

Kelly marking new chapter in leadership

Wes Kelly and Morefield Communications have been strategically linked for more than two decades. The 42-year-old Harrisburg native started as a summer intern and earlier this year became the first President of the company without the last name "Morefield." Wes has a B.S. in Computer Science from Penn State. He and his wife Stephanie have four children: Grace, Eva, Adyson and Aiden.

The Chamber: How would you describe Morefield Communications to someone unfamiliar with it?
Wes: Morefield helps organizations headquartered in Central PA make smart technology decisions enabling their success! Many organizations count on us to be their IT department where other organizations with an IT staff lean on us to improve business outcomes utilizing technology. We design, install, and support a variety of business technology solutions, with a focus on collaboration and security solutions.

The Chamber: What would people in Blair

Chamber Q&A

County be surprised to know about Morefield Communications?

Wes: That we've been in Blair County for over 50 years now. We operated out of the house of one of our sales professionals starting in 1969 and a couple years later operated out of a storefront at 15th St and 1st Avenue. In 1989, we then moved to our current office in the schoolhouse on Kettle Street.

The Chamber: What would they be interested to know about Wes Kelly?

Wes: I started at Morefield as a summer intern. Since that time, I have had the opportunity to work in various roles in the company doing installations, providing support, and designing solutions for clients in Blair County.

The Chamber: What are your thoughts about being the first "non-Morefield" person to head the company?

Wes: I may have a different

last name, but I've been a part of the Morefield "family" for over twenty years. One of our core values is "Culture – we foster a Thriving Culture." This is where the "family" feel comes into play at Morefield. We are a team. We encourage collaboration, demand accountability, and expect the utmost respect for others.

The Chamber: What challenges and opportunities did the pandemic pose to your company?

Wes: The COVID-19 pandemic hasn't really been a major challenge, but more of an opportunity. Before the pandemic, much of our organization worked in a hybrid environment. The pandemic required us to go 100% remote. Thankfully, due to our strong culture and commitment to excellence, we were able to successfully support our clients in this environment. As we come out of the pandemic, we are pleased to be able to offer all employees a hybrid working environment.

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



Wes Kelly, the new president at Morefield Communications, started at the company as a summer intern.

Wes: I have several role models, but I'll keep it to one of each type. On the personal front, it would be my Mom. Growing up she was always a giving person and put everyone else's interests in front of her own needs. This example has always pushed me to want to help others. On the profes-

sional front, Bill Conway our now retired Vice President of Operations has been a role model for me. Bill was the one that offered me an opportunity to take on a management role when I worked in our internal IT department. He took a chance on me and pushed me to move beyond technology

to learn business and leadership.
The Chamber: What's still on Wes Kelly's "bucket list?"
Wes: I love to play the game of golf, but don't get to play as much as I would like with four active kids. Hitting a hole-in-one is still on my bucket list.

Trade Show to help businesses regain balance

Owning a business has always carried its share of risks and rewards. Thanks to Covid-19 – the merciless monster that refuses to go away – peril has become the daily watchword as more and more businesses teeter on the brink of extinction.

"No business is comfortable right now," admits Richard Fiore, Jr., the board chair of the Blair County Chamber. "A few have seen some indications that things are getting better. But I haven't gotten the impression that we can relegate the pandemic to the status of a bad memory. It's still making a strong impression."

For that reason the Chamber is exploring as many ways as possible to help businesses get back on their feet. One of those is to create opportunities for businesses to get in front of consumers – and one another – to re-establish the relationships that existed prior to Covid and to add new ones wherever possible.

"Before the pandemic, the Chamber had spent considerable time and resources on promoting the importance of local buying," Fiore disclosed. "Now that concept is more important than ever. We understand that many businesses, particularly retailers and hospitality businesses, are struggling. It benefits our entire community to do what we can to help, especially since we're likely to spend money in those industry sectors anyway."

One opportunity for business stimulation that won't need to be created from scratch is the trade show that the Blair County Chamber and the Chamber of Business & Industry of Centre County



Jessie Covert (left) and Stacy Hoover (right) of the Blair County Chamber discuss strategy for the upcoming Business Experience with Irene Wetzel from the CBICC.



have been doing since 2018. This year that event, known as the "Business Experience," will be held on November 17th at the Blair County Convention Center.

"It will be similar to what we've done in the past but the sense of urgency will likely be greater," acknowledged Stacy Hoover, the Chamber's VP of Events and Technology. "This event is about building connections and providing ways for exhibitors to get a head start on making 2022 a profitable year. It may also provide some opportunities for shoppers to make some last-minute holiday purchases."

If there is one significant difference in this event from the trade shows held in 2018 and 2019 (there was no show in 2020) it is the relationship between the chambers. In June, the chambers announced

the formation of an alliance that is designed to promote more regional initiatives, particularly those aimed at workforce development.

"Although the trade show is not geared to workforce-related issues, it's got a strong economic development theme that ties it to the challenges that businesses are having in finding and retaining employees," according to Fiore. "And the keynote luncheon presentation that precedes the start of the event is all about workforce."

That keynote will be done as a panel discussion featuring business leaders whose businesses have a strong presence in both Blair and Centre counties. Those panelists will be announced closer to the time of the event.

"We've got a number of businesses with dual locations and similar challenges," explained Chamber President Joe Hurd. "The more we can do to address those challenges, the better the regional impact we'll have.

Our Alliance is very much about our region."

The trade show begins with the Keynote Luncheon from 11:30 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. The exhibit floor opens at 1:30 and closes at 5:00.

"From the comments that we've heard since the exhibitor information went out, we're anticipating a large turnout of exhibitors," Hoover pointed out. "Our past experience has been that the turnout of attendees has been more business-to-business but we may have interested consumers as well. We're inviting anyone with an interest in supporting our communities."

There are sponsorship opportunities for any businesses interested in gaining additional promotional value. To access sponsorship information, contact Jessie Covert at (814) 943-8151 or email her at jcovert@blairchamber.com. To reserve booth space, call Stacy Hoover at that same number or email her at shoover@blairchamber.com.

Rothrauff begins new role as Chamber VP



Julie Rothrauff (left), VP of Programming and Membership Information gains insight from former VP Judy Juda.

In her new role as VP of Programming and Membership Education, Julie Rothrauff is eagerly anticipating the opportunity to oversee a variety of programs and events that help connect Chamber members.

"The community involvement aspect of this position appeals to me," she acknowledged. "I've done events for a long time and the Chamber's events align well with my experience."

Rothrauff holds an Associate Degree in Business/Marketing from Penn State Altoona. Most recently, she was employed by Starfire Corporation as an event manager. Prior to that she

was a development specialist for 13 years with the National MS Society.

"Julie's background fits nicely with what we expect to accomplish within some of our key programs," admitted Chamber President Joe Hurd. "Our two leadership programs in particular require strong organizational skills as well as the ability to work effectively with a number of our committees."

Rothrauff recognizes the challenges ahead.

"The learning curve is obviously a factor," she noted. "There's a lot that encompasses the Chamber. I'm confident that the transition will be smooth."

Sixth YEA! class ready to launch business ideas

When the Blair County Chamber introduced its Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!) program in 2016, it set a goal of five years to determine whether or not the program was worthwhile and should continue.

On October 5th, the sixth

class of YEA! will have its first session beginning at 8:15 a.m. at the Sheetz Center for Entrepreneurial Studies in Downtown Altoona. The class will meet each Tuesday for 26 weeks.

For further information call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151.

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