

## INCITE!

## Why would they?

At first glance, it would seem like a solution that would solve more than one problem. Look closer, depending on how it's presented, and you realize that it might just have the opposite effect.

For nearly a year, the Chamber's Public Policy Committee has been looking at ways to help Blair County's municipalities to fill open positions. Bellwood Bor-



Joe Hurd

Blair County Chamber

ough's recent decision to potentially reduce its number of council positions, due to the inability to find people willing to run, indicates that we still have some work to do. As our committee initially kicked-around some recruitment strategies, the plan was to identify some business leaders who might see the importance of getting involved politically. After all, a whole slew of municipal dollars come directly from the businesses within our municipalities. Doesn't it make sense for those dollars to be allocated by those who provide them?

When the call went out for possible candidates, it was obvious that we had targeted the wrong group. These were people who were looking for fewer involvements. It was time for others to step-up. It was also time for the committee to move to Plan B.

With the county facing projections of limited long-term population growth, the concern of being able to retain young people moved front-and-center. Among the incentives in that retention effort, beyond the need to provide family-sustaining jobs, was to find ways to bring young people and new ideas into the decision-making process. Two birds with one stone? It seemed possible.

Discussions are underway between the Public Policy Committee and the Young Professionals of Blair County, another Chamber program. Public Policy's pitch is simple: If you want to have input into what happens to you and your community, you need to be willing to throw your hat into the political ring.

In so many ways it makes sense. And in so many ways it doesn't. The political climate in the country today is horrific. The regard for elected officials is at an all-time low. Why would anyone – young or old – want to subject themselves to the type of ridicule and disrespect that have become standard at all levels of government?

As one committee member, contemplating that question, opined, "Because somebody has to."

Maybe that somebody will be our young professionals. Maybe they'll be able to see beyond the obstacles to the inherent good. Yet you still have to wonder. Why would they?

## Fiore Furniture takes Covid head-on

When Covid-19 reared its ugly head earlier this year, many businesses braced for an impact that they expected would bring them to their knees. Bob and Karen Fiore at Fiore Furniture in Altoona not only didn't panic, they began to look for ways of turning a negative into a positive.

"In retail, you can't be complacent," Bob pointed out. "It doesn't take a pandemic to throw obstacles in your direction. Our business has been around since 1939. My father and his brothers weathered many storms and came out of them even stronger. It can be done and we're determined to do it."

So far, so good. Governor Wolf's mandate designating which businesses were essential didn't include Fiore Furniture. That didn't deter the Fiore's.

"We closed to the public on March 17<sup>th</sup>," Bob reported. "We continued to sell online and by phone until we were allowed to re-open on May 15<sup>th</sup>. We took the time while

we were closed to add four galleries – La-Z-Boy Comfort Studio, Mattress 1<sup>st</sup>, Smith Brothers and Daniel's Amish. Without Covid, that probably doesn't happen."

The real downside created by the pandemic for retailers like Fiore's wasn't that they didn't have buyers, it was the limited amount of products they had to sell.

"Furniture factories were also closed and when they opened they were at a reduced capacity due to the limitations of distancing employees," Bob explained. "This created a shortage of product and a longer lead-time for special orders. This was evident as early as June so we placed large orders with our manufacturers so that we'd have product to sell throughout the Christmas season."

Did they really need product? After all, who waits until a pandemic to buy furniture? According to Bob Fiore, a whole lot of people.

"The circumstances created opportunities for businesses like ours," he noted. "As people were forced to



Bob and Karen Fiore were determined to take a positive approach to the challenges presented to local retailers by Covid-19. Fiore Furniture has been in business since 1939.

stay home, one of their priorities was home improvement. They looked around and saw ways to change their living environment. We've done incredibly well and believe that others in our industry have probably also done well."

That's important to the Fiore's who understand the importance of being part of a strong business community. "We're strong proponents of the Chamber's Buy Here. Thrive Here. initiative," Bob emphasized. "We recognize that it's our local businesses

that support our various charities. The recovery from Covid in our Blair County economy will likely be due to the willingness of our local businesses to look out for one another." (Fiore Furniture has been a Chamber Member since 1956.)

## Young Entrepreneurs Academy welcomes seventeen students

The fifth class of the Chamber's Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!) program began its 25-week business-building experience on October 6<sup>th</sup>. The national program, headquartered in Rochester, New York, provides instruction, visits to industry, an investor panel event and a trade show.

The 2021 class in Blair County consists of seventeen students from five schools.

"It appears to be a spirited group with no shortage of creative ideas," acknowledged Royce Boyd, who is beginning her fourth year as the YEA! Program Manager. "Some of them already have an idea for a business, others are kicking some ideas around. It generally turns out that way."

Once again this year, the YEA! program will have the good fortune of having the same three instructors for the fourth consecutive year. Matt Stuckey, Jamie Stumph and Paul Cooney have provided expertise and consistency.

"Our success as a program has been heavily tied to these three people as well as to our group of mentors,"



Kiersten Biddle, Lucas Zimmerman (center) and Zachary Barton work on an assignment at a recent Young Entrepreneurs Academy session.

Boyd pointed out. "We've also been able to attract some very accomplished session speakers that help our students to piece things together. There's a lot to learn about starting a business."

The students realize that too.

"I'm looking forward to learning as much as I can about what's involved," admitted Kiersten Biddle of Central High School. "This program seems like a really great opportunity

and I'm excited to see how it goes."

Reece Boland of Hollidaysburg Area High School agrees.

"I've heard a lot about YEA! from other people familiar with the program," he disclosed. "They talk about being able to work with people who have run their own companies for a long time and who understand the best ways to proceed. That type of success is what we're all looking for."

## Chamber's Young Professionals set seminar on home buying

The Young Professionals of Blair County, a program of the Chamber, will hold a seminar on October 22<sup>nd</sup> from noon to 1:30 p.m. at the Devorris Center for Business Development. The topic will be, "Home Buying in Today's Market" and will feature Adam Conrad of Perry Wellington as speaker.

The presentation will

focus on financing, understanding the buying process and knowing how to be prepared for a move. The cost to attend the seminar is \$20/person and \$10 for those who prefer to attend by Zoom. Lunch is included for attendees and space is limited.

To register, visit the Chamber Website at [www.blairchamber.com](http://www.blairchamber.com).



Adam Conrad

## SETTING THE PACE

## Tara Saltzburg Chamber Ambassador

**1. Title and place of work:** Director of Sales and Marketing - Blair County Convention Center.

**2. Years with current position:** January will be one year.

**3. Positions held in the Chamber:** A member of the Chamber Ambassador committee.

**4. Family:** Husband - Mark; Son - Trey (5); Two puppies - Forrest and Togo.

**5. Community organizations:** I've been a member of The Penn-Mont Academy Gala Committee for three years. This will be my second year as a co-chair. I am also a member of the AYSO 452 board and I assist with coaching the 4-5 year olds.

**6. Hobbies/leisure:** I enjoy going for hikes with my family, teaching Power Yoga at Point of Fitness, working on my e-commerce clothing business (Westyn Baby) and skiing!

**7. Education:** I graduated from Penn State (University Park) where I was a member of the Women's Varsity Soccer Team. I was a Big Ten Distinguished Scholar and graduated in 2010 with a B.S. in Elementary Education.

**8. First job:** Territory Sales Manager for a medical device company

**9. I would like to be known for:** I want to be known for being a great mother, a loyal friend, and a smart, savvy businesswoman.

**10. Business role model:**



Tara Saltzburg

Sara Blakely (Spanx); Susan Petersen (Freshly Picked); Phil Knight (Nike). **11. Your thoughts about the Chamber:** I've been a member of the Chamber for years. I appreciate the many events and resources available for Chamber professionals, most notably, The President's Forum. Being a member has given me an incredible opportunity to connect with local professionals across a multitude of industries, many of whom have been working in Blair County far longer than I have. I appreciate the Chamber organizing it - It's been a pleasure and an honor to be part of it.

**12. Your thoughts about Blair County:** I love Blair County! I appreciate the beautiful seasons and small-town feel. I'm from a beach town in NJ, but once I found my way to the mountains, I never looked back. This has been a tough year but we are steadfast and resilient and I'm confident that Blair County will come out of this stronger and better than ever.

Digital Marketing Zoom  
Tuesday, October 20 ■ 2:00 PM

Call the Chamber at 814-943-8151  
to register and receive link.



## Disinfection of Virus-Infected Sites

The **COVID-19 Pandemic** has enhanced the need for decontamination of common interior surfaces and the management of potentially contaminated materials in businesses, healthcare settings, retail environments, institutional facilities, government facilities and many other environments which we Americans occupy daily. **Keystone Response Services** is ready to assist with your decontamination needs. Our services are delivered by trained experts, giving your organization the ability to act quickly and effectively to remediate dangerous public health threats. We understand that the health and well being of you, your family, and employees are foremost and are our top priority.

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