

Young Professionals returning to roots

In 2003, the Blair County Chamber of Commerce created a program called Growth and Relationships of Young Professionals (GRYP) to encourage business people between the ages of 21 and 40 to accelerate their climb on the corporate ladder through a variety of professional development activities. In 2015, GRYP gave way to a new program called the Young Professionals of Blair County.

"There was a feeling at the Chamber that GRYP had run its course and something new needed to replace it," acknowledged Darin Tornatore, an original GRYP member who is currently the Chamber's Immediate Past Board Chair. "At least on paper, YP seemed to be the answer."

It hasn't happened. Despite the efforts of an energetic committee, YP has struggled to gain the level



of participation at events that GRYP routinely enjoyed. The difference, according to Tornatore, seems to be the overall concept.

"GRYP was established as a separate membership entity within the Chamber," he pointed out. "There was a separate membership fee that admitted GRYP members to events. That fee, almost always, was paid by the employer of the young professional."

From the beginning, the YP Committee insisted that the separate membership be eliminated and that young professionals incur event costs on their own, rather than rely on their employers.

"They wanted to maintain independence," Tornatore

noted. "It was a good idea but one that had a pretty significant downside." That downside was that few young professionals had the resources or the desire to pay for event participation out of their own pockets.

Beginning in September, YP will adopt the GRYP model and have annual memberships available. The cost will be \$40 for Chamber members and \$50 for non-members. A campaign will begin later this month to make employers aware of the opportunity to get their young professionals involved in the YP program.

"For employers, this is an inexpensive way to show their employees the importance of professional development and their willingness to invest in that development," Tornatore admitted.

While the recruitment process is taking place, the YP Committee will be exploring ways to expand



Mariah Turiano, chair of the Young Professionals Committee answers a question at a recent YP meeting. Looking-on is the Chamber's Immediate Past Chair, Darin Tornatore.

on YP's mission.

"The change in overall focus gives us a great opportunity to look at better ways to make the YP experience more valuable," explained

Kirsten Stratton, a Committee member who also sits on the Chamber Board. "We'll be gathering information from young professionals to better understand what's im-

portant to them and how we can deliver it."

At this point, the only other change will be that the age range for YP is now 21-39.

Family legacy inspires, motivates Evey

By his own admission, Matt Evey has had a tough act to follow. Actually, he prefers it that way. As broker/owner of John Hill Real Estate in Hollidaysburg, Evey represents the third generation of a family-owned business that has been in continuous operation for the past 80 years.

"It's certainly been a fantastic and unique opportunity," he acknowledged. "My grandfather, (the late) John Hill, started our company. Even though I didn't have the good fortune of working under him, there were many occasions that there were as many as three real estate agents sitting at our kitchen table sharing stories. As a young agent, I can tell you that the mention of my grandfather's name opened a lot of doors. His reputation in the community was excellent."

So was the reputation of the man who succeeded him. Henry "Ace" Evey, Matt's father, had an impeccable work ethic and prided himself on honesty and integrity.

"He completely molded and shaped my career in real estate," Matt disclosed. "My father had a remarkable set of social skills that I greatly admired. When I took over



Matt and Terry Evey are part of the team at John Hill Real Estate. Matt is broker/owner, Terry is bookkeeper. The company has an impressive 80-year history.

running the business in 2003 I often went to him for advice. And often that advice would simply be that I needed to work a little harder." Ace Evey passed away five years ago.

In a competitive real estate market, John Hill Real Estate constantly seeks ways to distinguish itself from other agencies. Matt Evey is convinced that technology is a strong, separating factor.

"We have embraced new technologies more quickly than many of our competitors," he pointed out. "We

recently rolled-out an all-new website that is state-of-the art. Our upgrades represent the fourth time in fourteen years that we've done that. Technology changes quickly and we always strive to stay ahead of the curve."

Another source of pride at John Hill Real Estate, in which technology also plays a part, is the heavy emphasis on support that the company provides to its agents. The company engages 21 agents.

"We take great pride in personally training and

supporting our new and our experienced agents," Matt explained. "We are available to help our agents at all hours – to answer questions, review contracts or for whatever other needs arise. We even have a messaging app that helps to connect all of us."

"At the end of the day, it's the support that can translate into a much better customer experience, something that will always rate high priority."

(John Hill Real Estate has been a member of the Chamber since 1983.)

Baker Mansion readying for post-pandemic revival



The Blair County Garden Club spruces-up the exterior grounds of Baker Mansion anticipating the re-opening.

Covid-19 was not kind to the Blair County Historical Society at Baker Mansion. The Mansion closed its doors last March to adhere to the guidelines for non-essential businesses and there was no discernable timeline for reopening.

"Like most non-profits, we were hopeful but not really confident," remembers Julia Schokker, who stepped-in as a volunteer following the departure of Executive Director Joe De-Francesco. Schokker agreed to manage the daily operations and finances for the museum. She had a lot of help.

"Dr. (Michael) Farrow, our Chairman of the Board, Kate Rimbeck, our Events Chair, and other members of our board played major roles in keeping our organization moving forward," Schokker admitted. "Fortunately, our Annual Appeal, which typically raises \$12,000 raised \$28,000 in 2020. That helped us to remain solvent and gives us enough operating funds to reopen later this month."

Baker Mansion has a three-prong strategy to attract visitors. The Mansion opens Memorial Day weekend and will be hosting tours every Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. through December. Spe-

Non-profit Focus

cial exhibits and events will be part of Blair County's 175th Anniversary, including the planting of a tree to mark the milestone and the publishing of a souvenir booklet.

Lastly, the Mansion will be expanding its outdoor programming which will include live band concerts, beginning June 5th, as well as free movie nights.

"In addition to our own events, we're hoping to partner with the Horseshoe Curve and the Railroaders Museum to bring-in more out-of-town tourists," Schokker pointed out. "We also believe our strategy of holding outdoor events provides fun and safe ways for local families to celebrate the start of summer vacation. We are proud to announce that 100% of our museum staff are vaccinated to help insure the safety of our guests and employees."

Anyone who would like to support the mission of preserving and interpreting local history should visit www.blairhistory.org.

(Blair County Historical Society has been a Chamber member since 2008.)


Ballot results have importance to business

The Blair County Chamber has maintained a reluctance to endorse candidates for elected office. It has no hesitation in supporting issues which it believes are in the best interest of its members and the business community.

Tomorrow's primary election includes three ballot questions that the Chamber, through its Public Policy Committee and its Board of Directors, feels are important enough to support. The first two speak to challenges created by Covid-19.

"Our businesses have had a particularly difficult time adjusting to some of the mandates that restricted their ability to remain viable," acknowledged Richard Fiore, Jr., the Chamber's Board Chair. "Without being critical of the Governor, it's obvious that the current system puts too much authority in one person's hands."

The committee, Fiore pointed out, emphasizes the importance of all branches of government working together, especially at critical times.

 Primary Election Ballot Questions	
YES	MEANS . . .
#1	A majority of state lawmakers, elected by the people, can vote to end emergency declarations & restrictions on citizens.
#2	Emergency declarations limited to 21 days unless the General Assembly, elected by the people, approves longer.
#3	The Pennsylvania Constitution would prohibit the denial of equal rights based on race or ethnicity.

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