



**Altoona Mirror**

*Making It Happen For You*

# Business Insight

The content for this page is coordinated by the Blair County Chamber of Commerce in cooperation with the Altoona Mirror

## INCITE

### Getting past tomorrow

As a Journalism student many years ago, I was familiar with the name Dorothy Dix. I knew that she was a well-respected writer and was the country's original syndicated advice columnist for women. At one point it was estimated that she had 60 million readers.

Many people who know me get a big kick out of the fact that I still rely on the



**Joe Hurd**

Blair County Chamber

Franklin Planner to keep my schedule and house my daily to-do list. My reason is simple: Why would you trust technology to perform those functions when you can write your upcoming plans in a space smaller than a postage stamp? As you might expect, my optometrist is very important to me.

One other advantage to the Franklin Planner is that each day it provides some pearl of wisdom from someone who has said something profound at a certain point in their life and who would be very surprised to know that people are still paying attention to it. One day last week, that pearl came from Dorothy Dix.

Dorothy died in 1951 so she didn't enjoy the double-whammy of living through a pandemic and an atrocious political environment all at the same time. She did, however, live through two World Wars, a Depression and enough other periods of unrest to qualify her to say something memorable and have it appear on the hallowed pages of the Franklin Planner.

Dorothy's quote last week was this: "I have learned to live each day as it comes and not to borrow trouble by dreading tomorrow. It is the dark menace of the future that makes cowards of us."

Tomorrow is Election Day. For those of us who can't bear to watch one more political commercial, hear one more baseless allegation or tolerate one more mean-spirited exchange between people who should know better, it is happening just in the nick of time.

When I read what Dorothy Dix had to say, I found it both inspirational and foreboding. It is not easy, with everything that has transpired during the past ten months, to keep dread at arms-length. I applaud those who can do it and wish I was one of them.

Perhaps it is the dark menace of the future that concerns so many of us. As people lose hope and so much of what has sustained us in the past diminishes in value, being a coward will be the least of our problems.

## Health provider supports outreach

If one thing is especially true about healthcare in a place like Blair County it is that the more providers willing to help, the more successful the outcomes. That thought process is why, 35-years-ago, the Primary Health Network was born.

Primary Health Network is the largest Community Health Center in Pennsylvania. It takes great pride in implementing innovative technologies and programs to enhance access to healthcare services. Some of those programs and services include free medical transportation, healthcare scholarships, a sliding fee discount scale and telehealth services.

"We are also certified as an Age-Friendly Health System," explained Sara Rupp, Marketing Director for PHN. "As such, we follow evidence-based practices to provide the best possible care to our older adult patients and their family caregivers. Currently, only 400 other health systems across the United States hold this certification." There are two Primary

Health Network locations in Altoona. Altoona Behavioral Health is at 620 Howard Avenue and Altoona Community Health Center is at 1701 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

"We work with all of the local health systems and behavioral health services in the community to communicate and collaborate," Rupp pointed out. "As an example, our Altoona Behavioral Health location works directly with UPMC Altoona inpatient and crisis services to provide seamless transitions of care."

Blair County is just one piece of a very large puzzle that began with the opening of a small community health center site in the Shenango Valley in 1984. Since then, Primary Health Network has grown to become one of the largest Federally Qualified Health Centers in the nation. It staffs more than 150 physicians, dentists, psychiatrists and certified nurse practitioners as well as 400 support staffers. Each year, PHN serves more than 80,000 patients in sixteen counties in PA and one county in Ohio.



The Primary Health Network, which expanded to Blair County in 2008, has been a valuable community partner.

"We expanded to Blair County in 2008," Rupp reported. "Since then, we have witnessed countless positive patient outcomes as the result of our model of care."

They have also been good citizens, particularly during Covid-19. They held a donation drive where employ-

ees designated a portion of their paychecks to be given to a local food pantry. Primary Health Network matched all employee donations at a 5:1 ratio. As a result, \$3,075 was given to the Altoona Food Bank.

"It's important that the Blair County community

knows who we are and the services we provide," Rupp emphasized. "We've been members of the Blair County Chamber for several years and that has helped us to make many valuable connections. We look forward to playing a key role in the county's healthcare future."

## Hotel GM makes loud impact in a quietly efficient manner

Donna Helsel can remember it like it was yesterday. Fresh out of Penn State's Hotel/ Restaurant and Institutional Management program, she had landed a job at a Blair County hotel as a night auditor with aspirations of moving up the corporate ladder. The next sound she heard was a thud.

"The owner of the hotel told the manager, 'She has to go. She'll never make it. She's too quiet,'" Helsel remembers. "That was not what I wanted to hear."

It was also not something that she was willing to believe. After eight years at that hotel, Helsel moved-on to Motel 6 where she spent the next 21-years, the last twelve as general manager. During that time she won several awards, including Area and Regional GM of the Year.

Helsel is now general manager of Comfort Inn Altoona, a position she was hired for in February.



Donna Helsel, General Manager of Comfort Inn Altoona, has won a number of awards for her leadership abilities. She has more than 30 years in hotel management.

Although it was not the easiest time to undertake a new position, she has embraced the opportunity.

"I was able to jump right in because of my experience," Helsel pointed out. "This is a great property with an outstanding reputation." The challenges posed by Covid-19 haven't dented her enthusiasm.

"The main challenge is to satisfy people within the new rules and guidelines," she explained. "The expectations don't change, nor should they. Our occupancy numbers are not great but overall not bad. We continue to do our best"

(Comfort Inn Altoona has been a member of the Chamber since 1999.)

## Owl is no pussycat as Chamber continues technology advancement

As Covid-19 throws the Blair County Chamber from practicality to creativity, at least as it pertains to advances in technology, it is no surprise that it is the least tech-savvy member of the Chamber staff who expresses the most amazement.

"This thing is incredible," gushes Chamber President Joe Hurd after a demonstration of the Chamber's new "Owl." The Owl is a device that allows the Chamber to hold live meetings with a Zoom option. That flexi-

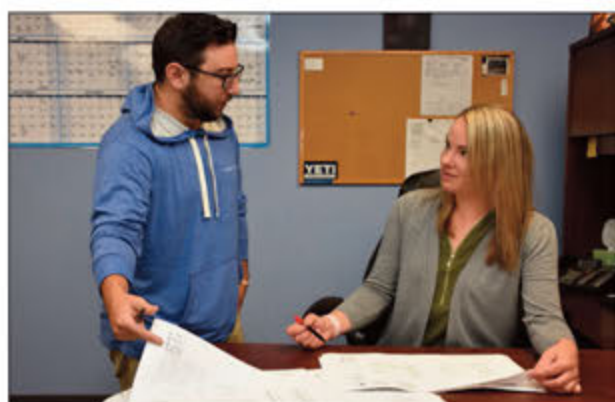


bility will keep board and committee members in the loop who are still unable to attend events in-person.

"Again, we've been able

to extract opportunity from adversity," Hurd noted. "The Owl gives up options that we've never had before."

## Mosebach Electric grows during Covid



Dan Pruyn and Amanda Edevane, lighting specialists at Mosebach Electric, review construction drawings for an upcoming project.

Opportunity seldom knocks during times of adversity. However, during the monumental obstacles thrown at the business community during Covid-19, one Blair County business wasn't about to ignore the possibility that sometimes in the worst circumstances, good things happen.

For Mosebach Electric Supply in Altoona, that has been essentially the story.

"Like many businesses in our market and across the world, we experienced a severe downturn, especially during the peak of the pandemic," acknowledged PC Manager Justin Irvin. "We're recovering and the future is looking strong."

Unlike most of their local competitors who had permanent layoffs, furloughs and downsizing, Mosebach Electric Supply didn't lay off a single employee.

"In fact, we used this as an opportunity to invest in our future by growing our staff by 20%, adding 25% more inventory and 30% more warehousing, thus positioning us to service our customers better in the years ahead," Irvin noted. Mosebach Electric has

been operating in Altoona for more than 30 years. The company is a full line wholesale electrical distributor that serves both industrial and commercial clients. The company is owned by Consolidated Electrical Distributors (CED), a privately held national company with an outstanding reputation. For Mosebach Electric, the arrangement provides the best of both worlds.

"We have local management and local decision-making which allows us to be fast and flexible in serving our customers," Irvin pointed out. "But we're also supported nationally by CED which has over 700 locations and more than 10,000 employees."

Irvin believes much of the company's success is due to its dedicated staff.

"We feature an outstanding staff of inside sales, operations, warehouse, drivers, project managers and technical specialists who average over 15 years of experience working hand-in-hand to make sure projects run smoothly and accurately," he disclosed.

(Mosebach Electric has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 1992.)

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