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More reasons for optimism

There really is no substitute for the memories that make you smile.

The Chamber's recent ribbon-cutting at Slinky Action Zone returned me to the scene of countless nights when the energy level of my young children (now all in their 20's) required a venue with sufficient safeguards, better overall supervision and less access to Mountain Dew.

The soft play area at Slinky still features a variety of padded crawl corridors,

some down low, others up high. I spent considerable time in those corridors, mostly trying to find my children when it was time to go home. As I look at those corridors now,

I try to speculate how many rescue vehicles the Slinky people would need to call, should I foolishly attempt to rekindle my youth.

If you haven't personally visited Slinky Action Zone since its recent renovation, you need to make it a priority. It's still a great place to take little kids but it's so much more now. The 2-Tier Laser Tag area alone is something that you'd only expect to find in a big city. It's worth a look even if you have no intention of playing Laser Tag.

The unfinished phase at Slinky will add a brewing company to the operation. If you've ever been to a Dave & Busters, I'm sure that you already have a sense of how this enhancement will create an atmosphere of additional excitement.

Dr. Gary Raymond and Dr. Alan Kivitz, the owners of Slinky Action Zone, are just the most recent businesspeople in our county to invest in a project that will impact our quality of life but which also provides a shot-in-the-arm to our travel and tourism efforts. They should be commended.

Two days after the Slinky ribbon-cutting, the Chamber's Board of Directors approved a recommendation from Rails-to-Trails that sets the stage for an upgrade to the way that the county's trail system is managed and funded. This, too, would potentially increase the county's ability to use another of its significant recreational assets to attract visitors to the area. Rails-to-Trails, to its credit, has been doing an amazing job with strictly volunteers. It's no longer practical to continue in that manner.

It's an understatement to say that many good things are happening here. We already know that having great amusement parks and a terrific minor league baseball stadium make us an attractive destination. Stay tuned. There's more to come.

Martin Oil marking membership milestone

Blair County has long been recognized for its many outstanding family businesses and the impact they make on the area's economy. One of those businesses – Martin Oil Company – is celebrating the 60th anniversary of its founding and its 50th year as a member of the Blair County Chamber.

"It's a big year for us," acknowledged Karen Padula, Corporate Secretary, who is an integral part of the family operation. Her father, Thomas C. Martin is Chairman; her brother Tom G. Martin is President and her brother, Daniel Martin, is Treasurer. The business was started by George O. Martin in 1962.

Martin Oil has six conveniently located offices that serve homes with delivery of heating oil and other fuel products such as gasoline and on and off-road diesel fuel. The company delivers to commercial businesses including farms, construction sites and trucking companies. The offices are located in Bellwood, Alexandria, Shade Gap,

Ebensburg, Woodbury and Bedford.

Martin Oil also owns and operates ten Martin General Store locations which are community convenience stores. Those stores provide quality food, gasoline and outstanding service at all locations.

"We also own America's oldest gas station," Padula pointed out. "Reighard's is a full-service gas and diesel location in Altoona. Most people would be surprised to know that the oldest gas station in the country is located here. The friendly staff at this location will pump your gas, wash your windows and put air in your tires."

The long association with the Chamber, according to Padula, has been based primarily on satisfaction. "The Chamber has been a very good place to network and make a lot of great friends and loyal customers," she admitted. "We depend on them to send us updates on new laws and legislation. The Chamber meetings provide us with great speakers and also let



Martin Oil Company often gets credit for just its outstanding convenience stores. But the service component of the company is equally impressive.

us know of new businesses in the area that can provide us much-needed services and potential business for us to provide services to them."

As many businesses in the county continue to

struggle as the result of Covid-19 and staffing shortages, Martin Oil is optimistic that the next twenty years will be as good as the past sixty.

"Ideally, the business will be going strong with, of

course, some necessary changes with the times," Padula predicted. "One key to staying in business is to adapt. We are doing the type of improvement that will guarantee our long-term success."

Active Living Steps Challenge recognizes most recent winners



Active Living Steps Challenge winners are, left to right (seated): Beth Neely, Lori Campbell and Bruce Erb. (Standing): Jennifer Sabourin, Billie Lynn Lewis, Dr. Aditya Bhatnagar and Dr. Dirya Tumuluru. The Steps Challenge was coordinated by Coleen Heim and Emily Beam.

Blair County is determined to become one of Pennsylvania's healthiest communities, even if it has to accomplish that one step at a time. Or, in some cases, millions of steps.

"We have a growing number of people in our county who have embraced healthy living practices," explained Coleen Heim, Director of the Healthy Blair County Coalition. "So many of our events are geared to creating healthy living opportunities."

One of those events, co-sponsored by the Workplace Wellness Committee of the Blair County Chamber, is the Active Living Steps Challenge which recently recognized the event winners in five categories. The Individual Winner, who walked 852,273 steps, is Bruce Erb. The Small Team Winner, with 4,500,547 steps is Blair Health Choices.

Hollidaysburg Church of the Brethren, with 6,792,431 steps, took home the Medium Team Winner honors. Altoona Family Physicians checked-in as the Large Team Winner with 9,475,045 steps. And finally, Penn State Altoona Faculty & Staff was the X-Large Team Winner with 26,365,716 steps.

"This was our first time in the Steps Challenge," admitted Billie Lynn Lewis, Co-Director of the Health & Wellness Center at Penn State Altoona. "I've always been a pusher for health and wellness initiatives for the faculty and staff. We had 55 people who turned-in steps to me. Beyond the health benefit, it was just really fun."

Beth Neely of the Hollidaysburg Church of the Brethren agreed.

"It gave us fellowship together and helped us spiritually and physically," she

noted. "It was good to see people in a different setting. For an event like this one, you seldom only derive one benefit."

For Erb, the experience was incorporated into his daily regimen.

"I go to the YMCA six days a week and I try to walk 10,000 steps a day," he disclosed. "I had done the Steps Challenge in the past as part of the team from the courthouse. When the team decided to take a year off, I decided to do it as an individual. It was enjoyable."

Heim announced at the award ceremony that Healthy Blair County will be starting a new fitness challenge initiative called Spark Blair County. That initiative will start on April 15th and conclude on May 31st. Details will be announced in a few weeks.

"It's an exciting new program," she reported.

SETTING THE PACE

Leslie Postek Sustainable Blair County

- 1. Title and place of work:** Environmental Engineer, Gwin, Dobson and Foreman, Inc.
- 2. Years with current position:** Two.
- 3. Positions held in the Chamber:** Sustainability Committee Member.
- 4. Family:** Boyfriend - Matt, Cats - JT and Sammie, Father - Stanley.
- 5. Community organizations:** Currently looking to get involved.
- 6. Hobbies/leisure:** Horseback riding, fishing, hunting, motorcycle riding.
- 7. Education:** Bachelor of Science in Environmental Engineering from Gannon University, Erie, PA - 2019.
- 8. First job:** Production Team Member at Edible Arrangements in Erie, PA from 2012 - 2019. This was my first job I worked at when I first started high school and kept all throughout college until I moved to Blair County to follow my career goal of becoming an Environmental Engineer.
- 9. I would like to be known for:** Setting and achieving my life goals.
- 10. Business role model:** Tom Kaye, Franchise Owner of Edible Arrangements in Erie, PA. Tom is the perfect example of a business role model. He



works alongside his employees and motivates them to perform their best work. He handed down his Pepperidge Farm bread route business to his eldest son and opened up an Edible Arrangements franchise approximately 12 years ago. Both businesses continue to be successful.

11. Your thoughts about the Chamber: I believe that the Chamber provides wonderful leadership opportunities for organizations by creating ways that they can be involved in the community which can benefit the community and promote their business.

12. Your thoughts about Blair County: Blair County is a beautiful place for outdoor recreation and has many historical sites. There are multiple career, business and hobby opportunities available for people of all ages. I am proud to call Blair County my home.

Band of Brothers Tour

The Blair County Chamber and Ketrow KURTZ Travel will be offering a special "Band of Brothers" Tour from September 2-16, 2022. The Tour follows the path of Easy Company from its training bases in Toccoa, Georgia and England into combat in France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and on to final victory at Berchtesgaden, Germany – Adolf Hitler's Alpine Retreat. For further information, contact Ketrow KURTZ Travel at (814) 695- 1100

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