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## Zane Helsel Excavating true to its mission

There is little doubt that some of Blair County's best businesses are not always ones with the highest profiles, despite their impressive histories of accomplishment. One family business – Zane Helsel Excavating in Duncansville – fits that category more by choice. With just eight employees, the company has managed to build a solid reputation by staying true to its mission.

The company began with just a backhoe and a single-axle dump truck in 1956. At that time its founder, Zane Helsel, focused mainly on services for residential customers and utility companies. In the 1970's, it added services in site development and the energy sector.

Zane Helsel Excavating was incorporated in 1990. In 2005, Helsel retired from the corporation but he remains involved in Legacy Land Development Group.

Gene Horomanski, Secretary/Treasurer and CFO of the corporation has helped the next generation to take on ownership responsibilities.

"We're an active company that provides a variety of excavating services to customers in Central and Western PA," Horomanski points out. "We have the knowledge and the experience to complete any type of project with any customer including commercial, industrial and residential."

"We provide a large inventory of equipment to get your site development, mobile rock-crushing, utility installation, storm water management, grading and excavating projects done right."

Among the projects that Zane Helsel Excavating has on its front burner is the area's newest subdivision called Red Tail Ridge. Being

done in conjunction with Legacy Land Development Group, it is a duplex community which will take approximately five years to complete and which includes eighteen duplexes. Jason Horomanski, the company's Vice-President and Gene's son, believes that this project will fill an important community niche.

"The development will offer affordability for people of all ages," he acknowledged. "People can't afford to buy a family home for what these units will cost. As other contractors prioritize other residential models, we feel that ours will meet the needs of buyers seeking a different approach."

While Zane Helsel Excavating has no current plans for business expansion due to the uncertainty of the economy, Gene Horomanski is convinced that the com-



Gene Horomanski (left) discusses grades and elevations for the next duplex at Red Tail Ridge with his son, Jason.

pany has many reasons to be optimistic.

"In the present and in the future, we'll continue to strive to provide innovative

approaches to excavating," he noted. "Being a family-owned business, the legacy and work ethics are passed down from generation to

generation." (Zane Helsel Excavating has been a Blair County Chamber member since 1993.)

## Sustainability survey will help restaurants

Of all the industry sectors that have been negatively impacted by Covid-19, local restaurants may still top the list. At its most vulnerable time, when the industry was mandated to close or severely limit its services, the Blair County Chamber stepped-up with promotional efforts to help ease the pain. Now the Chamber is stepping up again, this time in a very different way.

The Chamber's Sustainable Blair County Committee, with an assist from Sustainable Pittsburgh, has created a Restaurant Survey that should help restaurants to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. The resulting data should result in more efficiency and ways to save money.

"With the pandemic, it's a good time to help restaurants reassess," believes Committee Chair Chris Foster of Stiffler McGraw. "This survey makes that process very comprehensive. It's relatively easy to complete."

Spearheading the effort to make the survey applicable to local restaurants are committee members Matt Michrina of Sheetz and Stefan Long of Veeder-Root, assisted by two business people quite familiar with the topic – Paul Randazzo of



Putting the final touches on the Restaurant Survey for Sustainable Blair County are, left to right: Chris Foster, Don DeLozier and Matt Michrina.

Mama Randazzo's and Don DeLozier, owner of both Prime Sirloin and U.S. Hotel.

"Restaurants should be concerned about public perception and cost savings," Michrina pointed out.

"Completing the survey shows that they care about their restaurants and about the community. The survey hits on a number of key issues. It's well balanced."

DeLozier agrees. "Restaurants, particularly at this time, need to tweak what they're doing," he disclosed. "This survey will

help identify areas that restaurants have a tendency to downplay or ignore."

Like the survey introduced by the Sustainable Blair County Committee three years ago to help businesses of all kinds, the Restaurant Survey will contain incentives.

"We'll recognize those restaurants that reach certain levels of performance with a designation of either gold, silver or bronze," Foster explained. "Those designations should help those restaurants show customers how willing they are to pri-

oritize those things that are meaningful."

The Restaurant Survey will be available beginning June 15th. It will be located on the homepage of the Chamber Website at [www.blairchamber.com](http://www.blairchamber.com).

"We're encouraging all restaurants to take the survey," Michrina noted. "It's available to Chamber members and non-members. We've been asked what constitutes a restaurant and our criteria is simple. Any business that makes food or drink, qualifies as a restaurant."

## Leadership Youth grad making an early impact



Anaiyah Crone receives her certificate from James Gerraughty, Chair of the LBC Youth Committee.

A few weeks ago, fifteen high school sophomores from seven Blair County schools graduated from the Chamber's Leadership Blair County Youth program. The graduates were advised to use their servant leader training to make a positive difference in their community. One student was already off to a head start.

Anaiyah Crone from Altoona Area High School used the inspiration from her step-dad and the encouragement of her LBC classmates to petition the school district to add an African American History class to the school curriculum.

"Being an African American student at a mostly white school, it kind of hurt

me that we don't learn about Black history in general," Anaiyah explained. "We learn the basics. So I decided to bring my idea to the table even though I wasn't sure that I'd get a good reaction." She needn't have worried. The administration and the student body were extremely supportive. The new class will be added next year.

Anaiyah credits her Leadership Blair County experience with making a big difference in how she approached her goal.

"We learned in one of our sessions that if we believed in something, we needed to go for it," she pointed out. "The LBC program helps you to be more confident and comfortable with yourself."

## Legislators to address Non-profit concerns

Non-profit businesses in Blair County faced many of the same challenges during Covid-19 as their for-profit counterparts. There are, however, a number of issues that continue to make life difficult for non-profits and those will be part of a discussion this Friday as the Blair County Chamber's Committee of Non-profit Businesses holds its annual Legislative Breakfast at The Casino at Lakemont Park. The event begins at 8:00 a.m. and concludes at 9:30.

State Senator Judy Ward and State Representatives Jim Gregory and Lou Schmitt

will answer questions submitted to the committee in advance. Time permitting, additional questions will come from attendees.

"This event provides our non-profit community the opportunity to have a meaningful dialogue with our legislators," acknowledged committee chair, Natalie Depto-Vesey of Home Nursing Agency. "We look forward to their insight."

The cost to attend the Legislative Breakfast is \$20 for Chamber members and \$25 for non-members. To register, go to [www.blairchamber.com](http://www.blairchamber.com) or call (814) 943-8151.



State Representative Lou Schmitt, Senator Judy Ward and State Representative Jim Gregory will address current legislation at the Committee of Non-Profit Businesses Legislative Breakfast.

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