



Bags packed for the Cove?

When Doug Mingle was chair of the Chamber's Board of Directors a few years ago, he would often joke about the angst that people from Altoona seemed to feel about traveling to the Cove.

"I've told more than a few people that if I was smart I would have opened a hotel to accommodate the Altoona

crowd who considers the trip out here to be long and arduous," Mingle acknowledged. A lifelong "Cove guy," Mingle has

owned the Roaring Spring True Value for practically forever. He appreciates his Altoona customers and is not beyond

providing a ribbing to the ones who treat their shopping excursion like a battle of wills.

"I tell them that people from the Cove must drive a lot faster than people from the city because it's no big deal for us to drive to Altoona, often more than once a day," Mingle pointed out. "Really, how far away do they actually think we are?"

That's a very good question and one I decided to pursue with attendees at a recent Chamber event held in Downtown Altoona. My question was simple. How far, in miles, is Roaring Spring from Altoona?

The answers were all over the board and, as you would expect, on the high side.

"I'm thinking 28 miles," one gentleman told me. "That actually might be the distance from Hollidaysburg to Huntingdon. I think I've seen that sign."

"At least 20 miles, probably closer to 25," another guy predicted. "Depending on the time of day you drive it, it takes at least an hour. Traffic is usually bad."

When I told him that the actual distance to Roaring Spring was 16.2 miles (according to MapQuest), he wasn't convinced.

"It's a lot further to Martinsburg," he argued. How much further?

"Ten more miles."

It's actually four. A lady thought long and hard about my question before finally guessing 10 miles.

"If you get on I-99, it really doesn't take long at all," she noted.

I talked to sixteen people in all and it turns out that the only factor for Altoona people that supersedes inconvenience in deciding to visit the Cove is motivation. What type of motivation?

"My wife and I drive to Mamie's a lot," a man offered. "I see a lot of Altoona people from Altoona when we go there. Evidently, the trip isn't too far for that."

Evidently not.

YEA! graduates step-up to give back

As the seventh class of the Blair County Chamber's Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!) program arrives for its first session tomorrow at the Sheetz Center for Entrepreneurial Excellence, it will be greeted by more than just the usual cast of characters.

Besides Program Manager Tim Gildea and instructor Jamie Stumph, three former YEA! graduates – now interns – will be assisting in the process of helping the class's twenty-one students to build a viable business. Jackson Boyer and Sam Fiore from YEA's inaugural class in 2017 and Brad Shaffer from 2018 have volunteered to share their expertise.

While being YEA! grads is a common denominator for the three, it's not the only one. All three are current students at Penn State Altoona and all three are part of the university's prestigious "Sheetz Fellows" program.

"It will be great to have these guys involved," ac-

knowledgeed Gildea. "When you're advancing concepts and explaining why things in the business world happen a certain way, it's important to have the validation of people who have been through the YEA! program and understand how it works."

While the initial years involved some growing-pains, the strong influence of the staff in Rochester, New York, where YEA! is headquartered, created a solid base on which to build.

"Not only was the program enjoyable, it provided many skills and an incredible experience," Boyer remembers. "So much of the process of building a business was thoroughly explained but also well monitored. I look forward to being part of that monitoring process." Boyer went through the YEA! program as a freshman from Bellwood-Antis. He is now a double major, working on a B.S. in Accounting and a B.S. in Business with a concentration in Financial Services.



The YEA! Program is excited to have three of its graduates volunteer as interns to help with this year's class. They are, left to right: Sam Fiore, Jackson Boyer and Brad Shaffer.

Fiore is also working on a degree in Business with a focus on Accounting.

"Having an opportunity to learn about entrepreneurship really got me off to a solid start in college," he noted. "It broadened my knowledge and created some options that I wouldn't

have had otherwise. I'm looking forward to helping the YEA! class to benefit from the experience in the same ways that I did."

Shaffer, like Fiore a Bishop Guilfoyle graduate, had the additional opportunity to compete in the YEA! national competition.

He had been chosen by the Investor Panel as having the Most Outstanding Business which qualified him to travel to Rochester.

"YEA! has been such a great part of my life," he admitted. "I'm really looking forward to sharing what I've learned."

Global Power Line Academy helps offset lineman shortage



Ken Bilek (left) has built a training facility that has trained more than 400 students in the line trade.

Prominent among the challenges to the nation's fragile workforce is the fact that many industry sectors are hard-pressed to replace retirees. And in all probability, the situation is likely to get worse.

Ken Bilek wasn't about to let that happen. Bilek had started his company, Global Live Line, as a training and safety consulting business for Electric Utility Companies. Although he had experienced a high level of success, he recognized that the workforce fallout from his industry demanded something more.

In 2005, Bilek and his mentor, Fred Fritz, discussed the idea of starting a school for power line workers.

"We saw that an incredible number of experienced linemen were getting ready to retire," Bilek pointed out. "There was also a lack of new and interested candidates entering the line trade and those that were

entering were doing that without the fundamental skills to be successful."

To assess the potential to impact the industry, Bilek partnered with the Keystone Development Partnership in 2009-10 to hold a 10-week pre-apprenticeship linemen's boot camp. It hit the mark so dramatically that Bilek, Fritz and some other partners started Global Power Line Academy. They developed a curriculum and a training program that was ultimately approved by the PA State Board of Private Licensed Schools in 2012.

Global Power Line Academy is a hands-on, 10-week, pre-apprenticeship program that offers training to those individuals wanting to enter a formal apprenticeship program for electrical line workers. The Academy is located at Blue Knob Ski Resort and sessions run from April through November.

"We've had over 400 stu-

dents go through our program with more than 90% of our students working in the trade that requires line worker skills," Bilek disclosed. "We've had students from several states and even one from the island of Tonga. Many of our students have reported back that they've completed formal apprenticeship programs and are making more than \$100,000 within the first two years of working."

Bilek is looking forward to attracting additional students and growing the Academy.

"We envision the school continuing to thrive and grow," he acknowledged. "What we teach provides a considerable advantage. The shortage of linemen due to retirements has already begun and will continue. Opportunities are knocking."

(Global Power Line Academy has been a Blair County Chamber member since 2017.)

Dr. Barry England named recipient of Chamber ACE award



Dr. Barry England (pictured with a newborn calf) has been a pillar of the ag community for more than 50 years.

Dr. Barry England, a longtime Doctor of Veterinary Medicine in Southern Blair County will be the 2022 recipient of the Blair County Chamber's Agricultural Community Excellence (ACE) Award. The award will be presented at the Farm-City Dinner, set for November 2nd at Freedom Township Fire Hall.

"Dr. England has been an incredible part of our county's farm community for more than four decades," explained Joe Diamond, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau Regional Director, who chairs the Chamber's Farm-City Committee. "Not only is he a well-respected veterinarian, but an outstanding dairy farmer as well."

England was humbled by the award but stressed that he's only one small part of a bigger picture.

"I was very surprised by my selection," he admitted. "My first reaction was to ask if this award also included my brother Fred and our families who are all part of Penn England Farms. We would never have been able to do whatever we accom-

plished without their involvement."

England graduated with a B.S. in Animal Science in 1973 from Penn State and four years later earned a VMD degree from the University of Pennsylvania. He and his wife Diane have been particularly supportive of area youth, including 4-H, FFA and the Dairy Princess program.

Among England's other honors has been his 2021 induction into the Pennsylvania Holstein Hall of Fame. He is also involved extensively in his church.

"I do my best to stay active," he acknowledged. "I'm figuring on doing what I do as long as I'm physically and mentally able to do so. I still get excited by the ongoing success of our breeding program."

To register for the Farm-City Dinner, contact the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at www.blairchamber.com. For sponsorship information, contact Jessie Covert at that same number or email her at jcovert@blairchamber.com.

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