

INCITE

The Gender Dilemma

Earlier this month, the Chamber embarked on a strategic planning exercise to add direction and purpose to an organization that too often, as the expression goes, “flies by the seat of its pants.” I can make that claim with great certainty since I’m the one charged with steering the ship and hoping that it not only stays clear of the rocks but doesn’t exit the water altogether. Ahoy matey!

The strategic planning process was especially interesting because, rather than just looking at the short-term goals of the Chamber, it included a glance at where we might be directing our

focus twenty years from now. That discussion also proved to be an ideal time for those of us with AARP cards to take a bathroom break.

While participating in an industry tour with students in our Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!) program a few days following strategic planning, I thought about what Blair County might look like in 2040. What would the business community consist of and who would our leaders be?

Without a crystal ball, accurate answers to those two questions would be hard to determine. But we can narrow it down, based on at least one data category. That category is gender.

We are told by business development experts that counties like ours will have difficulty attracting businesses in the future and that we should prepare to start and grow our own businesses. I don’t disagree. In fact, our YEA! program was created for just that reason. Having just begun our fifth class of young entrepreneurs, it would be great to report that we’ve had a balanced mix of males and females.

We can’t. We’ve had 68 males and 17 females. The most females (6) were in the first class in 2017. We haven’t had more than three in any of the subsequent classes. Is it a problem? Absolutely. What we do about it is already a topic being discussed by at least two Chamber committees.

There is a flipside and it occurs within our leadership programs. During the past five years, the Leadership Blair County Adult program has graduated 62 females and 43 males. Leadership Youth has practically mirrored that, graduating 63 females and 41 males. Is that a problem? Not likely. Due to a sad disparity in opportunities to lead, females are still catching up. Once they do, 2040 will be a great time for Blair County.

Looking forward to watching it happen from dry land. (Joe Hurd is President/CEO of the Blair County Chamber.)



Joe Hurd

Blair County Chamber

Popular trade show on track for 2021

With Covid-19 already taking a toll on 2021 events, particularly during the first quarter of the year, it stood to reason that the Blair County Home Garden & Healthy Living Showcase would be on thin ice.

“There wasn’t a whole lot of optimism when the planning committee met a couple months ago,” reported Stacy Hoover, the Blair County Chamber’s Vice-President of Events and Technology. “With everything else that had been cancelled, we weren’t sure that our options were all that great.”

The committee put together a survey, asking those businesses from the most recent shows if they felt that moving forward with a show in early 2021 was practical.

“We knew that we were in uncharted waters to begin with,” acknowledged Dave DeBiase, Executive Officer of the Blair-Bedford Builders Association, which partners with the Chamber on the show. “It was clear to our committee that if we got a thumbs-down, it was likely that we would wait until 2022.”

Moving to later in the

year wasn’t a viable option, according to Hoover.

“Contractors in particular look for new opportunities early in the year,” she noted. “The later it gets, the less interested and available they are to be part of trade shows. That’s why we have the date that we do.”

In 2021, that date will be from March 5-7 at the Jaffa Shrine. DeBiase was gratified at the response to the survey.

“We got the information we were looking for,” he pointed out. “The feedback indicated that a large number of businesses wanted to continue to have the opportunity to meet potential customers face-to-face and they supported having a show.”

Many of those who responded to the survey have already secured their 2021 booth spaces. A few of them have already signed-on as show sponsors.

“These are businesses that have sponsored in the past and have recognized the marketing benefits of sponsoring,” Hoover disclosed. “It’s really an inexpensive way to promote what you’re doing.”

If the Show Committee



Discussing strategy for the 2021 Blair County Home Garden & Healthy Living Showcase are: Stacy Hoover, Chamber VP and Committee Co-chairs Randy Colyer (center) and Jimmy Burchfield. The showcase will be held at the Jaffa Shrine from March 5-7.

has a challenge beyond the obvious it is to find ways to expand the “healthy living” component of the show. That component was introduced at last year’s event.

“We felt that healthy living was a close tie-in to both home and garden because it encouraged people to work indoors and outdoors,” Hoover noted. “Having

UPMC Altoona step-up as a sponsor got us off to a good start. We just need to identify some additional businesses that could benefit from the exposure that this show provides.”

DeBiase agrees.

“This show is in its 51st year,” he explained. “We’re always looking for ways to make it more relevant to what

the industry needs. We’re confident that businesses that have some connection to healthy living will see the advantages of having access to potential customers.”

The recruitment process for exhibitors and additional sponsors is underway and will continue through February. For information, contact Hoover at (814) 43-8151.

New BASICS Website will allow for greater access to information



The Chamber’s Young Entrepreneurs Academy is among the many BASICS programs that are featured on the new BASICS website. That website is an excellent resource for career information and can be accessed at www.blairbasics.net.

As the Blair County Chamber’s largest and most diverse program, BASICS (Businesses And Schools Investing in Cooperative Solutions) has been an effective way to address workforce challenges at all levels of career preparation. From Early Childhood Education to K-12 to Higher Ed, BASICS has had a little something for everyone.

What BASICS has not had, however, has been enough emphasis on directing people to its website. Nor has it made enough effort to keep that website current and interactive so that it would serve as the destination that BASICS Committee members feel that it needs to be.

“To be effective, BASICS and its programs must be

relevant to the needs of the people of Blair County,” explained committee member Paul Hutchison. “An active, current website is an important tool in reaching these people with information about our programs and guidance on how they can become involved. Our web presence is our first line of contact.”

To build the incentive meant to rebuild the website. Working with Recharge Web Design and PS Solutions – two Chamber members – the site is now function functional and awaiting the arrival of anyone looking for information on just about anything career-related.

“Our user-community is varied, just like our programs,” Hutchison pointed out. “People of all ages will find information on the site

that will be helpful in a number of ways. As an area where workforce development is a critical issue, the BASICS Website is an ideal place to establish a key resource.”

BASICS has been a staple of the Chamber’s program offerings for nearly three decades. From a discussion group seeking to identify ways for business people and educators to work more closely together, BASICS has evolved through identifying and implementing programs like Career Shadowing, Leadership Blair County Youth and Young Entrepreneurs Academy, just to name a few.

“Our goal with this website was to build a platform,” Hutchison noted. “That’s done.” To access that site, go to www.blairbasics.net.

Chamber accepting award nominations



The Chamber’s Annual Meeting and Award Presentation will feature an array of awards for individuals in the business community who did great things during 2020.

The Annual Meeting & Award Presentation of the Blair County Chamber of Commerce won’t take place until January 29th but the nomination period for those awards is underway and will continue until December 31st.

“The Annual Meeting is one of the most anticipated events because it’s just a lot of fun,” admitted Chamber VP of Programming and Membership Education Judy Juda. Ironically, the deadline to submit nominations corresponds with Juda’s retirement date. “I’m helping my replacement, Gwen Querry, get up to speed with this event. There are a lot of moving parts.”

And a lot of coveted awards. Those awards and their sponsors are: ATHENA (First Commonwealth Bank), Judith A. Rossi Educator of the Year (DelGrosso Family of Companies), George Award (Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries), Joseph

P. Rosenhamer Chamber Spirit Award (P. Joseph Lehman Consulting Engineers), Donna D. Gority Servant Leader Award (Reliance Bank), Small Business Person of the Year (First National Bank), and Young Professional Award (ABCD Corporation).

As is tradition, the award recipients will not be notified in advance.

“That’s why people enjoy the Annual Meeting so much,” Juda reminded. “It’s always a challenge for us to get the awardees to attend and we’ve been rather devious from time to time to make that happen.”

She encouraged people to submit nominations.

“The more nominations we get, the better. We’ve got a lot of talented people in our community as well as people willing to help others. To access a nomination form visit our website at www.blairchamber.com.”

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