

Chamber committee moves trail discussion

“Blair County is falling behind.”

That is the opinion of Karl King, a board member of Rails to Trails of Central Pennsylvania, who has helped his organization to accomplish some impressive things within the local trail community, despite the fact that the effort has been completely done with volunteers.

“Other counties in our region are moving ahead at a pace that we’re not able to keep up with,” King pointed out. “We need to take a hard look at where we are and what it will take to maximize the opportunities associated with trails.”

Karl King has also been a longtime member of the Blair County Chamber’s Transportation Committee. It is that committee, at King’s urging, that has been given the okay by the Chamber’s board of direc-

tors to begin discussions aimed at developing a funding stream to play catch-up.

“We’ve been exploring the ways that some of the other counties are doing it,” acknowledged Tracy Plessinger, who chairs the Transportation Committee. “We’re confident that enough people in our county see the value of the trails that it won’t be hard to draft a workable plan.”

Since many of the other counties have enjoyed some degree of funding from county government, the Chamber’s committee invited County Commissioner Laura Burke to its March 24th meeting. Other attendees included Brandon Peters, Transportation Program Manager for Southern Alleghenies Planning & Development Commission, who also sits on the committee. Peters talked about a Peer Review Program through

DCNR that would include a grant of \$10,000 to do a study that assists municipalities and counties in improving their park and recreation services. The match would only be \$1,000.

Commissioner Burke likes the idea.

“I’m open to it,” she pointed out. “I can’t speak for the other two commissioners but I really think doing a feasibility study is a good way to start, particularly since there is so little cost involved.”

Peters believes that there are additional funding sources that could play a part in helping the county to make significant strides once survey results would become available.

“Somerset County is a good example of a county that has been able to leverage financial resources through a variety of avenues,” he noted. “Trails



Blair County Commissioner Laura Burke participated in a discussion regarding the county’s trails with the Chamber’s Transportation Committee.

are not only important ways to provide recreation for an area but they also have a pretty important economic development upside.”

Steve McKnight, President of ABCD Corporation, agrees.

“Trails, it’s well-documented, are a driver for economic development,” he disclosed. “Outdoor opportunities are why so many people come here to live and to visit.”

Non-Profits address challenges at symposium

Non-profit businesses play an important role in the Blair County community. Unfortunately, that role is too often taken for granted, making it difficult for non-profits to gain the support necessary to fill specific needs.

“It’s really an ongoing challenge to have people fully understand the many good things that non-profits do,” admitted Holly Keller of Garvey Manor Nursing Home, who chairs the Blair County Chamber’s Committee of Non-Profit Businesses. “We aren’t in it for the glory but there is satisfaction in helping to make a difference.”

To look more extensively at the challenges – and the opportunities – facing non-profits, the committee held a symposium on March 22nd. Twenty-two non-profit businesses participated.

“It was really a good turnout and the enthusiasm was really impressive,” Keller pointed out. “The format, which consisted of three focus groups, generated a whole lot of information and opinions on how we can work better with the for-profit community. That community plays a vital role in helping us to develop strategies that keeps us from duplicating efforts.”

Much of the discussion at the Non-Profit Symposium



Among those taking part in the Non-Profit Symposium are, left to right: Holly Keller, Lisa Hann and Sonny Consiglio.

focused on the many difficulties that non-profits are having in attracting and retaining employees and volunteers.

“We understand that this is hardly a new problem for any of us,” explained Hannah Harley of Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art. “Our inability to pay what a lot of people are looking for means that we need to be creative in what we offer and we need to look for people who share our passion for bringing something exciting to our area.”

A number of non-profits indicated that they’ve created scenarios in which employees and volunteers have much greater control of their schedules, have benefits that more closely match their individual needs or are more likely to gain recognition for what they do.

“Money isn’t always the primary motivator,” Keller disclosed. “We all have people working with us and working for us who like to go home at the end of each day knowing they’ve helped someone.”

The symposium brought together businesses that, although they don’t regard one another as competitors, they understand that in most cases, they’re chasing the

same dollar. That matters little, according to Lisa Hann of Family Services Incorporated.

“There’s such a powerful synergy within the non-profit community,” she acknowledged. “We help each other because we recognize how incredibly difficult it is to accomplish what we need to accomplish all by ourselves.”

Any non-profit business that would like to join the Committee of Non-Profit Businesses should contact Joe Hurd at (814) 943-8151. The Committee will be releasing an Executive Summary about the symposium in the near future.

YEA! students chosen to compete nationally



Marisa White (left) and Ashlyn Brown display some of the apparel that helped them win the most outstanding business designation at last Tuesday’s Investors Panel event.

Two Hollidaysburg Area High School seniors, who focused an apparel business on spreading awareness about mental health issues, were selected as the outstanding business at last Tuesday’s Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!) Investor Panel Event.

Ashlyn Brown and Marisa White created WeatherTheStorm to “help make someone’s day better.” They make hoodies and other clothing items replete with positive messages.

“When we thought about building a business, we wanted to make sure that it was something that benefited people who were struggling,” Ashlyn pointed out. “We were hoping that the messages on our apparel would encourage people to reach out and possibly start relationships that would lead to friendships.”

The Investor Panel Event was held at The Casino at Lakemont Park. Twelve investors allocated \$12,000 to the eleven businesses that are part of the YEA! program in 2022.

“Our investors make such a huge difference in helping the YEA! students to complete their businesses,” acknowledged Carol Gensimore of Value Drug Company, who chairs the Chamber’s YEA! Committee. “They judge their presentations and provide solid feedback on what they like and what still needs some work. The entire experience is really impressive.”

The winning business will now take part in a national competition to be held in June. Between now and then, there’s plenty of work to do.

“We were a little nervous at the start of our presentation but settled down as it went along,” Marisa admitted. “We recognize that we need to practice, especially since our five minute presentation will now need to be pared-down to three minutes for the national competition.”

They will have help.

“We’ve been fortunate to have some business people in our community who are excellent in helping our students to prepare for what happens next,” Gensimore explained. “We want to provide Ashlyn and Marisa every advantage we can. Their product is well worth it.”



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