

W. R. Grace a worldwide success story

While the monkeypox outbreak in the United States hasn't yet made a significant impact on Pennsylvania, one international company with a Blair County presence is at the forefront of keeping the affliction in check.

W.R. Grace, located at 2858 Back Vail Road in Tyrone, manufactures fine chemicals for leading global organizations. One of those is a smallpox treatment for SIGA Technologies. That antiviral is also considered effective to treat monkeypox and is now in high demand.

It is not at all unusual that W.R. Grace would be involved in something with such an obvious upside. The company has been in business since 1854, has operations in 30 countries and customers in 60. Grace employs 4,300 worldwide, 160 of those in Tyrone. On reputation alone, Grace stands tall.

"Grace is a leading supplier of specialty catalysts, engineered materials and fine chemicals," explained Plant Manager Randall Andrews. "We're part of the Standard Industries family of companies. We are head-

quartered in Columbia, Maryland with 23 additional locations worldwide. Our Tyrone plant is one of three plants in the U.S. that support our Fine Chemical Manufacturing Services (FCMS) business."

The FCMS business is a contract development manufacturing organization focused on small molecule chemistry supporting the pharmaceutical, nutraceutical and fine chemical industries.

The history of the Tyrone operation began in 1975 when Albemarle Fine Chemistry Services opened its doors. The company, headquartered in Louisiana, was a consistent employer in the county but decided in June of last year to unlock value from other areas of its portfolio. To accomplish that, Albemarle sold its Fine Chemistry Services business to W.R. Grace. It was right place, right time for Grace.

"The strategic investment was designed to build on the strengths of our portfolio in Health and Life Sciences with pharmaceuticals being the largest and fastest growing sub-segment within our Materials Technologies business," acknowledged Andrews. "The acquisition

bolstered our capabilities in highly complementary analytical, regulatory and manufacturing services."

As far as employee responsibilities are concerned, not much has changed in Tyrone. Approximately 70% of the employees are skilled, hourly employees. This would include Production Operators, Maintenance Technicians, Quality Assurance Lab Technicians, Shipping/Receiving and other support groups. The other 30% would include management and support staff, consisting of Quality, Safety and Environmental groups, Chemical Engineers, Chemists and other administrative support.

Thomas Getz, HR Manager for both Albemarle and Grace, had the responsibility of transitioning from one company to the other during the pandemic. With all the challenges facing employers from the recruitment and retention standpoint, it would seem that Getz would have his hands full. No so, he admitted.

"Covid-19 has had minimal impact on recruitment and retention here. Since the onset of the pandemic, our organization quickly pivoted to support a remote



Making-up an in-process sample for analysis at W.R. Grace are Lab Systems Analysts (from left): Joe Steinbugl and Dan Burns.

work environment and institutionalized strict safety protocols for those members of our workforce who were required to be onsite for manufacturing to persist. Our WATCH (Wash, Avoid Touching, Cover and Hold Back) protocol, combined with strict adherence to all country, state and local guidelines enabled production to continue even during lockdown periods."

As W.R. Grace prepares

for the future, it does so with considerable optimism.

"Our goal at Grace is to be the worldwide leader in specialty and fine chemicals through both organic growth and bolt-on acquisitions that align with our long-term growth strategies," Andrews emphasized. "From a short-term perspective, we are continuously looking at opportunities to drive bottom-line growth amid an economic climate that con-

tinues to see supply chain challenges and ongoing inflation.

"The goal of our FCMS business is to continue to be a leading Contract Development Manufacturing Organization in North America by building on our legacy of strong customer relationships and exceptional quality service.

(W.R. Grace has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 2000.)

HART addressing human trafficking

For a high percentage of Blair County residents, the county's marketing mantra has emphasized that we are a great place to "live, work and raise a family." There are challenges, however, to that way of life and one of the scariest is human trafficking.

So is there human trafficking taking place in Blair County and is the situation improving?

"I feel like this is a tricky question," explained Ashley Owens, Children's Advocacy Director at Family Services, Inc. "Human trafficking is definitely happening in Blair County and has been happening for decades. I do not think we have the data to support whether it's getting better or worse but what I can confidently say is that we're beginning to recognize it. So our numbers are higher than in the past but it could be because we are finally educating our community and partners and shifting our lens on how we view circumstances to identify trafficking situations."

Many of the partners that Owens references are part of an initiative put together in 2019 called HART – Human Anti-Trafficking Response Team. Nine local agencies have become members of HART, whose mission statement describes it as "a collaboration of law enforcement, prosecution, direct service providers and community members that take a victim-centered approach for effectively combatting human trafficking in our community."

The agencies recruited to be part of HART are not there by accident, according to Ashley Gay Vocco, Victim Services Program Director at Family Services.

"The Victim Services Pro-



Combining talents to have a positive impact on the effort to stop human trafficking are, left to right: Shannon Tucker, Ashley Gay Vocco, Ashley Owens and Tory Schwarze.

gram in-house expert on human trafficking – Tory Schwarze – attended trainings and read extensively on trafficking coalitions in other communities that were successful and helped save lives of those being trafficked," Gay Vocco pointed out. "In doing so, it became evident that there were specific entities and systems that needed to be part of any effort. Law enforcement, prosecution (District Attorney's Office), mental health, victim services, Children's Advocacy Center and medical providers need to work in tandem to create a supportive team around victim/survivor while holding traffickers and buyers accountable."

The HART team is broad but not all-encompassing, believes Shannon Tucker, Assessment Supervisor for Blair County Children, Youth and Families (CYF).

"The team covers a lot of the bases but there are others who play an important role

in the mix," Tucker noted. "For instance, we have leaders of faith-based congregations who attend meetings. Clergy who are educated in the dynamics of trafficking can help spread awareness, break down stereotypes and provide comfort and aid to victims."

Ultimately, the more education and awareness that takes place in the community, the more effective HART will be. That education, Owens emphasizes, needs to focus on what the real challenges are locally.

"I've had an opportunity to talk to many different groups of Blair County citizens," she disclosed. "I'd say the average citizen within the county is aware of human trafficking but views it more like the movie 'Taken.' You see Facebook posts about people stalking others or trying to grab children in parking lots but we are not seeing that type of activity here.

"What we are seeing is family members trafficking family members, drug dealers trafficking individuals or romantic partners trafficking their paramours. Part of our effort at HART is to dispel myths surrounding trafficking."

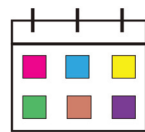
HART has an Education Subcommittee that has a goal for 2023 to get in front of as many people and as many different groups as possible to paint the picture of what trafficking actually looks like in Blair County.

"I could write several books on what I have seen over more than fourteen years working at CYF and why community education is important," Tucker acknowledged. "I am so thankful for the commitment of the people who understand the urgency associated with issues like trafficking. I think people would be stunned to know how many cases have been resolved through their outstanding efforts."

Community Calendar building momentum as awareness increases



The Blair Events Calendar is a great community tool to find information about upcoming events in Blair County.



BLAIR EVENTS CALENDAR

The Blair Events Calendar is alive and well and looking for more posts.

The Calendar was created a year ago through the efforts of the Blair County Chamber and Arts Altoona and went live in November. Little-by-little, it has gained acceptance, according to Brittany Mayer, the Chamber's Digital Media Manager.

"People are definitely using it," she pointed out. "It started slowly but has built momentum as people are learning about it. We've had quite a few large events posted on it although we know there are other ones that were never submitted. The process clearly takes time and we're doing what we can to promote it."

The original intention was to only post events

that would draw at least fifty people. There was concern that too many events would discourage people from looking for the ones in which they had an interest.

"We've had some smaller events that we decided to post," Mayer admitted. "We aren't at the stage where we can be too selective and it was also difficult to predict attendance. The Calendar is intended to be a resource, not just for the people who live here but also for visitors looking for something to do."

There is no cost to have an event posted. Simply email the information to bmayer@blairchamber.com. To access the Calendar, go to www.blairchamber.com or www.artsaltoona.org. and click-on the BEC logo.



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