

Homegrown talent

As the business community in our region fashions a workforce recruitment strategy, there's never been any doubt that most of the future workforce is already here. At least potentially. On Wednesday, we're likely to learn more about a significant group of them.

The BASICS/Rotary Career Fair will be held at the Blair County Convention Center. That event, a partnership between the BASICS program of the Blair County Chamber and the county's six Rotary Clubs, will involve more than 1,000 high school sophomores from ten school districts.

The give-and-take of workforce relationships is always in-play with those who have jobs to offer and those who may, at some point, want to fill them. The BASICS/Rotary Career Fair features 72 career choices for students to learn about. Out of that group, they select four. What they select, according to Nicole Zernick of the BASICS Steering Committee, will likely be influenced by a couple of factors.

"Besides a career that interests them, they will also consider what their friends are selecting, what careers people in their family might be working in and what might make them the most money," she pointed out. "When we look at the overall list of selections, some things are predictable."

Like the high number of students indicating an interest in some aspect of the medical profession. Physicians, nurses, physical and occupational therapists all did well. That's a positive sign for healthcare facilities that have struggled to maintain adequate staff, provided we can get them to stay.

Other high numbers were attached to auto and diesel mechanics, chef/food service, interior design and a category combining police, detective and criminal justice. For some reason, wildlife conservation officers were as popular as welders with this class of sophomores.

So what careers didn't do well? Unfortunately, two on the Southern Alleghenies list of High Priority Occupations for our region – logistics and machining drew little interest. Others were banking, lineman (which is a high paying job) and human resource management. There was some speculation from the committee that HR never rates high because students don't know what it is. So I asked a couple of sophomores just to be sure and their answers indicated that we were guessing wrong.

"Human resources – that's hiring and firing, right?" one of them asked. "Why would anyone want to do that their whole life?"

Somewhere an HR professional is likely pondering that same question.

Craig Fencing sets the standard for value

Small family businesses accomplishing great things. In Blair County, that description more than fits Craig Fencing.

Located at 300 East Sixth Avenue in Altoona, Craig Fencing was established in 1983 and has become Central PA's Largest Commercial Fencing Installer. All from one location and all with just fourteen employees. The company handles projects that range from maximum security prisons to front yard corner accents and everything in between.

"Our story has been one that shows the incredible impact of family and friends," acknowledged John Craig, the company's primary project manager and residential/commercial estimator. "My mom (Lou Ann) and my dad (Gary) started the business and their first employee, if you want to call him that, was my pap (Jack Craig).

"The family ties did not stop there. At various points, my dad employed his brother, his sisters, a

few cousins, nephews and lastly, my brother and me. The workforce has always had a family feel to it. Those who weren't family were my dad's friends from high school and people from their families. That's created a lot of loyalty and a lot of employee longevity."

The fencing industry, according to Craig, has undergone some dramatic changes during the twenty years that he's been part of the business.

"The most dramatic change involves the type of fence that is valued most now," he pointed out. "When I first started, more emphasis was put on function and practicality than appearance. This led to a majority of the commercial fence systems and a few of the residential ones being galvanized chain link because it was more secure and more cost effective. In recent years more projects emphasize curb appeal with customers choosing to upgrade their fence system to an ornamental style."

As the next generation



Ryan (left) and John Craig, have vision for the future while keeping the core values the company was built upon by their father, Gary (right).

continues to make its entry into the Craig Fencing hierarchy, John Craig is keenly aware of the importance of not deviating too far from his parents' vision.

"Our vision will be similar to what it's always been," he noted. "When

the business is turned over to my brothers – Patrick, Ryan and me, we'll be determined to remain aggressive in winning projects and doing work that our parents will be proud of. We are acutely aware that this business is their legacy

that they've put blood, sweat and tears into building. We'll always work our hardest to carry on that legacy with great pride."

(Craig Fencing has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 2016.)

Penn State Student Showcase includes capstone internships



Penn State Altoona students, left to right: Hunter Stoudnour, Makenna Dunio and Evan Dively are eager to share their internship experiences at the Student Showcase.

During its long history, Penn State Altoona has helped its students to achieve many significant accomplishments, particularly within the business realm. Several years ago, the University created the Student Showcase to allow students to display those accomplishments to the local community.

The Spring 2022 Student Showcase will take place this Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at Devorris Downtown Center. Students will share their research, internship and capstone project presentations in business, electro-mechanical engineering technology, rail transportation engineering and security and risk analysis. The event is hosted by the Division of Business, Engineering and Information Sciences and Technology, supported by the Office of Research and Engagement.

The Business Internship

and Research Poster Presentations will be held from 9:15 until 10:00. It's a way for students to highlight their capstone internship or research, according to Cynthia Wood, Assistant Teaching Professor of Business Administration.

"It gives students an opportunity to present their responsibilities and why their internship was strategic to the host organization," Wood pointed out. "They also summarize their approach to their internship, the industry research they did relevant to their internship and the measurable outcomes they achieved."

It also provided a vivid representation of life in the workforce.

"My experience at Altoona Lung Specialists allowed me to develop many skills that I will carry with me throughout my professional career," acknowledged student Makenna Dunio. "I was able to cre-

ate a LinkedIn profile for the practice and develop a monthly newsletter that is being sent to 1,000 patients."

"My internship in the Store Development and Real Estate Department at Sheetz showed me how the process of site acquisition works and how it supports the organization's growth goals," explained student Hunter Stoudnour. "It exposed me to situations I had never seen before."

"At Value Drug Company, the focus of my internship was to assist with the event planning of their annual merchandise expo," said student Evan Dively. "I had an opportunity to work within a team while managing given tasks effectively. Internships can lead to making many professional connections and even job opportunities."

Anyone may attend the Student Showcase. There is no cost. For more information, contact Katerina Parowski at krp5559@psu.edu.

Legislative Breakfast to feature discussion of non-profit issues



Rep. Jim Gregory



Rep. Lou Schmitt

Non-profit businesses in Blair County are facing challenges that have put many of them in crisis-like positions.

"The struggles have been ones that few of us can overcome without some sort of guidance through the legislative process," acknowledges Holly Keller of Garvey Manor Nursing Home, who chairs the Blair County Chamber's Committee of Non-Profit Businesses. It is for that reason that the committee annually hosts a legislative breakfast in which legislators at the state level answer questions and offer advice.

This year that breakfast will take place this Friday from 8:00 to 9:30 a.m. at The Casino at Lakemont Park. State Senator Judy Ward and State Representatives Jim Gregory and Lou Schmitt will attend.

"It's an event we prioritize because our non-profit businesses face hurdles and it's important for us to understand where we can help," Gregory admitted. "Too often people tend to forget the essential role these businesses play. As legislators, we make certain



Senator Judy Ward

that doesn't happen."

Retired Blair County Commissioner Donna Gority, a member of the committee, serves as moderator of the Q&A. Questions are submitted by non-profits and formatted by the committee.

"We cover the gamut of important issues," Gority noted.

The cost to attend the Non-profit Legislative Breakfast is \$20 for Chamber members and \$30 for non-members. To register, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at www.blairchamber.com. Corporate sponsor of the event is Central Pennsylvania Community Foundation.



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