



## If not us then who?

In one of fiction writer Kurt Vonnegut's most heralded works, *Breakfast of Champions*, the weary protagonist is consoled by a friend with these words: "You are pooped and demoralized and why shouldn't you be? It's not easy to reason in a world that wasn't meant to be reasonable."

Vonnegut, who died in 2007, should see us now.

There was a time not so long ago that our problems were more irritating than

unrelenting. As individuals, we could shrug them off and go about our day. As a community, we were pretty sure someone had them firmly under control.

Thanks to a pandemic all bets are off.

Not only are we stuck in a health crisis, all of our entanglements seem to be magnified. We can't find people to work. We can't find anyone to care for our children while we go to work. We have inadequate housing and a tangled supply chain that's making it difficult to access anything including food.

We're not happy with our political leaders and our spiritual leaders and anyone whose opinion on leadership differs from our own. And winter weather is on its way.

Pooped and demoralized almost sounds preferable.

From the vantage point of a chamber of commerce, it appears that we've spent much of the past eighteen months talking about how terrible everything is and how miserable we are. To no one's surprise, that strategy hasn't accomplished much. Sooner or later, if you're lucky, you reach the point where enough-is-enough.

We've reached that point. It's our committees that are in the process of looking at the most pressing issues and determining the most effective ways to move forward.

Our BASICS Committee completed a two-day symposium on the challenges related to healthcare staffing.

Our Public Policy Committee is taking a hard look at the housing dilemma that makes it difficult to attract new businesses to our county.

Our Transportation Committee is working on solutions to the area's inability to provide better access to local attractions and hospitality businesses, an ongoing headache to our travel and tourism industry.

Our Committee of Non-Profit Businesses and our BASICS Subcommittee that deals with childcare issues are both considering symposiums bringing together providers for meaningful dialogue.

The general consensus among our committees is that much needs to be done and that we're the ones that can do it. Wanna help?

## Symposium yields insights, opportunities

There was no shortage of information or opinions at the Healthcare Employment Symposium, held November 2nd and 3rd by the BASICS Committee of the Blair County Chamber.

"We were hoping that the participants would be willing to share their thoughts on the employment crisis that's taking place in healthcare. We weren't disappointed," reported BASICS Co-chair Neil Hollander. "One of our goals was to have enough flip-chart material to begin compiling a strategy. We're happy with the volume of information that came out of both days."

Thirty-three people attended, representing healthcare facilities, service providers, human resources professionals, school district administrators and higher education specialists.

"BASICS stayed true to its mission," acknowledged Committee Co-chair Chris Farrell. "The acronym is Businesses And Schools Investing in Cooperative

Solutions. Both business and education were well-represented and the dialogue both days was spirited and interactive."

Much of the discussion focused on determining more effective ways to recruit and retain healthcare workers, more thorough ways to make young people aware of career opportunities and more creative ways to offset the realities of a diminishing workforce.

"This is not one of those problems with a simple solution," Hollander pointed out. "There are many layers that need to be considered individually. I was impressed by the willingness of the people in the room to not only express their opinions but also to commit to a follow-up. We recognize that there's a lot to do and the sense of urgency is great."

According to Chamber President Joe Hurd, this Symposium is not likely to be the last.

"I've been approached by other industry sectors which like the format and



Chris Farrell of the Chamber's BASICS Committee records discussion items from one of the focus groups at the recent Healthcare Employment Symposium.

want to explore similar events," Hurd disclosed. "While healthcare seemed like the obvious one to begin with, others like hospitality and early childhood education have daunting challenges as well. We'll certainly do our best to provide the opportunities."

In the meantime, the BASICS Steering Committee will begin the process of sorting through the responses that came from the Healthcare Employment Symposium.

"We've heard from a number of people on the business and education

sides that they felt the event was worthwhile simply because it generated the type of discussion that hasn't taken place to this degree," Farrell noted. "They're also hopeful that the discussion isn't the extent of what's accomplished. We hope that too."

## Spahn Accounting helps clients maintain regulatory compliance



Tina Spahn and her son, Tim, have endured a number of challenges to their accounting business but have managed to experience success.

It's often said that the real measure of a strong business is how well it's able to overcome adversity. By that standard, Spahn Accounting at 1226 13th Avenue in Altoona is a pillar of strength.

Not only has Spahn Accounting been able to weather the many challenges associated with Covid-19, it has done-so within a year after having endured a serious fire at the business.

It's been a difficult time for sure," explained Tina Spahn, the company's former president who is now serving as vice-president to her son Tim, II. "We are a family business where we treat you like a family. We are as big as we would like to be but not too big that we cannot give clients the time they deserve."

Spahn Accounting has been in business in one



form or another since 1994 although Tina Spahn has been preparing taxes for the past 42-years. Her husband, Tim Sr. passed away in 2017. He, his father Jacob and his mother Arlene had all been owners. Now, Tina and Tim, II, comprise half of the four-employee Spahn Accounting team. They've adjusted well to a changing business climate.

"Just as we were getting back on our feet from the fire we were told to shut our doors and our clients

were told to stay home," Tina acknowledged. "We are a walk-in business so many of our clients didn't know if we were still open or where we went. We learned quite a few survival skills from that experience. Ultimately, we were forced to change to a 'by appointment only' format."

Tina believes that Spahn Accounting, despite numerous challenges, is heading in the right direction.

"We're excited about our future," she admitted. "I look forward to my son taking the reign of the whole company one day. He is very intelligent and very adept in the accounting, payroll and tax preparation industry. We have a strong customer base that is aware of what our skills are."

(Spahn Accounting has been a member of the Chamber since 2015.)

## Altoona Police Chief is keynote speaker at next "Breakfast Club"



Photo by Patrick Waksmunski

Altoona Police Chief Joe Merrill is confident in his ability to connect the community and law enforcement.

The Chief of Police of the City of Altoona will be the keynote speaker at the next Blair County Chamber "Breakfast Club," set for this Thursday, November 18th at 7:45 a.m. at The Casino at Lakemont Park.

Chief Joseph Merrill has been in that role, first as the interim chief upon Janice Freeling's retirement on March 1st and then as a permanent replacement on

May 10th. The Chief will discuss challenges and opportunities that face local law enforcement

The cost to attend Breakfast Club is \$20 for Chamber members and \$30 for non-members. To register, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at [www.blairchamber.com](http://www.blairchamber.com). Corporate sponsor of the November Breakfast Club is DiAndrea Media.

## Business After Hours

One of Blair County's most attractive and popular hotels – Wingate by Windham Altoona – will host the next Blair County Chamber of Commerce "Business After Hours" on Thursday, November 18th from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. The Wingate is located at 909 Chestnut Avenue. It is an annual award winner for customer satisfaction

and cleanliness and includes an on-site lobby wine bar and lounge as well as an indoor pool and fitness center.

The cost to attend Business After Hours is \$10 for Chamber members and \$20 for non-members. To register, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at [www.blairchamber.com](http://www.blairchamber.com).



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