



BUSINESS

A legacy of commitment: Rick Utter hands reins to son Keith

Story & photo by Barbi Walker-Walsh

In an era where following in your father's footsteps is less common than it once was, Tempe businessman Rick Utter is passing the torch to his son Keith.

After 34 years of service to American Family Insurance and its customers, Rick is retiring, leaving his legacy of commitment and service to his 33-year-old son.

"They started this agency before I was even born," Keith said.

"So I grew up in the business, you know, seeing how hard they've worked."

Growing up and witnessing the relationships his father built over the past 30-plus years inspired Keith.

"It's a relationship business," Rick said of the insurance industry. In fact, a colleague of Rick's got him into the industry back in '89 when he was working as a probation officer.

Adding that some of the best agents end up being referrals.

Now, the referral relationship has been passed on to Keith. Keith occupies the big corner office, with windows that look out onto the foliage and let the sunshine in, while Dad is now in Keith's old office.

Smaller and windowless, but with a fridge and coffee maker, Rick is happy for the switch, he said with a laugh, that he can hide out in there.

Even though Keith wishes his parents would just go sit on a beach somewhere, he really does like working together. They have a good relationship, and both say it's all been a positive experience.

Rick said that working together as a family (Keith's mom and wife also work in the office)

"It's been fun having him here."



Sometimes a parent brings a kid into the business, but when the young adult realizes all the hard work—that all they saw from the outside was the fun part—they're no longer interested in taking over, Rick said.

Rightfully so, building a successful business of any kind is hard work. Building and maintaining a career based on relationships in one's community with people you've known for decades is especially hard work.

Which is why the transition for Keith and Rick is so essential. Keith already has sales experience, and when his dad said he was ready to retire, it seemed like the right time for Keith to take over. As Rick toys with how often he'll come into the office, he still has his foot in the door and wants his customers to know it's still the same Utter team.

For now, the plan is to keep on much of what they've been doing, both Utter men said. They've built such a great foundation here, and he doesn't want to mess that up, Keith said. But with a new generation comes newfound energy, and Keith is eager to go out and find new business, too.

"You know, we're looking forward to putting our own little spin on it, whatever that looks like."

Funding OK'd for resource officers at 2 Kyrene schools

The Chandler City Council has approved agreements with the Kyrene School Districts to provide school resource officers at all public high schools and middle schools in Chandler through June 2026.

The agreements, approved during the City Council's Dec. 7 meeting, fund a combined total of 12 school resource officer positions to serve at assigned districts, which also include Chandler Unified and Mesa.

Grants from the Arizona Department of Education School Safety Program cover nearly all the personnel costs for the positions.

Any remaining personnel costs are split equally between the city and school districts.

Two officers will be dedicated to Kyrene and assigned to Aprende and Pueblo middle schools. Nine officers will be dedicated to Chandler Unified School District.

One officer will be dedicated to Mesa Public Schools and assigned to Summit Academy.

School resource officers are sworn members of the Chandler Police Department who perform police duties and provide a law enforcement officer presence on school campuses. Officers also assist administrators, teachers and students with school safety, security and law enforcement education.

Workforce aid now available in Tempe

Tempe is expanding its free workforce development services to help businesses fill positions. The program will work directly with employers to explore what talent they need in the pipeline, what jobs they need to fill now and what more is needed to help bolster the local labor pool.

The service is designed to lay the groundwork for a stronger economy.

"Tempe is committed to helping the local business community fill any gaps in their talent pipeline," said Tim Burch, director of community health and human services.

"Through this position, Tempe will be able to continue attracting high-quality businesses and ensuring their success, which shows a commitment to supporting our residents and workforce."