

Alliance will boost multi-county interaction

Blair County has a workforce problem. Centre County does too. Rather than attempting to address those problems individually, the Blair County Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber of Business & Industry of Centre County formed an Alliance that launched in June.

"It made sense for us to look at ways to collaborate," acknowledged Blair Chamber President Joe Hurd. "As the two largest chambers in the region, we felt that we could bring more businesses and resources to the table. The challenges are too significant to confront one county at a time."

Vern Squier agrees. As President of the CBICC, he understands the urgency that surrounds a number of business issues in an economy that has taken numerous hits during the past two years. Workforce is at the



top of that list.

"It's been difficult," he admitted. "Through the Alliance, we can bring more focus and energy to work together on various topics that makes sense, relative to our regional economy. Each of our organizations operates a robust program in the workforce arena and through selective combinations of those efforts/programs, even more can be done for our respective businesses."

The BASICS program in Blair County and Centre Ready assist young people through career development initiatives while also helping current employers and job-seekers to find one another.

"Our region of the state has not been projected to

experience dramatic growth," Hurd pointed out. "So we need to find ways to keep and develop talent in as many ways as we can. Vern and I and our staffs are exploring ways to create synergies between our two counties and then to take the next step."

That step will be to engage other counties in the region through their chambers.

"We've tried and failed to create regional efforts by bringing everyone together at the same time," Hurd noted. "There were frankly too many voices and too many ideas to get our arms around. We're hoping, by starting small, our chances of success are better."

Among the initial programs between the counties is the continuation of an event that will be in its third year. A Business Trade Show will be held on November 17th at the Blair County Convention Center.



Vern Squier, President of the Chamber of Business & Industry of Centre County talks strategy with Blair County Chamber President Joe Hurd concerning the Alliance.

The event was cancelled in 2020. Squier believes that this type of effort plays an important role in blurring the borders of the two counties.

"While it's essential that

our chamber staffs work together, it is equally advantageous to have our members interact whenever possible," he disclosed. "Especially in these post-Covid times, our busi-

nesses need support and resources from other businesses in the region. The collective energy is net-positive to our local economies as well as to our overall regional economy."

Corle Construction has impressive reputation

It didn't take a pandemic to make the construction industry difficult. Just ask Matt Wilson, Project Manager at Corle Construction in Imler.

"Even before the pandemic hit, finding people who wanted to make a career in the construction industry was tough," Wilson admitted. "The past eighteen months have only exacerbated that difficulty, especially when you lose longtime employees. You don't walk down the street and find someone who brings the same level of experience and enthusiasm."

"We've been fortunate to be able to maintain a high percentage of our staff and also attract some bright individuals who are willing to learn. Not everyone has been able to do that."

John Corle established Corle Construction in 1972. For the first year, he was the company's only employee. Today, the company is a full-service general contractor that specializes in design/build services for a multitude of project types such as manufacturing facilities, warehouses, agricultural and multi-use commercial buildings.

"We've been building



Matt Wilson of Corle Construction works-on the specifics of an upcoming project. Corle has built a strong reputation for attention to detail and outstanding customer service.

projects throughout the area for nearly 50 years," Wilson pointed out. "The process is ever-changing, getting more and more complex. Most people are surprised by the amount of work that it takes before you can put a shovel in the ground. Corle Construction works very thoroughly to obtain all the permits required for the projects, followed by the construction process and ultimately handing the keys to the customer."

Wilson believes that beyond just his company's design and building capabilities, most clients are unaware of the technology that goes into a successful project.

"We utilize an extensive amount of technology during construction," he disclosed. "From drawing creation, document management and information sharing, our technology tools play a vital role in our day-to-day business."

It all translates into a solid

reputation within the construction industry.

"We constantly strive for the highest marks in customer satisfaction," Wilson emphasizes. "We do very little advertising. We're firm believers in word-of-mouth. We're proud of all our projects but especially proud of those that have taken place during the past year when the conditions were most difficult." (Corle Construction has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 1991.)

Balconi to speak about keeping donors happy

There are few non-profit businesses that don't rely on some degree of donor support to accomplish their mission. But there are many that fall short of treating their donors with the respect that makes it likely that those donors will stay connected.

As president of UPMC Altoona Foundation, Tim Balconi understands the critical donor influence and will share some of his insight at the next "Best Practices Forum," set for this Friday, September 3rd, from 8:15 to 9:45 a.m. at the Devorris Center for Business Development. His presentation is entitled, "Building Relationships With Your Donors."

"This topic is one that appears on our committee's radar quite often," explains Natalie Depto-Vesey, chair of the Blair County Chamber's Committee of Non-Profit Businesses. "Many non-profits seem to be initially successful at recruiting donors but not quite as successful at keeping them over the long haul. Tim Balconi has an excellent reputation for knowing what it takes to make donors feel appreciated."



Tim Balconi



Best Practices Forums are just one part of what the Committee of Non-Profit Businesses does to promote the non-profit agenda. To become a member of the committee, contact Joe Hurd at (814) 943-8151.

The cost to attend the Best Practices Forum is \$10 for Chamber members and \$20 for non-members. Corporate sponsor of the Forum is Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries. To register, contact the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at www.blairchamber.com. Space is limited.

Hawaiian Islands tops the list of exciting travel opportunities for 2022

Among the casualties of Covid-19 has been the Blair County Chamber's Travel Program.

Accustomed to offering as many as three exciting trips over the course of the year, the Chamber has been completely shutout during 2020 and 2021.

"We've lost seven trips," explained Chamber President Joe Hurd. "It's been a combination between the destinations not allowing tourists to visit and the reluctance of people to go anywhere without some assurance of safety. Despite the fact that many sites are

re-opening for business, we've decided to hitch our wagon to 2022."

The 2022 destinations are impressive. The Chamber is partnering with new member, Swinston Travel, on an 11-day trip to the Hawaiian Islands which runs from January 31st to February 10th.

"This trip is geared to people who are unlikely to travel to Hawaii more than once and who are looking for ways to escape the Pennsylvania winter," Hurd noted. The informational meeting about that trip is tomorrow at 6:15 p.m. at the Devorris Center

for Business Development located at 3900 Industrial Park Drive, Altoona.

If Hawaii is not your thing, perhaps Ireland will be. The Chamber is partnering with Epic Journeys on a trip to the Emerald Isle from April 27th to May 6th. The informational meeting for that trip is September 8th at 6:00 p.m., also at the Devorris Center.

The third Chamber trip of 2022 will be to the Canadian Rockies from July 16th to the 22nd.

"This is a fabulous trip, especially for lovers of the outdoors, that we've had to

cancel in both 2020 and 2021 because the Canadian border has been closed," Hurd disclosed. "It was just too good not to offer again." No informational meeting has yet been scheduled.

The last trip of 2022 will be to Iceland from October 26th to November 3rd. The Chamber will partner with Ketrow KURTZ Travel. The informational meeting, set for the Devorris Center, will be September 28th at 6:00 p.m.

Call Marilyn at the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 to register to attend any of these meetings.



The Hawaiian Islands are a new destination for Chamber trips and one that is likely to be popular during the winter months.



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