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HURD IMMUNITY

A promise kept

When I was first hired as the Chamber's executive director, I assembled a list of organizations in various parts of the county and asked them if I could pay a visit. It was simply fact-finding and in retrospect, it went pretty well. No one soaped the windows of my car or rolled their eyes when I spoke. One of the organizations actually complimented me on my message and promised to invite me back.

That organization was the Martinsburg Booster Association. And, true to their word, I was invited to speak

to their members on February 10th. Three weeks ago. Almost 25-years to the day that I spoke to them last time. We had a nice chuckle about that and I agreed to clear my schedule for February, 2047. It's never too soon to plan.

I have a soft spot for the Martinsburg Booster Association. They had an impact on the Chamber for which I will always be indebted. Rather than sitting on their hands, they spoke-up when I asked for suggestions on how the Chamber could be a more effective organization. The crux of their message was this: "If you truly want to be a countywide chamber of commerce, you need to remove Altoona from your name." At that time, we were the Altoona-Blair County Chamber. I wasn't sure exactly how to respond to that suggestion. I knew that to change the name would require a vote of our board. I wasn't convinced that there would be an appetite for that, since a high percentage of our board members represented Altoona businesses.

I was wrong. The discussion at the next board meeting, with Rick Reeves of WTAJ leading the charge, resulted in a unanimous vote. From that moment on, we were officially the Blair County Chamber of Commerce. What that has meant has been nothing short of remarkable.

From a membership of around 600, our Chamber was able to climb to more than 1,000 members. Nearly all of those new members were from northern or southern Blair County. Just as satisfying was the fact that the membership numbers from our Altoona businesses were also increasing. There was no blowback from the name change.

Being the impetus for the impressive growth of a chamber of commerce is hardly the crowning achievement of the Martinsburg Booster Association. Their various projects and fundraising events help assist the Cove community in countless ways.

I'm hoping, God-willing, to see them again soon.

Chamber committees turn the wheels

Any successful membership organization, especially one with so many significant issues on its plate, can't rely strictly on its paid staff and committed board.

"There's a saying about something having safety in numbers," acknowledged Blair County Chamber Board Chair Richard Fiore, Jr. "That pretty adequately describes our strength and effectiveness as an organization. We encourage both investment and participation. In many cases we get both."

From the participation side, other than attendance at programs and events, the business and education communities accomplish important things through the Chamber's committee structure. The Chamber currently has twenty-five committees, subcommittees and roundtable groups. Each one of those is headed by a chair, a co-chair or a vice-chair.

"We're so fortunate to have people willing to step-up and take the lead of these groups," Fiore disclosed. "It's a lot of extra work beyond just being a committee

member. There are a number of expectations of each committee and the chair oversees those. It's an important responsibility."

Fiore knows that firsthand. After graduating from the Chamber's Leadership Blair County program, he joined the Public Policy Committee (which he later chaired) and the Transportation Committee. He was elected to the Chamber Board, became vice-chair and is in his second year as chair. Although it would not be unusual to leave his committee responsibilities behind, he remains on both Public Policy and Transportation.

"It's a good way for me to stay engaged on issues that impact the organization, especially from an advocacy standpoint," he pointed out.

In the Chamber world, committees are relatively standard. Most chambers pinpoint certain issues that the business community indicates require more extensive attention and those issues become the basis for committee formation.

"Most chambers have committees," Fiore admit-



The chairs, co-chairs and vice-chairs of the Chamber's 26 committees met for a Summit on February 16th to discuss ways to increase committee interaction.

ted. "Few would have twenty-five."

The Blair County Chamber would likely be the only one in Pennsylvania that has a separate committee for non-profit businesses, for sustainability, for workplace wellness or for data security. "Our committees are cre-

ated from information gathered from within the membership," Fiore reported. "Our programs and events follow that same pattern. We don't simply put something out there and then tell our members to take it or leave it. We gather their input before making any decision."

Chamber committees are open to members and non-members although committee leadership is restricted to members alone.

"We exist to serve the business community," Fiore noted. "While we'd like everyone to invest in what we do, all input is welcome."

Chamber Committee Leadership

Ambassadors

Sherri Stayer

Attractions/Hotel Roundtable

Patrick Schurr
Nate Bowen

BASICS Steering

Chris Farrell
Neil Hollander

BASICS/Rotary Career Fair

Steve Dalecki
Nanette Anslinger

BASICS Early Childhood Subcommittee

Rodney Green

BASICS Career Development Subcommittee

Judy Rossi

BASICS Attendance Subcommittee

Kaytlyn Clapper
Drew Yingling

Committee of Non-Profit Businesses

Holly Keller

Data Security Roundtable

Zach Beckel

Executive Roundtable

Philip Devorris

Farm-City

Joe Diamond

Golf Tournament

Chris Weidley
Brandi Noye

Home Garden & Healthy Living Showcase

Jimmy Burchfield
Randy Colyer

Leadership Blair County Adult

Sherri Stayer

Leadership Blair County Alumni

Jodi Cessna

Leadership Blair County Youth

Gary Drenning

Membership

Jessica Sprouse

Presidents' Forum

Philip Devorris

Public Policy

Chris Michelone

Safety

Lynn Gardini

Sustainable Blair County

Chris Foster

Transportation

Tracy Plessinger

WE-LEAd

Sara Fiore-Gunnett

Workplace Wellness

Phyllis Baker

Young Entrepreneurs Academy

Carol Gensimore

Young Professionals of Blair County

Jared Keller
Rebecca Culp

Safety Committee puts fun twist on networking and education

Among all the unfortunate consequences of Covid-19, at least pertaining to the business community, is that too many essential processes and practices have fallen through the cracks. One of those is workplace safety.

"The pandemic has put new responsibilities on businesses to deal with a whole new set of challenges," admitted Stacy Hoover, the Chamber's Vice-President of Events and Technology. It is Hoover who oversees the Chamber's Safety Committee.

"Businesses fully understand the importance of maintaining a safe working environment. They do a tremendous job," Hoover pointed out. "There are so many more things on their plate right now that it becomes difficult to adequately deal with all of them."

The Safety Committee is looking for ways to help.



Barb Smith and Mike Kessling, members of the Chamber's Safety Committee, discuss an upcoming networking event.

The committee has scheduled a "Safety Trivia & Networking Night" on March 3rd from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. at Zach's Sports and Spirits in Altoona. The purpose is to bring safety people together to relax and interact with other safety practitioners.

"Our committee exists as a resource for businesses that have safety directors

but also for small businesses that have people on their staff wearing more than one hat," Hoover explained. "We'd like to have more participation."

The event at Zach's, which includes pizza, salad and a cash bar is free to Chamber members. Non-members can attend for \$10. To register, go to www.blairchamber.com.

Fundraising is subject of Best Practices forum

Fundraising as a scholarly field is a relatively new phenomenon. Still, present conditions have led fundraising professionals and market researchers to study the role and function of advancement and development work. That information will serve as the basis of the next Best Practices Forum, scheduled for March 4th from 8:15 to 9:45 at the Devorris Center for Business Development.

Best Practices Forums are educational programs, done quarterly by the Chamber's Committee of Non-Profit Businesses.

The speaker for the next Forum will be Jim Watt, Vice-President of Advancement at Juniata College. He is currently pursuing his PhD in Organizational Leadership Development from Eastern University. His research focuses on leadership and its impact on fundraising, specifically in competitive markets.

At Juniata College, Watt's



Jim Watt

team recently concluded the college's most aggressive fundraising campaign in history, raising more than \$128 million to support various initiatives across campus.

He has worked for 20 years in the nonprofit sector.

Watt's combined experience and academic pursuit will be presented in a form that should offer usable best practices that will help impact your organization. The cost to attend is \$10 for Chamber members and \$20 for non-members.

To register, visit www.blairchamber.com.

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