



Leveling the field

A story by Alexandre Tanzi in a recent issue of Bloomberg News, entitled “Half of New U.S. Entrepreneurs Are Women,” would seem to be a positive sign for a nation with more workforce questions than answers.

The Doomsday crowd would have you believe that all women were in the process of leaving the job market to



Joe Hurd

Blair County Chamber of Commerce

take care of childcare responsibilities resulting from the pandemic. There’s actually a kernel of truth in that, according to Tanzi, who cites a survey conducted by

Gusto, a human resource management business.

Gusto’s data indicates that with schools and childcare centers still disrupted last year, “a growing number of parents – particularly women – started their own business out of necessity.” A record 5.4 million new businesses were formed in the U.S. last year.

How many of those were formed by women in the six-county Southern Alleghenies Region?

“Our client base for the past quarter indicated that 49% of those seeking help or guidance were women,” stated Jeff Boldizar, Director of the Small Business Development Center at Saint Francis College. “Seventy-three women were either already in business or looking to start a business. That’s not unusual. Historically, we’ve always had a fair number of women interested in starting businesses. Women are less reluctant to ask for help. They explore things a little deeper.”

From a Chamber standpoint, however, that enthusiasm for starting a business is not carrying-over to young women. The Chamber’s Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!) program, which is preparing to begin its seventh year, has not approached a 50/50 split in terms of gender participation. Not even close. The most recent YEA! graduating class consisted of 14 boys and 4 girls. Previous classes had similar numbers.

It remains a bit of a mystery when we compare it to other programs in which the Chamber has some connection. Our Leadership Blair County Youth program for the past several years has attracted more females than males. Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) has been evenly split. So has Pennsylvania Free Enterprise Week (PFEW). In the next few weeks, the recruiting process for YEA! will be heating-up. We’re hoping that more young women will recognize the opportunities associated with being the boss.

It will no doubt come in handy later-on.

Delaney encouraged by Mall’s potential

As the new general manager of the Logan Valley Mall, Tom Delaney is aware of the many misconceptions that surround the future of the Mall and retail in general. He’s confident that exciting opportunities are on the horizon. Delaney, 47, is a native of Nicaragua, grew-up in California, has a law degree and a strong background in real estate. He and his wife Anne Marie, who teaches law at Duquesne University, have a 10-year-old daughter Eva who has a passion for swimming and soccer.

The Chamber: As a relative newcomer to Blair County, what impresses you most about this area?

Tom: Aside from its beautiful scenery among the mountains, I am impressed by the contrast between the commercial hub that Blair County has become—with the presence of almost every big brand and national retail chain—with the quaint and charming place that it is; conserving its small town appeal and own personality. It says a lot about its privileged location, at a crossroads of major highways and easy access to interstate travel,

Chamber Q&A

as well as its people who continue to maintain a sense of community. To me, it feels that everyone knows everyone here; which is a great indicator of this sense of community.

The Chamber: What do you consider to be the greatest opportunities associated with the Logan Valley Mall?

Tom: Logan Valley Mall is at a pivotal moment in its history, and we see great opportunity ahead to reinvigorate the mall at the heart of the community. To that end, we are focusing on re-engaging with a variety of local businesses and organizations to serve as a venue for different community events and outreach activities. Mason Asset Management and Namdar Realty Group, who oversee mall operations and leasing efforts as a part of the property’s larger ownership group, have taken this community-first approach at other properties across the country with great success. We look forward to



Tom Delaney, General Manager of Logan Valley Mall, talks chocolate with Angela Brandt, Store Manager at Gardners Candies mall location.

learning from their experiences and applying them in a way that is uniquely Altoona.

The Chamber: What is the greatest misconception that people seem to have about the future direction of the Logan Valley Mall?

Tom: There is a pervasive sense across the nation that brick-and-mortar retail and in-store shopping are falling behind the ease of at-your-

fingertips next-day shipping. We simply do not find that to be the case, and a big part of our perspective is driven by the fact that much of what we are looking to offer at Logan Valley Mall cannot be replicated digitally. We believe that people will look to malls not so much as a place to do their shopping, but also for the experience of shopping; of going out, of interacting with people, of trying on clothes or trying out products before purchase, of finding different options for dining and entertainment, all of which cannot be achieved through a click of a mouse.

The Chamber: Who are your personal and professional role models and what makes them special?

Tom: It may sound a little cliché, but I admire my parents for their dedication and example. Because we moved between different countries when I was a

child, I now realize that each move was the end of one chapter and the beginning of a new one in their lives. In this sense, my parents practically had to start over three times, with all the struggles and sacrifices that it entails—and with the added burden of three children to raise. And now that I have gone through the same experience with my own family, as an adult I can appreciate how hard it was for them.

The Chamber: What’s still on Tom Delaney’s “Bucket list?”

Tom: My wife and I have always talked about traveling and taking Eva to Manchester, England. This is the place where we met, where we studied together, where we began our relationship, and where we shared so many great memories and experiences. So, it’s a place that I hold dear to my heart.

Ameriprise embraces change while expanding reputation



Dave Miller (left) and Jason Miller are part of an Ameriprise team that has made a significant impact in the region.

When Dave and Jason Miller – father and son – looked for a company to further strengthen what was already being built at Miller & Associates in Altoona, one candidate rose to the top.

“Ameriprise is a relatively newer company name but the company itself has been in existence since the 1800’s,” Jason acknowledged. “Much has changed since the original company was established and the company has done a great job of changing with the times.”

A Fortune 500 company, Ameriprise Financial Services is a longtime leader in planning and advice. It has earned high ratings in the investment industry and offers thousands of mutual funds.

The current focus of

Ameriprise is helping individuals and families achieve their financial goals through a financial planning process with their advisor. It is the advisor’s job to know and understand, not only the financial resources of the individual or family but to also know the person. Ameriprise currently has more than 10,000 financial advisors.

“Even within the boundaries of Blair County, there are multiple large practices that are affiliated with Ameriprise,” Jason pointed out. “I think Ameriprise has done a great job of building processes, technology and oversight that helps make our job easier so that we can spend more time with clients instead of running our practices.”

Being involved with Ameriprise has changed many of the work circum-

stances for the Miller’s but not all of them.

“There is still a Miller & Associates, although we have used this term mainly as a name for advertising purposes,” Jason explained. “We are considered to be independent contractors with Ameriprise and the company has been very supportive in all aspects of helping us to both maintain and grow our business.”

The Miller’s have also achieved some special notoriety. They are the only father and son that have reached the 35-year milestone (Dave) and the 20-year one (Jason).

“It’s a great company and it’s especially great to be able to work with my dad,” Jason added.

(Ameriprise has been a Blair County Chamber member since 2004.)

Nominations accepted for achievement award in business excellence



The Blair County Chamber of Commerce will present its 20th Lifetime Achievement Award for Business Excellence on October 17th at its annual Business Excellence Dinner. Nominations for that award will be accepted until the end of the business day on August 12th.

“This award recognizes a Blair County business leader who has made a substantial impact on our business community for an extended pe-

riod of time,” explained Richard Fiore, Jr., chair of the Chamber’s Board of Directors. “This event was created solely to pay tribute to just that one person.”

The first recipient of the award, in 2001, was the late Ernie Wissinger. The most recent recipient, chosen in 2020 but not recognized until 2021 due to Covid-19, was Mark Barnhart of NPC.

Nomination forms are available at www.blairchamber.com.

AIR CONDITIONING PROBLEMS?

Bedford 814.623.9086 • Hollidaysburg 814.693.8744 • www.kniselyandsons.com • 24/7

