

Showcase opens new chapter this Friday

In March of 2020, the Blair County Home Garden & Healthy Living Showcase celebrated its 50th anniversary at the Jaffa Shrine. It had no way of knowing that it would be the last show for two years and the last for the foreseeable future at the site of its previous fifty.

The Showcase opens this Friday at 4:00 p.m. at the Blair County Convention Center and will continue throughout the weekend, ending at 4:00 p.m. on Sunday. The committee that plans and executes the event is excited about its potential, based mostly on the impressive number of exhibitors that have signed-on and the likelihood that attendee numbers will also be up.

"When we discussed moving the show to the Convention Center, we decided to survey past exhibitors to get their reactions about making such a move," explained Stacy Hoover, the Chamber's VP of Events and Technology. "The result was an overwhelming amount of support and many of those were the first people to sign up for this show."

It was a change, according to committee co-chair Jimmy Burchfield of

Home Garden & Healthy Living SHOWCASE

Burchfield & Son Landscaping, that was unexpected but long overdue.

"The Jaffa Shrine did a great job for so many years," Burchfield pointed out. "But clearly the committee, the exhibitors and the people who routinely attended the show were ready for a change of some kind. Even tradition gets old after a while. This new venue provides a new direction. It brings more life to the show."

Couple that with the fact that Covid-19 and its many consequences caused the cancellation of the 2021 show and there's more reasons than ever for optimism to be attached to this year's showcase.

"Being off for a year made people more eager to exhibit," acknowledged committee member Scott Boyer of Boyer Refrigeration. "There were very few positives about the impact of the pandemic but this was probably one of them. If the year off also makes people more interested in attending the show, that will be even better."

From an attendees per-

spective, the Home Garden & Healthy Living Showcase has always been at the mercy of the weather. Having the event later than usual may work in its favor although, Hoover believes, there are two extremes at play where the show's history is concerned.

"Extremely bad weather is no good," she admitted. "Extremely good weather has also posed a problem. If people can get outside, they're more reluctant to attend an indoor event. Since we can't control the weather, there's really no sense worrying about it."

Or focusing on it, noted Dave DeBiase, executive officer of the Blair-Bedford Builders Association, the Chamber's longtime partner in hosting the showcase.

"Our emphasis with exhibitors and show attendees remains the same," DeBiase disclosed. "The importance of developing one-on-one relationships can't be overstated. People who buy on the internet are learning the hard lessons associated with custom satisfaction and product quality.



Jimmy Burchfield (left) and Joe Keith, members of the Home Garden and Healthy Living Showcase Committee put the final touches on plans for this weekend's event.

"An event like the Home Garden & Healthy Living Showcase provides people an opportunity to explore options with projects that they're considering. It also

allows them to support local companies and build the type of relationships that could result in better pricing and greater convenience. It's absolutely the

best way to shop." (For more information on the Home Garden & Healthy Living Showcase, contact Stacy Hoover at (814) 943-8151).

www.blairhomeshow.com

March 25, 26, 27

Blair County Convention Center

Fri. 4-8 p.m. | Sat. 10 a.m.-8 p.m. | Sun. Noon-4 p.m.

\$5 per person • Children 10 & under Free

PS Solutions gets help from some friends

The Blair County Chamber's desire to recognize the importance of working together isn't always about relatives accomplishing great things in the same workplace. Sometimes it's about local businesses combining their talents to make a project successful.

Just ask Joe Merilli. As owner/managing partner of PS Solutions, a software development company headquartered in Altoona, Merilli was happily facing the prospects associated with business growth. His strategy was to begin the process of expansion by looking at local providers.

"PS Solutions has been engrained in the community for the past thirteen years and we really value other local businesses and the importance of working together," Merilli disclosed. "When we made the decision to look to double the size of our office space due to growth, I started the search in our area."

What he found all along the way were businesses willing to help. All were members of the Blair County Chamber.

"That wasn't surprising," Merilli admitted. "We used the Chamber's Membership Directory to get started."

His first contact was Andrea Cohen at Blair Companies. Cohen introduced him to Barb Weakland at her organization who showed him several options in Lakemont Park Village.

"When I saw what they had available, I knew that



Joe Merilli, owner/managing partner of PS Solutions, credits the success of his new office complex to the expertise of people like Suzanne Zavalanski of Image Signs (left) and Tracey Baker of McCartney's.

Working Together

would be the new home of PS Solutions," Merilli pointed out. "We worked with Ralph Albarano's group for the build out. They did a terrific job."

There were still some hurdles regarding the space, such as immovable posts in the middle of the main cubicle areas. So Merilli's next call was to McCartney's.

"I called Randy Green, who I have known for many years, and he and Tracey Baker did all the design for our new eighteen cubicle work area," he explained. "They created play area spaces for a ping

pong table and a foosball table. They also outfitted our Team Lead offices and conference room with reasonable and usable furniture."

Then came the need for new signage.

"We called Suzanne (Zavalanski) from Image Signs," Merilli stated. "We had worked with them before on some signage in our prior office space. We wanted something that stood out and Suzanne delivered again for us. Our signage on the building and in the lobby really stands out."

All-in-all, the entire experience of business growth and office relocation, which can be a nightmare if not executed correctly, was literally a "walk-in-the-Park" for PS Solutions. Merilli is

grateful for what he saw and how everything fell into place.

"I guess the real message is that we have a lot of knowledgeable companies here in Blair County," he acknowledged. "I know a lot of companies that think they need to go outside the area to get quality work at decent prices. I can say with certainty that is not true. The Buy Here. Live Here initiative is alive and well."

Tracey Baker agreed. "In the modern world it's easy to forget the impact of working locally," she said. "When you keep your dollars local, the taxes stay local, the income stays local and many of the charitable donations stay local."

(PS Solutions has been a Blair County Chamber member since 2011.)

Career Fair's return a plus for students



The BASICS/Rotary Career Fair has successfully brought together business leaders and high school sophomores.

An essential event to help young people in our region better understand career choices is back after a two-year hiatus.

The BASICS/Rotary Career Fair will take place on April 27th at the Blair County Convention Center. The Fair, which brings together presenters from 90 career sectors and more than 1,200 high school sophomores from ten area schools, was last conducted in 2019. Covid-19 and its gathering restrictions caused cancellations in 2020 and 2021.

"We're incredibly grateful to be able to offer this event once again," acknowledged Steve Dalecki of ARC Federal Credit Union who co-chairs the Career Fair Subcommittee and also represents the Altoona Sunrises Rotary Club. That club is one of the six Blair County Rotary Clubs that participates in the Fair,

primarily by helping to recruit presenters and underwriting a portion of the operational costs.

The other partner in the Fair is the Blair County Chamber's BASICS program which plans and executes the event including the recruitment of sponsors. BASICS is an acronym for Businesses And Schools Investing in Cooperative Solutions.

"At a time when career exploration is extremely important to our young people and to the workforce needs of our county, the process of disseminating relevant information on careers is one that our committee places a high priority on," explained Chris Farrell of Pennsylvania Highlands Community College, the BASICS Committee co-chair.

For further information on the Career Fair, contact Joe Hurd at (814) 943-8151.

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