

Business Hall of Fame program slated for June

After a two-year hiatus, the Business Hall of Fame is returning, albeit with a few significant changes. The event, started by the Blair County Chamber in 1990, will be held on June 16th at The Casino at Lakemont Park.

Perhaps the biggest change is that event is now a luncheon instead of a dinner.

"There was a feeling that since a number of our major events took place either in the morning or the evening, that we look at doing something midday," acknowledged Board Chair Richard Fiore, Jr. "We were also concerned that some of our evening programs haven't returned to the prominence they had prior to Covid. So we decided to explore some options."

The Hall of Fame luncheon will begin at 11:30 a.m. and conclude by 1:30 p.m. That would be considerably shorter than the evening event.

"There will be fewer

awards and no reception prior to the luncheon," explained Chamber President Joe Hurd. "We'll continue to assure the prestige factor that the honorees deserve without some of the technology aspects of the past. We're anticipating a really nice event."

The luncheon will still be highlighted by the presentation of the Hall of Fame Awards. But rather than the four inductees in past years, there will be no more than two presented at this event. The Awards of Distinction will likewise undergo a change. While holdovers like Excellence in Small Business and Young Emerging Business will remain, there will only be one recipient in each of those categories instead of the three that existed in the past. And for the first time, there will be a Non-Profit Business of the Year Award.

"We have large group of non-profit businesses in our

county and in our Chamber membership," Hurd pointed out. "They're doing great things and should have an opportunity to be recognized for them. The Hall of Fame luncheon is the appropriate time."

In the past, the Hall of Fame judges presented awards for safety, technology and sustainability. Those awards will be presented under a category known as "Business Specialty Awards" but only when a particularly outstanding accomplishment is identified.

Despite the many changes that the Business Hall of Fame is undertaking, the nominating and selection process remains the same, according to Hurd.

"We're inviting people to submit nominations," he noted. "They can come from within the Chamber membership or from outside it. Nominees do not need to be Chamber members. Nomination forms can be



Lisa Michelone (left), Kirk Leidy and Diana McClure, members of the Business Hall of Fame Committee, discuss the upcoming event.

downloaded from the Chamber website at www.blairchamber.com beginning March 7th.

"The selection process will once again be handled by people from outside Blair County. It's important

that objectivity and transparency are part of all of this. We've always been able to assure nominators of this."

A subcommittee consisting of Chamber staff as well as members of the former

Business Hall of Fame Committee are overseeing the details associated with the Business Hall of Fame luncheon. For more information, contact Stacy Hoover at shoover@blairchamber.com.

RT Contracting does a variety of projects in a variety of markets



A key part of the RT Contracting team is, left to right, Brian Bender-Senior Estimator, Mandy Gregg-Office Manager and Adam Fernsler-President.

If Covid-19 has taught the business community anything to keep in the front of its mind it is the importance of being flexible. That has been particularly pertinent to the construction industry which can sometimes be too narrow in its approach to providing services.

One local business that has tried to place exceptional focus on flexibility is RT Contracting with offices in Duncansville and State College. RT is a commercial general contractor that has been in business for more than 25 years. It completes very small projects (\$10,000) and very large projects (\$10,000,000) in different sectors of the economy including but not limited to hospitality, education, healthcare and retail.

"We can design and build your projects," acknowledges RT's president Adam Fernsler, who also became the company's owner two years ago. "We don't necessarily identify with a certain style. We do many different projects in many different market sectors. Building style is controlled by clients and their designers."

Among the more notable projects in the region that RT Contracting has done are the Penn-Mont Academy Original School Building, Schwab Hall at Saint Francis University, Myers Elementary School and Bell Mansion Apartments in Bellwood.

RT currently employs twenty people.

"Staffing has remained steady for us throughout," Fernsler pointed out. "We have gained and lost employees during the pandemic. We have seen more quality applicants during the past six months. Our largest concern for the future is having enough young people continuing to enter the construction trades."

He's extremely optimistic about the company's future.

"Our goal is to provide consistent quality construction," he disclosed. "Too much growth can lead to poor performance. However, slow controlled growth is the plan as we continually receive resumes and hire new people."

(RT Contracting has been a Blair County Chamber member since 2012.)

BASICS reacquires program on attendance

Nearly two decades ago, the BASICS Committee of the Blair County Chamber had a subcommittee on truancy that focused attention on helping school districts to address the challenges associated with getting kids to come to school.

Over the years, that effort was re-directed to a group headed by Judge Jolene Kopriva and most recently fell under the umbrella of Healthy Blair County Coalition as the School Attendance Task Force.

Now it's a BASICS subcommittee again.

"The reason for transferring it again is the result of the role that BASICS can play in further supporting school attendance while addressing a broader issue of attendance in post-secondary and in the workplace," explained Coleen Heim, Director of Healthy Blair County Coalition, who is also a member of the BASICS Steering Committee.

The new name is the BASICS Attendance Subcommittee and it will be co-chaired by Kaytlyn Clapper of PA CareerLink and Drew Yingling of Altoona Area School District. They bring energy and experience to an issue that the pandemic has only made more difficult.

"We recognize that schools and employers are often overwhelmed with attendance issues," Clapper



Drew Yingling and Kaytlyn Clapper, members of the BASICS Steering Committee, will co-chair the BASICS Attendance Subcommittee.

admitted. "From the employer side, it has become a struggle that businesses face that they haven't faced to this extent, possibly ever." For schools, the challenge is similar but more familiar.

"We've been down this road before," Yingling pointed out. "If a kid misses two days during a calendar month, it's considered chronic absenteeism. That's too many. So our schools try to keep students engaged and creating good habits. When it's successful, it helps us to ultimately build a better community. When it doesn't, other problems occur."

One of those is that attendance problems in the school usually become attendance problems in the workplace.

"The goal of our subcommittee is to look at the available data and then determine the most effective ways to help, particularly in areas where there's access to those who are most impacted," Clapper noted. That help may come from some of the initiatives that were already in place when Healthy Blair County Coalition operated the program.

"Working with the United Way of Blair County, we were able to initiate a "Be There Buddy Mentoring

Project" and a "Be There Attendance Challenge" which encouraged schools and community partners to support initiatives that positively reinforce school attendance," Heim disclosed. "It makes sense for those programs to continue."

Clapper and Yingling agreed.

"There are many things out there that have had some element of success and should be continued," Yingling stated. "We're also looking forward to drawing on the knowledge and experience of the people who have been at this for a while."

Breakfast Club features OOT awards

In what has become a tradition, the Blair County Chamber and Operation Our Town partner each March on a special Breakfast Club program that pays tribute to the many people in the business community and in law enforcement that help keep our county vibrant and safe.

"We're honored to be sharing the podium once again with the outstanding people of Operation Our Town,"

acknowledged Chamber President Joe Hurd. "What they've done and continue to do is a huge factor in our quality of life."

This year's Breakfast Club will be held this Thursday, March 10th beginning at 7:45 a.m. at The Casino at Lakemont Park. Among the presentations that morning will be the awarding of the Community Partnership Award to the Gloria Gates



Memorial Foundation. There will also be law enforcement awards presented. District Attorney Peter

Weeks and Jim Walstrom will provide an overview of the many accomplishments of Operation Our Town during 2021. The cost to attend Breakfast Club is \$20 for Chamber members and \$30 for non-members. For reservations, call (814) 943-8151 or register online at www.blairchamber.com. Corporate sponsor of the March Breakfast Club is Durbin Companies.



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