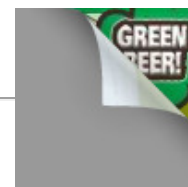


Cakora has big plans to follow Herget retirement



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By Ed McMenamain
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PEKIN, Ill. -

Skip Schermerhorn remembers struggling, with the rest of the competition, to build a simple one-man vessel during a cardboard boat regatta during a Marigold Festival years ago.

When he looked up, Henry Cakora had already assembled a giant, floating, four-person galleon. "He really was probably the No. 1 entrepreneur in the city of Pekin," said Schermerhorn, president of Herget Bank in Pekin. "He is an individual that can do anything."

Cakora retired from Herget's board of directors this month after 35 years of service. Cakora, also former president/CEO/chairman of Tazewell Machine Works Inc. in Pekin and member of Pekin Hospital's board of directors, said retirement will give him time to oil paint and devote his entrepreneurial energy to the Tazewell County Animal Protection Society no-kill shelter, or TAPS.

He said he wants to find a political solution to the endless birthing and then euthanizing of pets. "I don't want this to come out in any shape or form against the animal control," he said. "They have to do what they're doing. We allow them to be born and then we kill them — and I want to work on the other end — prevention."

"I've got a lot of ideas. I'm not prepared to put them out yet, because they're too green. And I know it's going to be difficult. I think there's a way to do it."

Cakora is also on the TAPS board, and has served as president.

TAPS Director Angela Blackman said Cakora laid out the shelter's computer operating system and was instrumental in fundraising for the new facility.

"We've been so lucky to have him," she said. "For me he's been a mentor, and a friend." For longtime residents of Pekin, Cakora's work with TAPS over the years is just one of many places his presence is felt.

It was his impetus that created the giant sundial in the Mineral Springs Park Sunken Gardens on Court street near Pekin Hospital.

Under his watch, Tazewell Machine Works grew from a few thousand square feet operation with 20 employees, to its current 180,000-square-foot location with more than 100 employees.

After returning to Pekin after graduating from Northwestern University in 1959, Cakora was hired on as an engineer at the business, started by his father.

By the mid 1960s, the keys had been turned over to Cakora.

"I was still young," he said. "It was hard because you're intimidated by the age of your customers. You just had to go and even if you got intimidated you had to do something. But it always worked out. Maybe not the first try but always the second."

Cakora then passed down the reins to his son, Mack Cakora, in 2000, who is also taking his place on the Herget board.

"In the foundry business, the best thing was probably the opportunity to be creative and as an engineer, make machinery — and money," he said. "The worst was probably the heavy handedness of some of our larger customers — no price increases, no matter what. Even today it's a struggle just to put out a business with the energy prices and the metal prices and not having much recourse. It's not fun to run like that."

Cakora, and Herget, rode out the '70s recession and the Peoria area's economic collapse in the '80s.

"Everybody had property to sell and that included Herget," he said. "You couldn't give homes away. It was rough."

He said his favorite times with the bank have been within the last four or five years, when it began to more aggressively market to customers.

Like with TAPS, Cakora brought his engineering background and accompanying computer skills to help update the bank's loan software in the '80s.

Schermerhorn said the bank still uses many of the models and graphs created by Cakora more than 20 years ago.

"He's had a major, major impact on the community that people don't even think about," he said.

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