

Reliance Bank values young professionals

Phil Freeman has worked in Blair County long enough to understand the challenges and opportunities associated with building and maintaining a healthy business community. And he recognizes that a big part of the process is tied to working hard in the present with a constant eye to the future.

As President/CEO of Reliance Bank, Freeman employs a considerable number of young professionals – people in the 21-39 age range – and he feels that the ongoing development of those people is a good thing for his bank and the region in which his bank serves. It’s also why Freeman has decided to invest in memberships for interested employees to become involved in the Young Professionals of Blair County, a program of the Blair County Chamber.

“It’s a great opportunity for our team members to connect and learn from their peers,” Freeman acknowledged. “They develop long-lasting relationships and the foundational skills to be-

come future leaders in our community.”

It also creates an advantage for Reliance Bank. “The involvement of our young professionals enables them to further develop their interpersonal skills and gain confidence, which in turn improves the quality of their interactions with our customers and the community,” Freeman pointed out. “It’s such a pleasure to witness their continued personal and professional growth.”

The cost for young professionals to participate in the Chamber’s YP program is inexpensive. Chamber members can belong for just \$40 a year, non-members for just \$50. YP membership reduces the cost of attending programs and events. For Reliance Bank, underwriting the cost is a no-brainer, according to Freeman.

“I’ve watched our team members really enjoy and appreciate the opportunity to be involved in YP,” he admitted. “It’s created an energy for others to participate and really get engaged.

This has been a home run for our organization and I’m certain that it could benefit other organizations as well.”

Chamber Board Chair Richard Fiore, Jr. agrees and he’s hoping that Reliance Bank’s involvement will be an example for others.

“Like most programs that the Chamber does, the real successful outcomes usually happen as the result of high participation,” Fiore disclosed. “As our YP program begins to plan events for young professionals, we’re hopeful that our businesses will recognize the advantages associated with staff development and will offer to underwrite the costs of involvement. Even if the financial commitment is more than a business wants to do, we’re always welcoming their willingness to help promote the program within their business.”

Fiore believes that there’s an additional benefit to businesses that support YP.

“Businesses are always looking for ways to inspire loyalty among employees,” he explained. “By showing a commitment to employees



Phil Freeman, President/CEO of Reliance Bank poses with the bank’s employees who are part of the Chamber’s Young Professionals. Left to right (seated) are: Lindsay French, Freeman and Lindsey Riley. (standing): Aubrey Weatherly, Brianna Soucy, Lauren Dodson, Jamie Bianconi and Michaela Detwiler. Absent were Aaron Mogle and Julie Carney.

in terms of their professional development can send a message that can have a pretty significant upside.”

Any business that would like additional information

on how to recruit employees should call Joe Hurd at (814) 943-8151.

“We’d be happy to assist in the process of identifying employees who would at least like to attend a net-

working event or two to see what YP is all about,” Fiore noted.

(Reliance Bank has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 1954.)

Customer first is Barton’s business philosophy

In the business world, bigger isn’t always better. Just ask Tim Barton, president of Barton’s Plumbing & Heating in Duncansville.

“I used to have fourteen employees and we worked throughout western Pennsylvania,” Barton disclosed. “We made the decision to make the business more family-oriented to assure that we could take care of the people locally who have been loyal to us. We currently have six employees. People would be amazed by the amount of work we get done with just six.”

He would like to have more. “I’d love to add a few more service people but we just can’t find them,” he pointed out. “We’re fairly specific in what we expect and we understand that the pool of people in our industry isn’t very deep. It’s just one of the challenges we face.”

Another significant one is supply chain. Getting the products is difficult enough, Barton admitted. Absorbing the rising costs of those products and having to pass those increases on to the customer is not



Tim Barton has 28-years experience in the Plumbing and Heating business. He’s happy to have sons Jake and Zac as part of the operation.

something he looks forward to.

“It’s really unavoidable,” he pointed out. “Our suppliers only guarantee their prices for a week. We’ve had five increases so far this year. Usually it’s just one.”

Despite the many obstacles provided by Covid-19, Barton acknowledged that 2020 was one of his best years, primarily due to the company’s designation as

an essential business.

“We were busier than normal as the result of more people being home,” he noted. “We strive to provide high quality in all that we do and it makes a difference at times like these.” It’s a lesson that Barton imparts to his sons – Jake and Zac – who are among his employees.

“Having them as part of the business has been a good thing,” Barton em-

phasized. “They’re the future and the decisions they make will determine the direction we go. I’ve been in the business for 28 years. The way that we’re operating now (with six employees) is the best for me. If the boys want to take it back to the size that we used to be, that will be their decision.”

(Barton’s Plumbing & Heating has been a Chamber member since 1997.)

State Senator Judy Ward to offer year-end review at Chamber breakfast

State Senator Judy Ward will be the keynote speaker at the next Blair County Chamber Breakfast Club, set for this Thursday at The Casino at Lakemont Park beginning at 7:45 a.m.

The format for the event will be a Q&A moderated by Attorney Chris Michelson of McQuaide Blasko, who chairs the Chamber’s Public Policy Committee. Questions for the Senator were submitted by members of the Chamber and reviewed by the committee.

“We’re looking forward to having the Senator provide insight on issues that are important to the business community,” Michelson explained. “It’s been an incredible year to keep track of everything.”



The cost to attend the Breakfast Club is \$20 for Chamber members and \$30 for non-members. The cost includes a buffet breakfast. To register, contact the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at www.blairchamber.com. Corporate sponsor of the December Breakfast Club is Stuckey Automotive.

Chamber YP Committee to hold networking event

The Young Professionals of Blair County will ring-in the holiday season with a networking event on December 9th from 5:30 to 7:30 at Zach’s Sports & Spirits in Altoona.

“We’re looking forward to having a great turnout of young professionals for our last event of the year,” explained Jared Keller of Keller Engineers, who chairs the YP Committee. “Our last several events have been well-attended and people made great contacts. Zach’s is a great networking venue.”

The Young Professionals will continue to offer separate memberships to the YP program to help offset some



of the costs associated with upcoming events and to reduce the per-event costs to YP members.

The cost to attend the YP event is \$10 for those young professionals who are members of the YP program and \$15 for anyone who is not yet a YP member. To join YP, contact the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or download an application at www.blairchamber.com. Visit that same website to register for the event at Zach’s.

It’s Happening at the Blair County Chamber

■ The Chamber Ambassadors meet tomorrow at 8:00 a.m. at the Devorris Center for Business Development. The Ambassadors help new Chamber members to become acclimated to the organization. If you or someone from your business would like to be an Ambassador, contact Joe Hurd at (814) 943-8151.

■ The Workplace Wellness Committee also meets tomorrow. That meeting is at 10:30 a.m. at the Devorris

Center and can be accessed on Zoom as well. Help our business community to understand ways to keep employees healthy and our employers from paying high insurance costs. To become a Wellness Committee member, call Joe Hurd at (814) 943-8151.

■ The Attractions and Hotel Roundtables meet on Wednesday at 8:15 a.m. at Fairfield Inn & Suites. The Roundtables are a partnership between the Chamber

and Explore Altoona. The businesses that are part of the roundtables meet bi-monthly to discuss ways to help one another deal with the challenges that face our hospitality businesses. For more information on the roundtables, contact Joe Hurd at (814) 943-8151.

■ Interested in Sustainability and how it impacts our businesses? The Chamber’s Sustainable Blair County Committee meets on Wednesday at

1:30 p.m. at the Devorris Center to begin planning an event that will take place in January. The committee continues to offer a survey for local restaurants that helps them assess better ways to avoid food waste and save money on a variety of operational costs. Contact Joe Hurd at (814) 943-8151 for more information.

■ The Chamber’s next “Sanity Session” is this Friday at 8:30 on Zoom!



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