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AMBUCS continues long history of service

John Lloyd remembers a time when the Altoona AMBUCS club had serious discussions about capping its membership. “We were meeting at the UVA Club,” the longtime AMBUCS member and Penelec retiree pointed out. “Every meeting was packed. We weren’t sure if we could accommodate too many more members. It was a problem.”

It is not a problem today. While AMBUCS and practically all service clubs in Blair County are holding their own, none are likely to reject an influx of new applicants. Times have changed, according to Mark Ford, and so have priorities.

“It’s hard for service clubs to recruit and retain members,” acknowledged Ford, who is currently vice-president of Altoona AMBUCS. “A lot of people are reluctant to add another commitment to their schedule, especially one that meets every week. Some who have been with the club for a while feel that younger people need to step-up and replace them. In both cases, it challenges clubs to keep

adequate membership numbers.”

Those numbers are primarily dictated by what each club sets-out to accomplish. In the case of AMBUCS, its heaviest lift is mission directed. Begun as American Business Clubs in 1922, the organization was founded to help people with disabilities. While the level of success was impressive from the start, the name somehow never quite fit. In 1961, it was officially changed to AMBUCS. An improvement?

“I’m not so sure,” admitted Alex Seltzer, a life-member who joined in 1988 and who is serving as club president of Altoona AMBUCS for the very first time. “Despite all the great things that the organization does nationally and our club has done locally, the name itself hasn’t been a huge asset from a marketing standpoint. So we’ve got to explore other ways to get the word out.”

Clearly, the bellwether of AMBUCS throughout its 150 chapters nationwide is the Amtryke program which began in the mid-1990’s and

which gives away 3,500 of the therapeutic tricycles each year.

“AMBUCS Mission Statement focuses on inspiring people to conquer challenges related to mobility and independence,” Seltzer noted. “By staying true to that mission, our chapter has been fortunate to have witnessed so many young people in particular experience a life-changing moment.”

To Altoona AMBUCS board member Tim Serbin, there are few things that compare to sharing that moment. “Just seeing a child’s eyes light-up when they sit on their Amtryke for the first time is incredible,” Serbin stated. “You can’t put a price tag on something like that.” Since 1994, the Altoona Club has presented 175 Amtrykes.

It’s also not the only accomplishment for which the Altoona club should be known. Through its efforts, scholarship monies have been raised to help students in the fields of physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech pathology and audiology. Altoona AMBUCS



The Amtryke program has been the primary focus of AMBUCS since its inception. Altoona AMBUCS has presented 175 Amtrykes since 1994.

has also donated more than \$100,000 to Miracle League, Dreams Go On, Arc of Blair County and We Care.

“We try, whenever possible, to help as many causes in the community as we can, especially those that have some connection to our mission,” Ford disclosed. “We also have a blood screening each May with UPMC

which is our largest fundraiser. We have a wonderful group of people in this club who do incredible things. We can always use more.”

Seltzer believes that recruiting is the chapter’s loftiest goal and its biggest obstacle. “Every service club is in the same boat,” he explained. “In many cases,

we’re chasing the same people. I’m not sure that people can go wrong with whatever club they choose. There are a lot of very good ones in Blair County that are doing a lot of good things. We just hope they choose Altoona AMBUCS.” (Altoona AMBUCS has been a Chamber member since 2011.)

Transportation Committee expands mission to address tourism, pedestrian access issues

Blair County has a transportation challenge that goes well beyond fixing potholes and replacing street signs. And unless a number of key transportation issues are addressed, the county’s economy could be heavily impacted.

The Blair County Chamber’s Transportation Committee has revised its Mission Statement and created some goals to get the ball rolling. The goals speak to all modes of transportation – from ground and air to public and private transit, passenger rail and trail development.

“Issues of infrastructure, pedestrian access and transportation planning are all on the table as our committee examines the most effective ways to overcome some of the obstacles that are creating headaches for businesses and developers,” acknowledged Pat Miller, who chairs the committee. “We’re fortunate to have a committee comprised of knowledgeable people who understand the consequences of inaction.”

One of those people is Vince Greenland of Penn DOT District 9-0.

“This is the only county in our district that has this kind of group that gets together to discuss important



The Chamber’s Transportation Committee consists of, left to right (seated): Bill Scully, Vince Greenland, Pat Miller (chair), Donald Rossman, Richard Fiore, Jr., and Chuck Meyers. (Standing): Adam Ward, George Foster, John Frederick, Karl King, Marty Malone, Tracy Plessinger, Adam Claar, Joe Keller and Paul Wyrwas. Absent from photo: Eric Wolf, Tom Levine, Sean Shannon and Jason Shura.

transportation issues. I applaud the Chamber for that,” he noted. “It’s helpful for me to stay apprised of the many facets of transportation and how they interconnect.”

Despite the fact that the committee’s focus is primarily on Blair County, Miller believes that the borders blur on many of the challenges.

“When you look at our transportation network, you really need to look at it as a

regional strategy,” he explained. “It’s not just about our county. It goes well beyond that.”

From an economic standpoint, travel and tourism has been fighting a number of battles not only to encourage more travelers to visit the county but to make their stay enjoyable. Lack of transportation options have made it difficult.

“We’ve got significant ground transportation issues,” Miller pointed out.

“There are no longer taxis in our county so getting people where they want to go isn’t as uncomplicated as it is in other places. Freedom Excursions has done an incredible job but they can’t do it all. This problem rates a high priority with our committee.”

As does pedestrian access.

“It’s essential that our municipalities become more aware of the need to consider the importance of this topic,” Miller added.

Compassion is hallmark of care at Mattern House



Theresa Mattern and her son Buddy have been an unbeatable combination and the main reason for the founding of Mattern House, which opened in 1982.

Theresa Mattern can hardly believe how quickly the time has passed and how many positive things have happened in the interim. It was nearly a half-century ago that Theresa and her husband David were fostering children – primarily those with intellectual disabilities – at their home in Williamsburg. One of the children, whose name is Buddy, was scheduled to be transferred to another foster home. The Mattern’s couldn’t bear to see him go.

“He was just so sweet,” Theresa emphasized. “Despite all of his challenges, he had a smile that warmed your heart. We adopted him in 1979 and he’s never lost that smile.”

Buddy’s adoption convinced the Mattern’s that there was a need in the community for residential living. In 1982, Mattern House opened as a licensed home. Today, Mattern House, Inc. has more than 75 employees and provides care for 27 individuals.

There are 14 residential homes, 12 in Blair County and two in Somerset County.

“We encourage those who reside at our facilities to have an everyday life,” Theresa pointed out. “We help them participate in activities in the community, provide them transportation, manage their financial needs, medical support and personal care. We started out as a family home that has grown into the agency that we are today. We are more than a business. Mattern House is family caring for family.”

Like most businesses, staffing has become a major concern.

“Covid-19 has affected our staffing needs tremendously,” Theresa disclosed. “Our current staff is working to fill the gaps. We’re hopeful that the employment picture will improve so that we can continue to provide the care that our residents deserve.”

(Mattern House has been a Blair County Chamber member since 2015.)

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