**Tom Lesnak Bio**

Pronounced (Less-neck)

Tom Lesnak was appointed as President of the Independence Chamber of Commerce in March 2018. Prior to that time, he served as the President of the Independence Council of Economic Development, a position he took in 2007 when he relocated to Independence from St. Joseph, Missouri where he had been the Senior Vice President of Economic Development for the Saint Joseph Chamber of Commerce. Tom’s degree in broadcasting from Northwest Missouri State University helped him realize a passion for public service, and after a 10-year broadcasting career, he has worked in the public sector doing city administration, community economic development and as well as working for Chamber of Commerce organizations.   In his current role with the Independence Chamber of Commerce, he oversees 635 members and a staff of 8. The Independence Chamber also puts on the annual SantaCaliGon Festival every Labor Day weekend with over 300,000 in attendance. His passion for using technology to solve problems, improve efficiencies, and raise the profile of Chamber members is what motivates him on a daily basis.

**Alec Cook Bio**

Alec Cook is the sole owner of Continental Siding after spending 10 years with the company starting as a part-time employee and started working his way up through the ranks. In 2014, he was named as General Manager and then in 2017 became a minority shareholder and the first-ever business partner of Jerry O’Neal who was the founder of the company. In 2019, Alec completed his acquisition of the company and is now the sole owner.

Since taking over as the owner of Continental Siding in 2019, Alec Cook has earned an unprecedented number of awards and other accolades for all of the effort that he has put in. This began with the local mayor choosing Continental Siding to represent Independence as a Great American Story. The awards continued as Alec Cook’s leadership enabled Continental Siding to earn the manufacturer of the year award from the Economic Development Council, a Philanthropic Business of the year award, the 2020 Business of the Year award, Better Business Bureau Integrity Award, and the Corporate Citizen of the Year award by the Truman Heartland Community Foundation. All of these awards speak to the quality of Continental Siding’s work and the commitment to the local community that Alec has built into the fabric of the company.

Furthermore, Continental Siding owner Alec Cook has even recently been named to the 2021 class of 40 Under Forty in Ingram’s Business Magazine. This honor reflects the remarkable extent to which Alec Cook has stepped up, learned everything he can, and became a leader at such a young age.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, Continental Siding owner Alec knew that the right thing to do was to suspend all sales commercials on TV. Instead, he realized that there were much more important things to focus on at that time rather than siding. Instead of pulling their TV ads altogether, that money was instead spent to promote positive messages throughout the community to help raise people’s spirits during what was considered to be the darkest time for many local homeowners. Instead of just saving that money and not doing anything at all, Alec knew the right thing to do was to try and be part of the solution and give hope when things were so scary and intense for so many people.

Alec initiated a 100 Days of Giving program from day one of the stay at home order so that they were able to support the local community and give back to those that continued to support all local businesses throughout the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Continental Siding offered a matching donation of $10,000 to City Union Mission, donated 30,000 meals to Harvesters, gave $500 gift cards to 32 single mothers in need, paid 20% pay bonus to all staff for all three payrolls of the stay-at-home order, and also provided a $500 “someone in need” bonus to all staff members so they could be generous to someone they knew that was in need.

Later in the year, Alec organized a group of other Community Leaders to help local businesses that were struggling. Alec understood that supporting the Independence Chamber of Commerce was the morally responsible thing to do so the Chamber could, in turn, support every business of all sizes throughout the community. As part of his efforts, the Chamber of Commerce added 17 members who joined at the Community Leader tier of $7,500 annually and was a Co-Chair of a membership campaign that saw 111 new businesses join the Chamber. The Chamber as a result grew their membership by 17% during a pandemic and is now able to further support businesses in the community as the economic recovery begins.

Alec and his wife Allison are both graduates of Truman High School and have established a college scholarship fund for Independence area students to support education and workforce development.