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An Inside Look: BNI helps Bluffs' business community network

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Members of the local business community met last Wednesday morning, as they do each week, to have some breakfast and learn more about each other.

"I shoot all kinds of photography needs," said Anne Risney Morgan, owner of Risney Photo and Design.

"I offer coaching to small business owners," said Douglas Christy, president of ProVision Coaching, Inc.

Each of those in attendance at this event talked about their businesses during '30-second commercials.'



Every Wednesday, members of the local business community gather at the Council Bluffs Senior Center to learn more of each other's occupation. They are members of Business Network International. Submitted photo

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They all belong to an organization called BNI, Business Network International, the largest of its kind in the world where members can share ideas, contacts and business referrals.

"It's been beneficial for me," said David Overholtzer, a certified public accountant. "It's fun to get together. It's a social element and you learn more about what people do."

He mentioned learning new things on what chiropractors do from listening to one of them who belongs to BNI.

"I didn't know chiropractors worked on infants," Overholtzer said.

There are 23 members at the moment who belong to the Council Bluffs BNI branch, and they represent all kind of businesses, from insurance to real estate, from lawn care and carpet cleaning to law and accounting, and more.

They meet around 7:30 a.m. every Wednesday at The Center.

A yearly fee and monthly fees are required.

Photographer Morgan has been involved for about three years now after going to a meeting as a visitor with a member.

"The thing I like about BNI is it's a set format. You don't waste time at the meetings because we're business owners," she said. "You are there to learn about each other's business and to pass along quality referrals. You also get tips on how to be a good networker."

Usually the members will each speak during a "'60-second commercial" about their company, also known as the "manager's minute."

This allows time not just to provide a general view of the business, but also to seek specific referrals or provide helpful information to the others depending on the time of the year.

For example, Overholtzer informed the group during his commercial that they can now start filing their income taxes electronically.

During spring, Morgan will begin seeking referrals for high school graduation pictures, she said, while fall and winter is a good time to seek wedding picture referrals.

She also seeks referrals for sports team photos from the other members.

"Everybody knows somebody who plays on a team," Morgan said.

Members will even visit each other's business for 30 minutes or so to get a first-hand look at what they do. This provides a more knowledgeable picture on that business should someone ask for a referral, Morgan said.

The members also take part in charitable ways. This fall, for example, members purchased Halloween costumes that were given to Heartland Family Services, plus toys and other items at Christmas to the Micah House.

A goal is for the local chapter is to have 35 members in the near future, Morgan said.



The advertisement banner features the slogan "Building Relationships for Life!" in a blue script font on the left. Below it is the address "I-29 & HIGHWAY 30 • MISSOURI VALLEY, IA". In the center, the text "Introducing WOODHOUSE CHEVY-BUICK-PONTIAC" is displayed, with "WOODHOUSE" in large blue block letters and "CHEVY-BUICK-PONTIAC" in smaller blue block letters below it. To the right of this text is a blue slanted box with "WOODHOUSE" written in white. Further right are the logos for Chevrolet (a gold bowtie), Buick (a circular logo with three shields), and Pontiac (a red downward-pointing arrowhead). At the bottom right of the banner, the contact information "(712) 642-4131 • WWW.WOODHOUSE.COM" is provided.

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