

# Liebler, Atkins, unite to insure customers

by Tom Wearing | Mar 10, 2021

IMLAY CITY — Two familiar names in the insurance industry have reached a mutually favorable business agreement.

Jeff Liebler, owner of Liebler Agency Insurance, Inc., announced this week that he has purchased the Paul Atkins Insurance Group at 230 E. Third St. in downtown Imlay City.

Atkins, who had spent nearly 40 years in the insurance field, is retiring to pursue other interests and opportunities.

He leaves behind a loyal customer base which Liebler intends to serve with the same degree of care and professionalism.

Liebler said the opportunity to acquire the business ensures a smooth transition and a continuum of quality service for Atkins' customers and clients.

"We've known each other for a long time and I have a great deal of respect for Paul," Liebler said this week. "We see this merger as being good for everyone involved."

Atkins' history



**Jeff Liebler and Paul Atkins have forged both personal and business relationships during their accumulated years of serving the insurance needs of local residents and businesses.**

Atkins began his career in 1978, as a “rookie” agent for his father’s insurance agency, Atkins Insurance in Marlette.

In January 1983, he purchased the former Muir Insurance Agency from Larry and Theda Lichtenfelt of Imlay City.

At the time, Paul and his wife, Marilee, were the sole employees, however, after the couple’s second son was born in 1985, she opted to stay home.

“Our growth was rapid in those early days,” Atkins recalled, due in large part to the considerable time he spent meeting with prospective clients.

“In 1987, we moved out onto M-53, and two years later we bought the building at 1814 S. Cedar St.

“Van Dyke was a two-lane road at the time and the Kroger Plaza had not yet been built across the street,” Atkins said. “With the exponential increase in traffic and the dangers in pulling out onto Van Dyke at certain times of the day, we decided to sell that building and move back downtown.”

The need to move downtown led Atkins to purchase and renovate the building at 230 E. Main St.

“The building was owned by Dr. Glenn Smith when we first got to town,” he recalled. “We ‘doctored’ with him for a year or two before he retired.”

#### Onset of technology

Looking back at the evolution of the insurance industry, Atkins spoke about his introduction to computers.

“We had a Radio Shack a few doors down at the time and they had just come out with the so-called personal computer, a Tandy or something like that. I bought the computer and a book on DOS and taught myself how to program,” he said.

Learning to program provided Atkins the ability to write his own programs and calculate auto insurance rates for various companies.

“These comparative raters could calculate the rates for several companies in a couple of minutes,” he recalled, which gave him a distinct advantage.

Atkins said utilizing available technology has been beneficial to him and the insurance industry as a whole.

“We now serve several times the number of clients with the same staffing levels we did years ago with paper files,” said Atkins. “What we have noticed is that our clients absolutely value our accessibility.

“When people have a claim or a problem, they want local people who know their names and can come in and talk to,” Atkins opined. “Most of our clients value the relationship more than saving a little bit on their insurance.”

#### Time to slow down

Having reached the pinnacle of a rewarding career, Atkins views the merger with Liebler as the perfect scenario for their respective futures.

“In the past year or so I’ve been getting tired,” Atkins said. “I’m 65 and still love working with clients, but I want to slow down and work part time. It’s for that reason we are joining the Liebler Agency.”

He noted that the new arrangement allows his associate, Jennifer, to work alongside Liebler and his staff in his new building located at 566 S. Cedar St. (Van Dyke).

Atkins was quick to note the irony.

“Yep, we’re moving back out onto Van Dyke,” he said.



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## Idea floated to disband dept.

Mayor will host one-on-one discussions Thursday, April 1

By Tom Wearing  
twearing@pageone-inc.com

**IMLAY CITY** — City officials have decided to temporarily postpone discussion of a plan to disband the Imlay City Police Department and place it under the authority of the Lapeer County Sheriff's Department. City Manager Craig Horton reported earlier that city commissioners would discuss the idea at next Tuesday's, April 6, Imlay City



Imlay City Police patrol cars could soon become a thing of the past if city commissioners decide to disband the city's police department and place it under the control of the Sheriff's Department.

Commission meeting. On Tuesday, March 30, Mayor Jai Kempf announced that such public discussion will now take place at a later date.

"I will not be placing the police discussion on the April 6 agenda, in service to our residents," Kempf said. "We will postpone this discussion so that every resident will have the opportunity to join in on this very important

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## Growing season gets an early start

Valley Farms planting onion crop in March

By Maria Brown  
mbrown@pageone-inc.com

**IMLAY TWP.** — Just four days after spring officially "sprang," a crew from Valley Farms was in the mock fields, starting to plant their 2021 onion crop. Craig Brandt, who operates the vegetable farm with his brother, Chris, said March 24 was the earliest date in recent history that they've been able to put seed in the ground.

"We typically try to get in the fields sometime around April 9 and last year it didn't happen until April 26. Usually, at this time of year, the fields still have standing water in them," Craig said on Thursday afternoon looking out over the activity from Pennell Road near Bowers.

The farm's field crews started planting on Wednesday, March 24 and got their first 60

acres—a mix of red and yellow varieties—in by the end of day Thursday before rain moved in overnight. On Thursday, longtime employee Joe Pantoja was behind the wheel of the tractor pulling the planter. Craig said the soil and weather conditions were just right. The soil had drained sufficiently to be workable but there was still some moisture

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Valley Farms employees plant onions on a Pennell Road field Thursday afternoon.



Imlay City firefighters at the scene of a May 2020 barn fire in Imlay Township. The department is looking to recruit new members to grow their force to 20.

## Imlay City Fire Dept. needs new recruits

Fire Chief Rick Horton says 'commitment' a requisite

By Tom Wearing  
twearing@pageone-inc.com

**IMLAY CITY** — Responding to a fire alarm at any time of day and in all types of weather is not something that appeals to everyone.

Which explains why the Imlay City Fire Department is currently in serious need of new firefighter recruits.

Fire Chief Rick Horton is putting out the

and the community," Horton said.

In exchange for that commitment, new recruits will be provided free training along with required protective gear and equipment.

"It's not just Imlay City that is hurting for firefighters," Horton said. "All of our local fire departments need people."

"I can remember a time when there was a waiting list to join the fire department," Horton recalled, "but that's not

## Cases, variant counts surge in Lapeer County

By Maria Brown  
mbrown@pageone-inc.com

**LAPEER COUNTY** — COVID-19 case numbers continue to surge and health officials believe virus variants are playing a role in the uptick.

As of Monday morning, 37 confirmed cases were hospitalized locally with six individuals in the intensive care unit and four requiring a ventilator. Lapeer County is now ranked sixth in the state for daily new cases per 100,000, 11th for positive test rates and has the 12th highest infection rate in Michigan.

Lapeer County Health Department Director Kathy Haskins notes the number of confirmed virus variants has grown exponentially.

One week ago, the first three B.117 variants

were confirmed and as of March 29, that number had climbed to 23 total. Since then the first case of the B.1351, or South African variant has been confirmed.

"These variants are concerning because they are associated with increased transmissibility, leading to faster spread of the virus and potentially increasing numbers of cases, hospitalizations and deaths. Lapeer County, as well as many parts of the state have experienced rising cases of COVID-19 over the past several weeks," Haskins wrote in her Monday report.

"It is imperative that we continue to take precautions when out and about, and get vaccinated as soon as you are able, to minimize both the known serious consequences of COVID-

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call for local men and women who are willing to make such a commitment to themselves and their community.

Horton admits that not everyone is cut out to be a firefighter, but as the old adage applies, he says, "someone's gotta do it."

Currently that

are willing and able to make the commitment."

Horton said it's the "commitment" that separates those who talk about being a firefighter and those who actually do it.

"We're looking for able bodies who are willing to get trained and to serve their neighbors

that way anymore."

He said Inlay City Fire Department members meet the second and fourth Mondays of each month at the new fire hall on E. Borland Rd.

For further information about the Inlay City Fire Service or to leave a message at the fire hall call 810-724-6262.



A special vaccine clinic is being planned for 16 and 17-year-olds only on April 13. The health department will work with a partner agency to administer the Pfizer vaccine, the only one approved for individuals under 18.

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## Address

Tri-City Times  
P.O. Box 278  
594 North Almont Ave.  
Imlay City, MI. 48444

## Phone

1-810-724-0254

## Office Hours

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