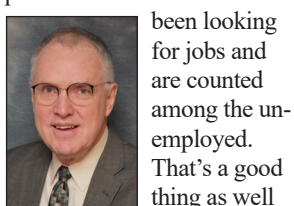




Going to the dogs!

The not-so-funny thing about data is that too often it turns your best arguing points into Swiss cheese. Not even two weeks after assuring a group of hopeful employers that the job prospectus in Blair County and across the country would soon be on “solid footing,” the federal Department of Labor unceremoniously pulled the rug out.

It seems that the Department’s most recent sample period identified 8.7 million potential workers who have



Joe Hurd

Blair County Chamber of Commerce

been looking for jobs and are counted among the unemployed. That’s a good thing as well as a sign of hope. What is not a good thing is that there are currently 9.8 million job vacancies. Even bad math students like me know a bad omen when they see one.

There are limited strategies that employers have to offset the shortfall of human capital and according to a just-released survey from Arthur J. Gallagher & Company, many have chosen to simply out-finesse the competition.

The survey results indicated that 41% of employers are offering enhanced benefits. Nearly 71% of those stated that medical and pharmacy benefits remain the most enticing. Discount programs, legal services and identity theft protection also have their supporters. Believe it or not, the fastest growing incentive is one that should come as no surprise.

Pet insurance.

That’s right, Rover can now throw caution to the wind as he takes his thrice-daily walks over hill-and-dale. According to Gallagher, 19% of survey respondents say they are offering pet insurance, a perk that is expected to rise 27% over the next two years. No matter how many times I hear those statistics, I can’t avoid shaking my head.

I realize that I am approaching dangerous territory. Dog-lovers, like their dogs, are enthusiastic and kind unless they believe there are reasons not to be. As I look closer at the data, it’s becoming obvious that dogs and other pets are unwittingly having an impact on the labor market. The reason for concern about our nation’s future workforce is that people just aren’t having children anymore. The talent pool is getting mighty shallow.

As a business organization, it is incumbent upon the Chamber to create some innovative strategies that will stimulate the workforce and then make those strategies work. Forming an Alliance with the Chamber of Business & Industry of Centre County has been an important first step. There will be others.

Until then, keep your canine close and your options open.

Jones continues to follow his passion

Corey Jones has been in Healthcare Administration for the past 40 years, both in Hospital and Long Term Care settings. The 62-year-old native of Akron, Ohio has been an effective leader in Southern Blair County as CEO of The Village at Morrisons Cove.

The Chamber: How did you get into long-term care administration and what brought you to Martinsburg?

Corey: I began my career in healthcare at the age of 16 and quickly decided that with the ever-changing and demanding issues that the field presents and its meaningful connection with people, I knew that this would become not only my career but also my life’s passion. I learned about The Village at Morrisons Cove through Dr. Robert Neff, who was the President at Juniata College and prior to that, was the General Secretary of the Church of The Brethren.

The Chamber: In what ways has long-term care changed most dramatically since you entered the industry?

Chamber Q&A

Corey: The regulations in our industry become increasingly more challenging each year. The expectation for perfection is unrealistic, but often scrutinized.

The Chamber: What would people in Blair County be surprised to know about Corey Jones?

Corey: Although my earlier career led me to many years in a large city, I am an avid outdoorsman. I enjoy hunting, mountain biking, hiking and running.

The Chamber: What challenges has Covid-19 created for The Village at Morrisons Cove that will be the most difficult to overcome?

Corey: The COVID-19 pandemic has created a severe limit in the availability of qualified staff. It is unlike anything that I have ever encountered in all of my years of healthcare



Corey Jones has a long history of successfully administrating healthcare facilities. The current staffing challenges facing long-term care providers has been difficult to overcome.

administration.

The Chamber: Who are your personal and professional role models and what makes them special?

Corey: Dr. Ramon Burket, our Chairman of the Board of Directors, has been an incredible influence on me over the course of my tenure at The Village. Dr. Robert Neff, a Harvard ed-

ucation professional, has taught me the value of prayer, patience and service. He has given his life to the church and education and is now on his third career, supporting the ministry at The Village at Morrisons Cove. Most of all, I am humbled by the staff at The Village. I am proud to work alongside

them each and every day.

The Chamber: What’s still on Corey Jones’ bucket list?

Corey: I would like to continue to grow spiritually, educationally and physically to meet the new challenges and opportunities that God has in store for me, as I continue my journey.

Family business becomes perfect outlet for multiple generations

The concept of “working together” has seldom been taken to quite the extreme that would become the hallmark of Bickel’s Surplus. Started in 1992 in Pinecroft by Bill Bickel, the concept of creating a business based on selling products procured from big retailers which emphasized leftovers, clearance items, end-of-season close outs and damaged freight loads was hardly novel but somehow gained a cult-like following.

“When my uncle opened Bickel’s, I was his only employee for the first few months,” acknowledged Duane Della, the current owner. “As the business grew, we got more of the family involved. Bill’s sisters Darlene, Donna, Nancy (my mother), Barbara and Joan as well as his brother Tom and his nephews Bob and Ron were all important parts of the operation. Most of the employees in the early days were either family or friends of the family.”

Whatever the familial mix, Bickel’s Surplus has been a destination for people looking for ways to get great deals without spending large amounts of money.

“I like to call it treasure hunting,” Della pointed out. “Then and now, when we find deals, we pass the savings on to the customers. We only sell new items and we rarely buy store returns. Our savings from the big stores are usually 35-80% of what you’ll find elsewhere. You can’t really beat that.”

When Bill Bickel passed away in 2019, the store in



Continuing a successful business like Bickel’s Surplus takes a team effort. For owner Duane Della that team includes, left to right: daughter Madison, sister Deanna, Duane and son Anthony. Absent are sons Dominic and Nate.

Working Together

Pinecroft closed. Della bought the store, remodeled it and reopened it later that year. In January of this year, a new location in Duncansville – Bickel’s Surplus Too – opened on Dunnings Highway. The management team consists of Della (owner), his son Nate (assistant manager), his sister Deanna (GM-Altoona location) and his niece Madison (sales associate).

“Having family members involved is so good because you know you can count on family,” Della admitted. “Not just to show-up but to put their reputation into the name. My name is not Bickel but I’m a Bickel through-and-through and proud of it and want to keep it going for my kids and other family members.”

Bickel’s has also opened

an online store on eBay called Bickelssurplus-toooutlet.

“We wanted somewhere that we could sell easily-shipped items,” Della disclosed. “Specialty items like facial creams, electronics and other more expensive things that don’t sell well in our stores, people can purchase at the online location.”

So what’s next on the horizon for Bickel’s? Duane Della is excited with the potential of spreading-out.

“We’re looking to grow our online presence with additional platforms to sell-on,” he noted. “We’d also like to add more locations, possibly in State College, Bedford or areas similar to those. We like where we are and what we’ve accomplished. We’re always looking toward the next great opportunity.”

(Bickel’s Surplus Too has been a Blair County Chamber member since 2017.)

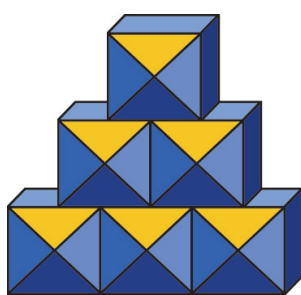
Leadership Blair County

LBC Adult set to begin

The 27th edition of the Chamber’s Leadership Blair County Adult program will officially get underway with an orientation session on September 10th at the Devorris Center for Business Development. The LBC Class of 2022 will consist of twenty-three members.

The orientation will focus on providing an overview of Blair County to class members and will include an Environmental Scanning and Analysis Task, a SWOT Analysis and a Scavenger Hunt to eight different Blair County communities.

“It’s been an effective way to get each new class off to a fast start,” re-



marked Sherri Stayer, chair of the LBC Adult Committee. “In most cases, class members will be meeting one another for the first time.”

Dr. Maureen Dodson will again serve as facilitator of the LBC Adult program.

For more information on Leadership Blair County, contact the Chamber at (814) 943-8151.

Leadership Blair County Adult Class of 2022

ANGELA BARRONER	DWAIN KEY II
KARA BENNETT	JEFFREY LANE
SUPERMAN BERROW	ZACHARY NIPER
ANGELA CLECKNER	JULIA PIPER
GAYLE CONNER	ANDREA POTEAT
CARLY COOK	JENNIFER SABOURIN
BRIAN DETWILER	JONAH SALLYARDS
KELLY ELDER	TRAVIS SEYMORE
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