

Home show success entices exhibitors to return

As the Home Garden & Healthy Living Showcase Committee continues with the planning of that March 25-27 event, certain trends seem to be emerging. One of those is that a high percentage of the businesses that have already signed-on as exhibitors have been veterans of previous shows.

"Quite a few familiar names," acknowledged Dave DeBiase, executive officer of the Blair-Bedford Builders Association, which partners on the show with the Blair County Chamber. "Although we've got an impressive list of new exhibitors, I think it speaks to the value of the show that so many previous exhibitors have made it a priority to return."

Brent Zimmerman, owner of Champion Roofing in Altoona, is one of those repeat exhibitors. Although Zimmerman admits that he has no shortage of jobs

Home Garden & Healthy Living SHOWCASE

lined-up for 2022 and in some cases beyond, registering to exhibit in the upcoming show was a no-brainer.

"We're anticipating a really good year," Zimmerman noted. "We've been in the show for many years and what we've learned is that you don't judge the value of the event strictly on one particular weekend. We've had people contact us a couple years after we talked to them at the show. It's actually happened on a number of occasions."

It's the nature of an effective trade show, Zimmerman emphasized.

"It's really about building long-term relationships," he pointed out. "Many of our customers came to us

through the show. It's likely to happen again. It would make no sense for us to figure that we could take a year or two off from the show just because we had a healthy amount of business already."

Scott Boyer of Boyer Refrigeration has had similar experiences.

"As well as we've done in attracting business during the many years that we've been exhibitors, this show is more than just about making connections," Boyer disclosed. "There's a lot of education that people who attend the show rely on. They not only want to know who will do the work, they want to get some guidance on what makes the most sense in



Brent Zimmerman, owner of Champion Roofing, and his friend Rocky are strong advocates of the Home Garden and Healthy Living Showcase.

what they ultimately decide to do. That's one of the real advantages of a trade show."

DeBiase agrees. "Some people believe that trade shows are a thing of the

past," he stated. "Those people are mistaken. People, more-and-more, want to talk face-to-face. That type of interaction is returning to prominence. This is our 51st year.

We've seen it all."

To become an exhibitor, contact Stacy Hoover at (814) 943-8151. To become a show sponsor, contact Jessie Covert at that same number.

Mentors play critical role in YEA! program

The success of the Blair County Chamber's Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!) program has been the result of many people with an understanding of the importance of building a business community from within.

One group of willing volunteers that have played a critical role has been the YEA! Mentors.

"The mentors guide the students as they start painting their own business picture," explained Tim Gildea, YEA!'s program manager. "They help the students provide substance to the thoughts and ideas that have been jumping around in their heads since the beginning of the business journey. The mentors help students to bring clarity to what they want to do."

They also ask the tough questions that ultimately guides the students to the formation of their business plans. Often that includes an infusion of practicality.

"When all is said and done, these mentors and mentees will have developed a relationship that may be life-changing for both," Gildea disclosed.

The mentors, particularly the ones that have been with the YEA! program for more than one year, vigorously agree with Gildea's assessment. Each has his or her own reason why they got involved with YEA! to begin with.



The mentors for the 2022 Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!) Class are, left to right: Katie Whysong, Lindsey Riley, Superman Berrow, A. J. Kelly, Bud Fulton, Jayme Orr, Darin Tornatore, Rob Wentz and Dan Bon. Absent were Gwen Fisher, Dave Cadle and Spencer Nicholson.



"I've been involved all six years of the program," explained Darin Tornatore. "It's an excellent program. We've got a lot of kids who leave the area and I want to be one of the reasons why they stay."

Katie Whysong has been a YEA! mentor for four years. She's enjoyed every minute of it.

"It's been a lot of fun," she reported. "There's a lot of satisfaction in helping these young people get started. They're very motivated to be successful."

Bud Fulton has also been mentoring for four years. He regards it as a "chance to give back." The learning curve, in his estimation, swings both ways. "I've learned as much as they have."

Rob Wentz is in his third year and stays involved because he loves helping kids.

"It's cool to see the passion that they have for developing a business of their own," Wentz pointed out.

"They've got it mapped-out and sometimes just need a jumpstart. The mentors try to provide that."

This year's YEA! class has twenty students, the second-largest class since the program began. It also has a new group of mentors. One of those is Superman Berrow. Like the others, he views the commitment as an opportunity.

"The future of Blair County depends on the willingness of people to do things that are valuable to making the county better. To me, YEA! is one of those things," Berrow acknowledged.

Foundation Board appoints officers, adds new members



Rachel Prosser



Tracy Plessinger



Jessica Fisher



Donald Yeager

The Blair County Chamber Foundation is anticipating a strong year of helping young people in Blair County to meet their career goals. To do that, according to Foundation Secretary/ Treasurer Cindy Cessna, the group must "up" its marketing game.

"We've done some really good things but people for the most part don't know enough about us," Cessna acknowledged. "One of our major objectives for 2022 is to raise awareness."

The Foundation will have new leadership as Rachel Prosser of Altoona-Blair County Development Corporation takes over as president and Tracy Plessinger of Altoona-Blair County Airport steps-in as vice-president. Prosser takes over for James Gerraughty; Plessinger for Prosser.

The Foundation also welcomes two new board members as Jessica Fisher from McQuaide Blasko and Donald Yeager from 1st Summit

Bank replace Chris Michelson and Brian Irwin, whose terms have expired.

The Blair County Chamber Foundation is in its 21st year. It was started to provide tax advantages to people who had a desire to contribute to the many Blair County Chamber programs that are geared to help Blair County youth. Those programs include Leadership Blair County Youth, BASICS and PA Free Enterprise Week. Since its inception, the Foundation has raised \$1,373,000.

A primary focus of this year's fundraising effort will be the Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program which allows businesses to contribute to 501 C-3 organizations.

"It's a win-win for both the organization and the contributing business," Cessna pointed out. "For more information, call (814) 943-8151 or email me (cessna@blairchamber.com). I'd be happy to walk you through it."

WELCOME TO THE CHAMBER

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