



Lofty goals

I know very little about the business climate of France. On some days I know very little about the business climate of Blair County. Change is happening all around us and it can become difficult to keep track of which businesses are regaining solid footing and which still have an unmistakable view of the cliff.

One thing I do know about business in France is that all



Joe Hurd

Blair County Chamber of Commerce

businesses are required to have a business license. And, even better, all businesses are required to join a chamber of commerce. What a wonderful place

France must be.

Because we are not France, the Blair County Chamber has launched a Membership Recruitment Campaign. It officially begins today and runs through May 31st. Our Membership Committee has set a modest goal of bringing-in 50 new members. I have personally set a more-than-modest goal of 1,000 new members. Now you understand why we need a committee to oversee a campaign like this one.

My rationale for setting such a high goal is that I'm more fixated than ever on the challenges that our business community faces in maintaining a healthy economy, preparing a resolute workforce and never succumbing to the idea that our better days are behind us. To accomplish those takes a committed effort from a lot of people and a lot of businesses.

It would be disingenuous of me to try to convince anyone in our county that the past two years haven't taken a toll in our Chamber's ability to meet our members' needs. We have lost a considerable number of members, most of which promise to come back when times get better. The sad irony is that historically we've been more effective during tough times.

Among the many important lessons that we learned during the pandemic was that we need to "up our game" when it comes to telling our story. There really is no lingering feeling of satisfaction when a new Chamber member admits that "I'd have joined the Chamber a lot sooner if I knew all of the things you do."

So our Membership Campaign is heavy on information and considerably lighter on gung-ho mentality. Businesses, we are finding, want to know that they are investing in an organization that can meet more of their needs than they can realistically meet on their own. It sounds simple. It's not.

To be one of my 1,000 new members, you know where to find me.

Claysburg student prepared for anything

Hawke Claycomb is not a big fan of surprises. As he explores future career options, the senior at Claysburg-Kimmel High School has strategically followed a plan to put himself in the best position for success.

"I just like to be prepared for anything that comes my way," Claycomb acknowledges. "I like experiencing different things and being confident that I've done what's necessary to get the best results."

Beyond some projects in elementary school and junior high, his preparations most emphatically began when he became a member of the Chamber's Leadership Blair County Youth class.

"The program taught me a lot of things," Claycomb remembers. "Mostly it taught me the importance of working as part of a team. It really stimulated my interest in business."

It also spurred his desire to start his own business and his next step was to apply for the Chamber's Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!) program. That program, in its sixth year, is a launching pad for ideas and Claycomb was challenged to spend 26 weeks learning and build-

ing within a rigorous framework of personal highs and lows.

"It was tough because there are so many components to taking a concept and turning it into something worthwhile," he pointed out. "It was even more difficult because Covid caused many of our classes to be virtual. I wasn't always sure that I was on the right path."

The outcome validated that he was. His business – Claycomb Soda Shop – was selected by the YEA! investors as the second best of all the businesses in the 2021 class.

It provided him additional incentive to keep developing his array of talents. As a senior, Claycomb has become involved with Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) and his accomplishments have continued. He goes to Hershey on April 11th to compete in FBLA's State Competition.

"My YEA! experience gave me the background to do well in the FBLA competition," he disclosed.

"To qualify, I needed to create a 15-page business plan. I already understood how to do that. I did it for my YEA! business. Now I'll be one of ten students



Hawke Claycomb (left) prepares his FBLA presentation under the watchful eye of Steve Walter, Claysburg-Kimmel's FBLA instructor.

from across the state giving a 7-minute speech on my business plan. I'm practicing that speech every day."

One person who can verify that is Steve Walter, Business/Computer teacher at Claysburg-Kimmel who has also been the school's FBLA advisor for the past 29-years.

"Hawk has a work ethic that's off the charts. He always finishes what he

starts," Walter admitted. "I have 35 FBLA members and we insist that those members focus on the importance of being part of a team. Hawke is a great example of that."

Claycomb's busy schedule also includes being part of the Idea Test Lab at the Sheetz Entrepreneurial Center at Penn State Altoona. He worked at Bedford Springs as a member

of the prep staff ("Lots of vegetables to clean," he reported) and baked and sold 75 dozen cookies at Christmas. Food service rates highly in his future plans.

"There's no doubt that Hawke will be successful," believes C-K principal Charles Kassick. "He asks the right questions when he needs information. He stays focused and he never hesitates to do his best."

Leadership Youth and Adult programs share perspectives



One of the exercises at the combined LBC session was the construction of a tower as each group worked together, emphasizing the importance of communication.

For as long as the adult and youth programs of Leadership Blair County have been in existence, certain class sessions have generated great interest and, even in some cases, great hope. At the top of that list might be the session in which the two groups spend an interactive day together. This year that day was March 10th.

"It's definitely one of my favorite sessions," remarked Maureen Dodson, facilitator of the LBC Adult program. "It's inevitable that at the end of the day, both groups will talk about how much they enjoyed it. Even though their perspectives are different, they gain some interesting insight."

That insight is based on

discussion of topics that pretty much run the gamut from societal pressures to international intrigue.

"From the adult perspective, I can verify that class members are impressed with the (youth) and encouraged about the future," Dodson pointed out. "Even the adults who have kids that same age are sometimes in awe with how much they know and what they see as solutions to current problems."

Tami Chadick, who facilitates LBC Youth, is not surprised to hear that the young people make an impression.

"The youth class always looks forward to it," Chadick explained. "They look forward to forming relationships. We're building

a culture of leadership so they're much more prepared for a session like this one than they were at the beginning."

Holly Butler of Bishop Guilfoyle was "excited" to be part of the session.

"It was great to learn from the adults and hear how challenging things can be from their standpoint," she noted. "It was also nice to see how interested they were in hearing about the struggles of teens."

Carly Cook of Jersey Shore State Bank, a member of the adult class, felt the day was mutually beneficial.

"It was amazing to see the similarities," she admitted. "So many of the goals and expectations were identical."

Humble beginnings yield positive results for dance theatre



Renee Staines (right), founder of Altoona Dance Theatre, provides instruction to student Emma Dietrick.

As Altoona Dance Theatre prepares for its spring performance on June 11th at Jaffa Shrine, its founder can take satisfaction in having built something special for her community.

Renee Staines founded the business at the age of 20 and was its only employee. Today, Altoona Dance Theatre has six employees and an impressive number of program participants. Its mission is the exceptional teaching of classical ballet and all forms of dance as well as a disciplined-yet-fun learning environment.

"We try to make it the best of both worlds as we offer a recreational track for students who just want to dance and perform," Staines acknowledges.

"And of course we offer a professional track which consists of our competition teams."

The focus, she emphasizes, has always been on teaching proper dance technique to children so in that regard the overall focus of Altoona Dance Theatre hasn't changed. "But there have been different aspects to our classes and our programs that have deviated with the aspiring artistic world," Staines noted.

Altoona Dance Theatre was also the first to offer "Mommy and Me" classes for those with special needs. "We're very proud of that," Staines disclosed. (Altoona Dance Theatre has been a Chamber member since 2007.)



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