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Blair County Chamber of Commerce in cooperation with the Altoona Mirror

Remaking the Hall

In the chamber of commerce world, recognition is incredibly important. A business community, especially a vibrant one, needs to occasionally stop and ease the wagon to the side of the road to acknowledge the efforts of those who've been pulling it.

The Blair County Chamber has consistently looked for appropriate ways to provide recognition. In 2021, despite the annoying oscillations of a pandemic, the Chamber was able to present an array

of awards at our Annual Meeting, a Lifetime Achievement Award for Business Excellence at our Business Excellence Dinner, and an Agricultural Community

Excellence Award at our Farm-City event.

Yet something was missing and for anyone who had ever been a member of the Chamber for longer than five minutes, the missing piece was significant. The Business Hall of Fame, a special night of long gowns and ill-fitting tuxedos, had somehow fallen-off the Chamber schedule. Blame it on Covid? Not this time.

The Hall of Fame made its debut in 1990 and each year four businesses were honored with induction. There was also a category called "General Awards of Distinction" that recognized, among other things, Excellence in Small Business, Young Emerging Business and Community Service. After nearly three decades, the decision was made to take a year off. That year was 2020.

To no one's surprise, 2021 didn't exactly provide the ideal circumstance for event revitalization. So the Hall of Fame's hiatus stretched a year longer. Blame it on Covid? You bet! But to be fair it had become rather obvious that some type of a facelift was in the offing.

There's a Cherokee Proverb that says, "Don't let yesterday use up too much of today." On June 16th, the Business Hall of Fame "luncheon" will be held at a site still to be determined. The event, unlike the others that recognize outstanding individuals from within the business community, will recognize outstanding businesses instead. Without the Hall of Fame that simply wouldn't happen.

There will be those within our membership that will miss the tradition of an evening event even though our recent survey results indicate that fewer people are enthralled with extending their workday, even to pay tribute to high-achievers.

Whether changing the time and potentially part of the format for the Hall of Fame event is viewed either positively or negatively is really secondary to the fact that saying good things about businesses at this stage of the game can't possibly be a bad thing.

New VA Chief of Staff mixes skill, passion

Chamber Q&A

Dr. Angela Rowe is a fly fisherman, a sporting clays shooter and an accomplished cook. She's also a healthcare practitioner who brings outstanding skill and enthusiasm to her new role as chief of staff at the James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center. The 56-year-old Rowe and her husband Paul have a son, Jimmy, and live in Hollidaysburg.

The Chamber: You've had an impressive impact already on medicine in Blair County. Describe it?

Dr. Rowe: I fell in love with orthopedics and accepted a position at Blair Orthopedics, becoming the first female orthopedic surgeon in Blair County. That partnership later grew into a joint venture with University Orthopedics and ENT Associates to open Advanced Center for Surgery, an outpatient surgery center known for quality care and for performing more than 2,800 out-patient total joint replacements since inception. This success story allowed Blair Orthopedics to merge with University Orthopedic and I have been with the combined group for the past 21 years.

The Chamber: In your new role as Chief of Staff, what do you look forward to accomplishing and what challenges seem most daunting as you undertake your new role?

Dr. Rowe: I am very excited to be at the James E. Van Zandt Medical Center. Over the course of the last five years, this medical center has experienced a level of growth and expansion that is rarely seen at other healthcare agencies. This medical center truly is the regional leader in providing healthcare to our Veterans. The ground work set by my predecessors, as well as the high level of dedication to our Veterans that our team has set as the standard, can be daunting for a newcomer.

The Chamber: What would people be surprised to know about Dr. Angela Rowe?

Dr. Rowe: I love to cook, especially for my friends. I think of food as the reason to gather and enjoy each other's company. I also like to shoot sporting clays.

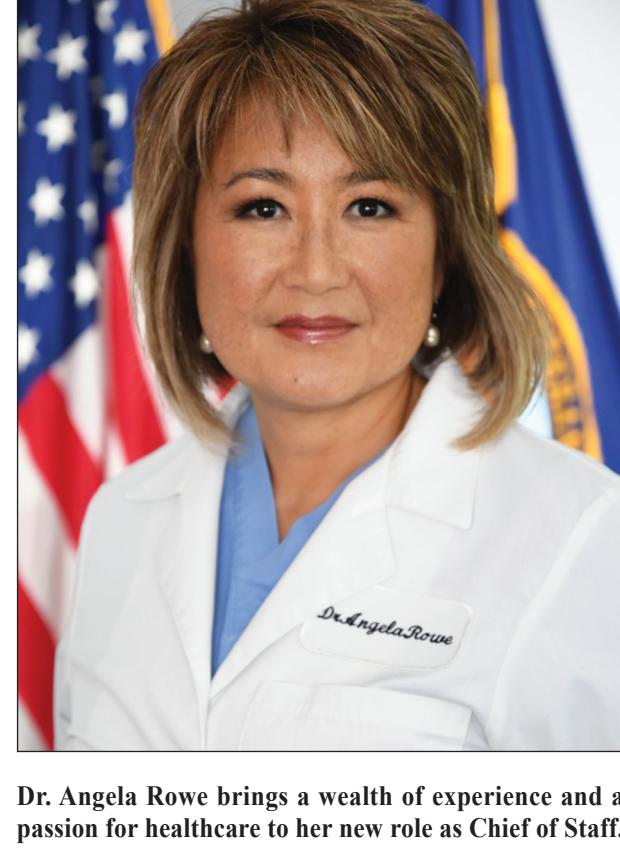
This is also another event I love to do with friends. Of course, there's always a little competitive ribbing going on with our group. We like to shoot all over, but Hollidaysburg Sportsman Club is my home club.

The Chamber: The late Dr. Sam Magee had a tremendous reputation as your predecessor. What made him so effective?

Dr. Rowe: Dr. Magee was a true leader at this VA. He was the reason I came to the VA. He asked me if I would help take care of the Veterans during COVID and I have been here ever since. People understood the passion he had for our Veterans, and gravitated toward him because of that.

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

Dr. Rowe: My personal hero is Misty Copeland. She became the first African American principal dancer in the American Ballet Theater's 75 year history. She overcame all odds to be the best and that's why she inspires me and many women to try harder. My professional role model is Ruth Jackson, MD. She was born in 1902 and she became the first female



Dr. Angela Rowe brings a wealth of experience and a passion for healthcare to her new role as Chief of Staff.

board-certified orthopedic surgeon in the U.S.

The Chamber: Among many other interests, you enjoy fly fishing. How did that interest come about and how would you describe your aptitude for that activity?

Dr. Rowe: I actually met my husband when I was

looking for someone to take me fishing. That was many years ago and since then I have fly fished for trout, small mouth, and I have even caught wall-eye on flies. But, that was by sheer luck. I love fishing and I can't wait to go back to Alaska to fish for salmon.

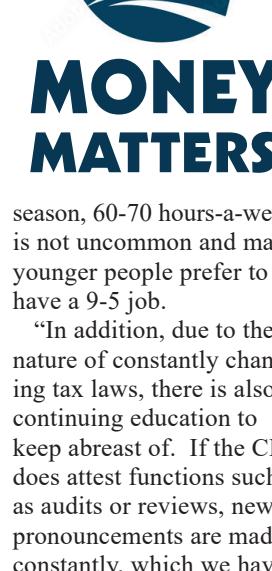
CPA Associates team offers expert advice and service

While the cold winter months in Blair County generally mean the need to hunker-down and hope for an early spring, to local CPA's and tax preparers it can mean so much more.

"This is our time," admitted Mike McClain. "We understand the challenges and we prepare to meet them. It's what you sign-up for."

As Altoona Director of CPA Associates, McClain knows the terrain. He has been at CPA Associates since 2006 after having spent 20 years with an accounting firm in Johnstown. It's been a long and satisfying career and one that is becoming unusual as the pool of Certified Public Accountants in Blair County heads toward the shallow side.

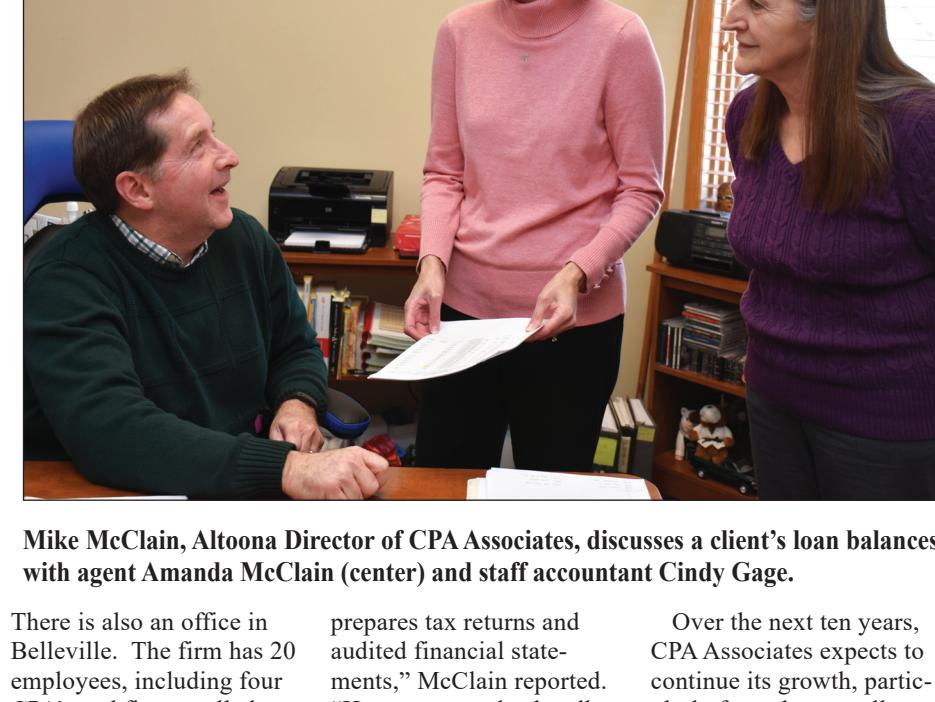
"I do believe the county could be facing a shortage of CPA's in the coming years," McClain acknowledged. "There are probably several reasons for that. The biggest one I see is that CPA's who chose private practice work long hours from January through April. During tax



season, 60-70 hours-a-week is not uncommon and many younger people prefer to have a 9-5 job.

"In addition, due to the nature of constantly changing tax laws, there is also continuing education to keep abreast of. If the CPA does attest functions such as audits or reviews, new pronouncements are made constantly, which we have to be aware of as well. Finally, a requirement for CPA licensure is 150 hours of undergraduate credits, which can typically result in a fifth year of college."

CPA Associates has been in business since 1987. It was founded in Huntingdon, PA and the home office is still located there. The Altoona Office has been on Valley View Boulevard since 2004.



Mike McClain, Altoona Director of CPA Associates, discusses a client's loan balances with agent Amanda McClain (center) and staff accountant Cindy Gage.

There is also an office in Belleville. The firm has 20 employees, including four CPA's and five enrolled agents. Four or five full-time employees work out of Altoona.

While tax preparation is a high priority, it's not the only game in town for CPA Associates.

"Many individuals think our accounting firm only

prepares tax returns and audited financial statements," McClain reported. "However, we also handle payroll preparation, payroll quarterlies and bookkeeping services for clients including check processing services and monthly financial statements. So business owners can keep a better handle on how their business is performing."

Over the next ten years, CPA Associates expects to continue its growth, particularly from the payroll processing side, according to McClain.

"We're always looking to find more efficient ways to service our current and future clients."

(CPA Associates has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 2006.)

Chamber looking to expand Presidents' Forum program

For more than two decades, the Blair County Chamber of Commerce has offered a professional development program to upper management members. The success of that program has spurred an expansion that will provide additional opportunities to participate, sometime in the spring.

The Presidents' Forum was created using a similar format to the Young Presidents' Organization (YPO) in which groups of business people meet on a monthly basis to discuss anything that makes them more effective in their business or personal life. The meetings, which generally last four

hours, are highly confidential and structured to make maximum use of the time.

"We currently have seven active groups," explained Chamber President Joe Hurd. "Each group has either seven or eight members. One of our groups has actually been in place for 21 years. The program has had outstanding

results and really fills an essential niche for people at the top of a business or for those heading there."

Philip Devorris of Blair Companies has been the chair of the committee that oversees the Presidents' Forum since its inception. "Philip has been the heart and soul of this program

and continues to help it grow," Hurd pointed out.

The Chamber will hold an informational meeting on the program on February 23rd at 8:00 a.m. at the Devorris Center for Business Development. People interested in attending should contact Joe Hurd at jhurd@blairchamber.com.

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