we aren't as fussy as the AACA who have been around since the 1935."

According to the Antique Automobile Club of America the club is the country's oldest and largest automotive historical society and is dedicated



An example of a "Rat Rod" - an older vehicle with a good frame and creative body and engine work. (Submitted photo)

to the preservation, restoration, and maintenance of automobiles and automotive history and has over 55,000 members.

New national show in 2023

Strong was president for the last six years and recently passed leadership in 2023 to Dan McGrew. Strong said the group is looking forward to the future and trying new ideas.

The club started planning the national car show two years before 2023 after receiving approval.

"We put on a three day national show in Hamilton at White Eagle, with a lot of planning and had to move it out of Norwich because we needed more hotels, and eating places," he said.

A few of the cars entered in the show consisted of a 1922 Ford

Model T, 1953 Packard Clipper, 1997 Cadillac Eldorado, 1956 Ford Thunderbird, 1987 Shelby GLHS, 1959 Austin-Healey 100/6, 1979 BMW 635CSI, 1965 Jaguar E-Type, and many more.

Strong said, "It was successful and we even made money. We try to do things maybe not to make a huge amount of money but not to go in the hole so we can afford to continue on.

We came out in a positive."

He said they had people come from as far as Baton Rouge Louisiana and Florida, pulling their cars in a trailer.

Rolling Antiquer's Old Car Club President Dan McGrew said, "We also planned a first outing for the show visitors, bussing them into Norwich to the Northeast Classic Car Museum and they were 'wowed'. They couldn't get over the cars we had in our museum. We arranged for a vendor outside the museum and shared additional eateries, etc. so they could explore and have a good time."

He said the following day the visitors were bussed to Cooperstown and enjoyed the experience.

"So, all in all, we pumped a lot of revenue back into Norwich, Hamilton, and Cooperstown," he added.

Strong said one of the perks of being a club member is they take road trips. He said they've gone as far as Reno and Detroit, gone through the Deerborne Museum and the most recent years have taken trips in the Northeast to Rhode Island and down to the Harley Factory in York Pennsylvania.

He said their non-profit club makes money through registration fees, gate fees, and food truck vendors' rental space fees, all of which support the costs for the meeting space at the Northeast Car Museum, bussing visitors, scholarships, fair-ground fees, and trips.

Appealing to a new generation

"Our membership has gone

from well over 100 people in the community, down to about 25 or so now," said Strong.

"We have a number of elderly women that came to the club via their husbands and although they may not be heavy participants with the cars, they still help out with the needs of the club and the shows and we couldn't do it without them."

Strong said the shows are important to the community as they are a big boost to the economy.

He said he would like to see more data collected and shared from Commerce Chenango on the economic input to the community from the different events that go on.

He would like to know how many extra tanks of fuel were sold, how many more hotels booked, and how many more meals sold.

McGrew said, "There's a lot of old cars and it just takes people wanting to be part of the club."

He said the club was a fun organization that shared knowledge and comradery while working on cars together.

"We're looking at doing some changes, one is coming up with a new name," McGrew said.

McGrew said, "We want to see new members, any age, any car, as long as you enjoy the car and if you want help to restore the car and have fun."

He explained they want to attract younger generation, even the AACA has updated their logo.

"We've been using is a 50's Chevy Apache Truck," said

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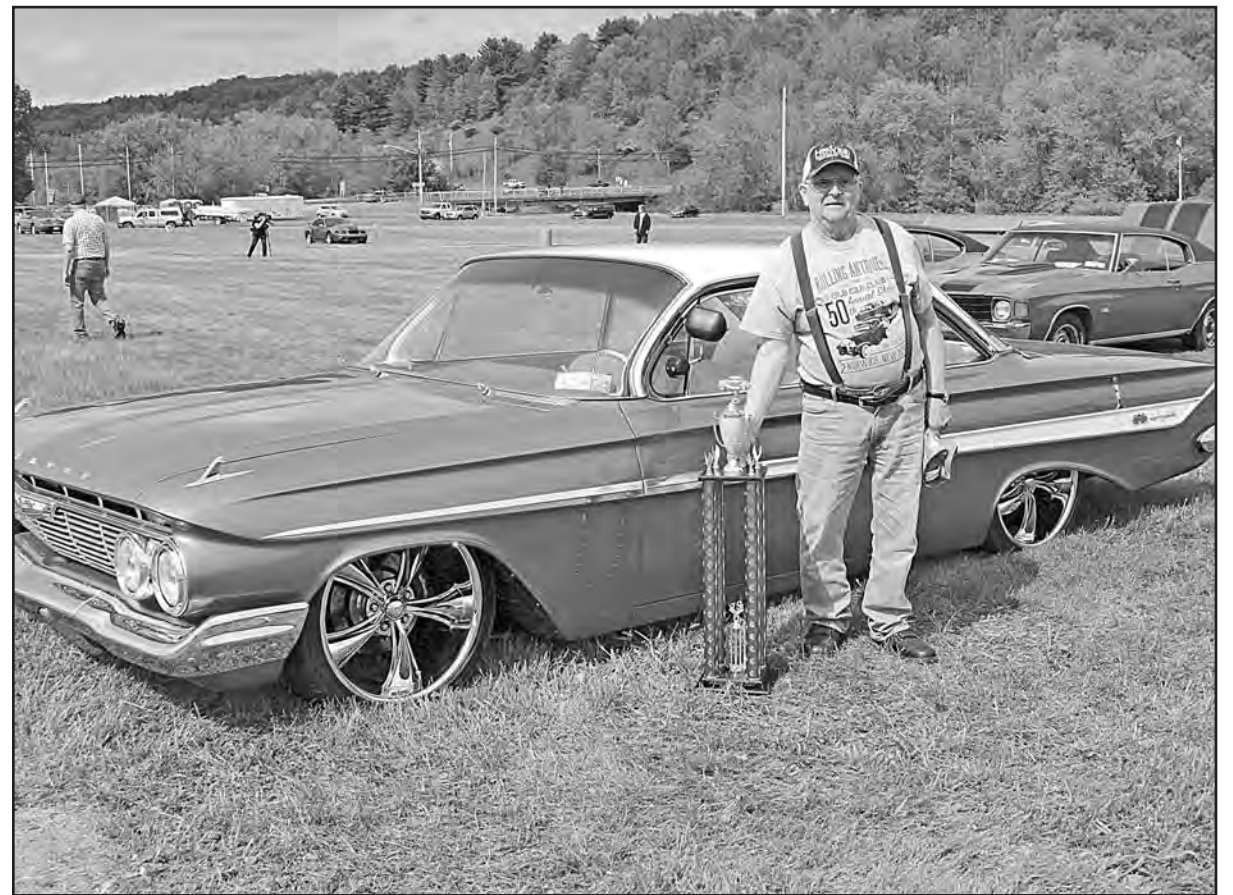
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Rolling Antiquer's Old Car Club revs it up for 2024 -

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McGrew. "So we want to move forward with something more recognizable that the younger generation can look at."

He said he also wants to change the name and get rid of the old concept and come up with something easier to convey. They will also be upgrading the website.

"The website has been around a long time and served its purpose, so we want to give it more pop and flavor with a younger attitude," said McGrew. "Showing it's a lively club, a club that does stuff."

He said he'd like to see the club give mini tours again when the weather's nice. They can all get their cars out and go hang out somewhere in the evening or afternoon and let people see the cars and come talk to them.

He said another item of discussion is the possibility of getting tours through the AACA.

"Instead of putting on a National Car Show like we did last summer at the White Eagle in Hamilton, this time we could have some type of tour that AACA would sponsor," said McGrew. "People from all over the country could come here and map out a nice little tour for them to take of upstate."

"Our non-profit group meets at the Northeast Classic Car Museum where we rent space and also rent space at the fairgrounds for the car show," he said.

Strong explained the club did all of the food preparation at the car shows in the past at the fairgrounds. They recently decided it might be more efficient to have food vendors.

McGrew said one of the ideas they have for the younger members that have children is to offer meetings twice a month, in order for members' schedules to not conflict with kids' summer activities, sports, family time, etc. or possibly meet at a restaurant or something like that. He said virtual meetings are a possibility too.

"This time of year, a lot of members have bugged out to Florida, so at least we can do a recording and post it on our website for those missing members to view it there and keep up on stuff," said McGrew.



The car club is looking for new members, "any age, any car, as long as you enjoy the car and if you want help to restore the car and have fun." Above: a cherry red 1955 Chevy Bel Air. (Submitted photo)

The benefits of sharing knowledge

The club looks to help others learn about older cars. McGrew said they would just need the garage and space to do it.

"I would think some of the young guys going to BOCES in the automotive classes would be interested in the club and there's gotta be a couple of elders that can pass on a few things, but on the other hand, the new technology is being taught to the younger generation and they can teach us about that and help us out with the newer cars," he said.

Strong said they had reached out to BOCES to see if any of the students would like to join the club.

"We did use some of those students to prep for the car show and all through the automotive group," he said. "And a few graphic arts students came up with designs for our t-shirts. They received free shirts once finished."

Strong said they give out two \$1,000 scholarships every year. One is for tools and the other for automotive curriculum anywhere in the country. When a student matriculates into a curriculum they will receive a registration number. That registration number then lets them know the student is in and if chosen, the money will be given to that school for purchases or studies.

"We get a lot of support from our community for our car shows but when communities

start losing events, organizations, churches, you begin to tear apart the fabric that holds the community together," said Strong. "It's very difficult to weave that back into a really viable situation. It's not just Norwich, it's all over the country."

Strong said the group hopes to find more participants willing to judge at the show.

For the past five or six years, a request for judging has been placed on the registration form. They ask at the gate too and would like to see more participants.

McGrew said, "You can't judge your own car class but you can judge another class. Even if you're not in the club, you can judge."

"I judged cars for the first time at the last car show when they had no one to judge the foreign cars," he said. "They knew I owned a foreign car, so I said okay and took the form and judged by checking off all the tick marks."

Strong added, "Some people just want to have their car seen. Others want to win a trophy. But 80 percent of the people that show up like what they're driving, being around like-minded people, and having a good time."

McGrew owns an MG he purchased in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1975 and at one time owned a 69 Camaro Convertible and a Datsun 240z.

For more information visit their website at raocc.org or email raoccny@gmail.com.



The annual Rolling Antiquers car show will be held on Memorial Day weekend at the fairgrounds. The cost is \$10 at the gate and allows visitors to enjoy the cars, and food truck vendors. Above, people look over the cars on Corvette row at one of the club's previous car shows. (Submitted photo)

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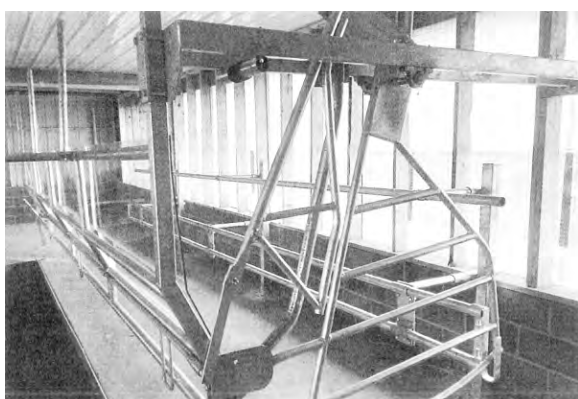
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