



Dissecting the data

The guessing game is over. When the Chamber's Public Policy Committee began discussions about ways to help local businesses being impacted by labor shortages, one committee member asked if we were looking for solutions based on certifiable data or simply on conjecture? The committee agreed to do its homework.

The first step was to invite businesses to complete a survey that would identify the number of employees that were needed to return to pre-Covid levels? After that, how many of the employees that were furloughed during the pandemic had not returned due to the \$300 government incentive to remain at home? And finally, what job titles were most in demand in returning to what had been considered normal?

"We wanted to get a better understanding of how far behind our employers were and what it would take to help them catch-up," acknowledged Chris Michelone of McQuaide Blasko, who chairs the Public Policy Committee. "We wanted to make sure that the survey was concise but also asked the right questions. And we were hoping for a good response."

The response was outstanding. To date, 155 businesses have completed it and others indicate they intend to, despite the fact that the deadline has passed. There is little doubt that workforce availability is a topic of highest priority for businesses, large and small. The next challenge for the committee will be to determine what the numbers mean and how to attack the shortfalls.

The category of primary interest was how many employees might be back to work if staying home didn't pay the same or better. The survey data set that number at 1,536. Since 54 of the 155 survey responders answered 0 to that question, the average of those impacted by the incentive was around 15. It's little wonder that recovery has taken longer.

Speculation is that even if all 1,536 employees returned to work today, it is likely to take more than a year for most businesses to feel whole again. Factor-in that many of the furloughed employees either won't come back when the incentive ends in September or won't be invited to return and the picture grows bleaker.

The survey question regarding the job titles was included for a different reason. It is likely that the Chamber's BASICS Committee will be assisting Public Policy in looking for more effective ways to meet the specific needs of employers as they continue the difficult task of staying viable.

Center enjoys the variety of work, play

When Steve Genter was growing-up in a small New Jersey town on the Delaware River, he could not have predicted that so much of his business career and his quality of life interests would take place in Blair County, PA. As owner of Genter Enterprises, Steve has successfully blended two related industry sectors and his love of self-help projects keeps him constantly on alert for future opportunities. Steve has two children – Krista (41) and David (36) and two grandchildren – Ethan and Jack, both age 7.

The Chamber: How did you get to Blair County from Westville, New Jersey?

Steve: I graduated from California State College and worked a few jobs in the Pittsburgh area. In 1978, I took a job as Tennis Director at the Blair Racquet Club in Altoona thinking that I'd be here for a few years and then would move back to Pittsburgh. Thirty years later I'm still here. In 2005, we sold the Club and I began to pursue other career opportunities.

The Chamber: What were those opportunities?

Steve: I purchased Sinking

Chamber Q&A

Valley Lawn Care and started doing lawn treatments for weed control and fertilization. Since then I've purchased three pest control companies – Sinking the Pest and Lawn, Roberts Pest Control and Klucker Pest Control – and I run those as well. Everything comes under the umbrella of Genter Enterprises. We employ twelve people out of locations in Hollidaysburg and Tyrone.

The Chamber: What would people in Blair County be surprised to know about Genter Enterprises?

Steve: That despite people knowing us primarily as a lawn care company, lawn care is actually only about 25% of our business. We do lawn care treatments for weed control and fertilization. We don't mow or landscape. Despite our best efforts, people still call us with landscaping requests.

The Chamber: What challenges has your business faced as the result of Covid-19?



Steve Genter has accomplished many of his business objectives in the Great Outdoors. He's hoping to accomplish some of his personal objectives in places like Pebble Beach.

Steve: The problem that both the lawn treatment and the pest control sides are facing has nothing to do with the health aspects of Covid-19. It has everything to do with finding employees. The current unemployment benefits situation has made it difficult to find quality people. We continue to search but without much success.

The Chamber: Who are your personal and profes-

sional role models and what makes them special?

Steve: My personal role models were my parents, Charles and Kathryn Genter. They have both passed but they were just really good people that gently showed me a good path. Professionally, I was fortunate enough to have a great professor in A.P. McGrew. He was the head of the Urban Recreation Depart-

ment at California State. He encouraged me to become an avid self-help book reader which I believe has helped me through the years.

The Chamber: What's still on Steve Genter's bucket list?

Steve: I'm a golfer so I guess I would like to get out to play Pebble Beach and I would also hope at some point to get down to the Masters.

Challenge is a step in the right direction for a healthy community

As Director of the Healthy Blair County Coalition, Coleen Heim is a terrific motivator but a horrible goal-setter. When Heim and her committee put plans in place for the Spring Steps Challenge, they set a goal of 110,000,000 steps.

"We considered that ambitious," she pointed out. "We failed to consider the level of determination of our walkers. That won't happen again." (The actual number of steps walked was 183,407,453).

On June 28th, Healthy Blair County Coalition and its partners – which includes the Chamber's Workplace Wellness Committee – held a short ceremony at the Chamber Office to present awards in five categories. The recipients were: Individual – Paula Binus (1,666,642); Small – The Lanzel Family (5,089,064); Medium – Altoona Curve (9,761,426); Large – UPMC Altoona Family Physicians (12,379,524) and Extra Large – James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center (18,761,877).

"The challenge was really well-received," Heim pointed out. "There were 27 teams and 393 participants. Our goal, ultimately, is to raise awareness of the importance of getting healthy and staying healthy. The message becomes more emphatic when events like this one build momentum."

The award recipients were happy to have an opportunity to compete.

"I saw the article in the newspaper about the Steps Challenge and decided to get involved," Binus acknowledged. "I walk whenever I get a chance, mostly with friends, to get and stay



Winners in the 2021 Spring Steps Challenge are, left to right: Paula Binus, Emily Davis (representing the Lanzel Family), Lynn Rogers (representing UPMC Family Physicians), and Derek Coughenour (representing VA Medical Center). Absent was the Altoona Curve.

healthy so the Challenge was another way of accomplishing that."

Staying healthy was the motivation of the staff at UPMC Family Physicians as well.

"Coleen twisted our arms to get involved and we're glad that we did," explained Lynn Rogers. "We focus on taking a holistic approach to wellness so our staff felt it was important to model an active lifestyle, similar to what we encourage our patients to do."

For Derek Coughenour, Associate Director of the VA Medical Center, committing to the Steps Challenge was consistent with other programs at his facility.

"We have a whole health initiative that focuses on disease prevention and health promotion so we tied the Steps Challenge into our VA2K initiative which raises awareness of the fight to assist homeless veterans (53 participants)," he pointed out. "Half the staff from the VA live in Blair County so more than 200 people actually par-

ticipated. It was a significant benefit to a great cause."

The Spring Steps Challenge was the second event of its kind put together by Heim and her partners and also the second time that the Lanzel family of Hollidaysburg have "outwalked" the competition in the small category.

"We're a super-competitive family that has been successful in connecting effectively with one another to keep track of our numbers," admitted Emily (Lanzel) Davis. "Between siblings, parents and grandparents, our team of eight people was determined to win again. And we'll be back for the three-peat!"

The next Steps Challenge will begin on September 11th and conclude November 6th. The goal, Heim emphasized, will be 200,000,000.

"I guess I learned my lesson," she acknowledged. "We've already heard from a number of businesses that didn't take part in the Spring that they plan to put something together for the Fall. We're excited by the enthusiasm."

SETTING THE PACE

Tara Eney Non-Profit Businesses

1. Title and place of work: Director of Operations, Altoona Community Theatre.

2. Years with current position: Director of Operations at ACT since November 2020. I began volunteering with ACT in 2008 by serving on committees and the Board of Directors, including as a Past President. I've directed, stage managed and acted in numerous shows.

3. Positions held in the Chamber: Member of the Committee of Non-Profit Businesses.

4. Family: Partner - Wallis Myers, sister - Marie Eney, mother - Carolyn Brogan, father - Robert and wife live in California, my brother and his family live in Minnesota.

5. Community organizations: I've been an active "Big" with Big Brothers Big Sisters for about 12 years. I've also recently joined the Rotary and am looking forward to being an active participant.

6. Hobbies/leisure: Getting out into the woods, hiking or camping and seeing plays and musicals in other theatres. I also co-host a monthly book club. Wally and I love going to movies and enjoy tabletop board games.

7. Education: B.S. in the Theatre Arts from Minnesota State University, Mankato.

8. First job: Detassling seed corn, by hand, in the fields of Minnesota. My second job was as a teaching assistant in one of the dance schools I attended.

9. I would like to be known for: As a mentor to other theatre artists who are trying to improve their craft



and who are striving to create great theatre. I'd like to ensure that ACT continues to be a strong part of the central Pennsylvania arts community for another 70+ years.

10. Business role model: I've learned so much from excellent supervisors and coworkers in my life about how to create a budget and advance a project plan to get your team moving toward a common goal. I need to specifically name Steve Helsel, ACT's long-time Executive Director who taught me so much about producing great theatre, but also was a shining example of what a mentor can do for others.

11. Your thoughts about the Chamber: Our local Chamber does an impressive job of creating networking events and opportunities to develop leadership skills. As I've attended professional conferences, the comparison between our Chamber and other small cities is remarkably positive for Blair County.

12. Your thoughts about Blair County: Blair County offers impressive opportunities in the arts! We've got remarkable talent and there are so many places you can practice your craft to learn and grow. I'm particularly excited to see downtown Altoona continue to develop as a business center. You also can't beat the scenery!

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