

## Service Clubs fighting recruitment battle

Many of the most significant things that take place in Blair County are the result of a service club stepping-up to make it happen. It's far from a new occurrence. The majority of clubs have long histories that document impressive accomplishments.

Unfortunately, another common characteristic of service clubs is the difficulty associated with growing membership. Or even maintaining what they have. Numbers are down and few clubs anticipate a revival anytime soon.

There are four service clubs that are members of the Blair County Chamber – Altoona AMBUCS, Altoona Kiwanis, Rotary Club of Altoona and Lakemont Lions Club. Recruiting is a high priority for all.

"Recruiting and retaining members is an ongoing challenge," related Jim Huff, President of AMBUCS. "To meet this challenge we are expanding our outreach and using new and different ways to get our message out." Not surpris-

ingly, young people are among the most highly-targeted members.

"It's a tough demographic," Huff noted. "Young people seem to have busier lives and more responsibilities. However, I believe AMBUCS has done a better job at obtaining younger, newer members than many other organizations. Those younger members are a vibrant, important part of AMBUCS."

The mission of AMBUCS is to create mobility for persons with disabilities and special needs. Its AMTRYKE program has been the focal point of that mission.

Kiwanis has been in Altoona for the past 105 years. The Altoona club has approximately 40 members and aspires to have more, according to current President Betsy Lehman.

"Recruiting new members can be an ongoing battle," she pointed out. "We also have to re-engage members whose habits have changed a bit due to cautious behaviors implemented during the Covid pandemic. We want them to come back and re-

discover Kiwanis.

"Life has many stages. We have had members ebb and flow according to life cycles which is pretty much expected. We have also lost aging members and those who move away from the area. Many retired members have stayed active in the club. Their passion and knowledge is such an incredible resource."

Kiwanis has a strong track record of raising funds for a variety of causes, among them scholarships for area youth. Scholarships have also been a high priority for the Rotary Club of Altoona which annually provides twenty-five scholarships of \$1,500 each to area students.

"Membership recruitment is extra important to us because the effectiveness of our events and programs, including scholarship donations, relies on having enough members to participate," explained President Alison Seltzer. "Despite that, we're fairly selective in that we are only looking for people who will put service above self."



Betsy Lehman (left), President of the Altoona Kiwanis Club, welcomes the club's newest member, Melissa Dolansky of PennCrest Bank.

There are currently 1.4 million Rotarians internationally. The Rotary Club of Altoona has 78 members, making it the largest service club in Blair County.

So what if local service clubs suddenly disappeared? "If Altoona Kiwanis closed our division, the youth in our area would suf-

fer the most," Lehman stated. "We choose programs that directly impact youth."

"Through our activities, a lot of local individuals and charitable organizations rely on us to make a difference," Seltzer admitted. "Without us, they would feel the loss."

"If AMBUCS did not exist, it is unlikely that other organizations in the community would be able to pick up the slack and provide all that our chapter currently provides," Huff predicted. "Let's do what we can to make sure that all of our service clubs thrive and grow."

## Altoona First maintains focus on community

Among the longest-tenured members of the Blair County Chamber of Commerce are the area's banks. One of those banks, which has been a Chamber member under the same banner for the past eighty-one years, is Altoona First Savings Bank.

"Although I haven't been around since that relationship started, it remains as an important part of what we do," acknowledges Troy Campbell, who has been President/CEO at the bank since 2017. "The Chamber works to build the business base in our community. Membership in the Chamber also provides a great atmosphere for building relationships and opportunities for further investment."

Altoona First opened its doors in 1927 and its mission has stayed consistent ever since, according to Campbell.

"We're a local bank that is 100% focused on creating relationships with individuals, families and local businesses to help them to achieve success and see our community prosper," he pointed out. "We do this in the Altoona First Way which is relational, responsive and respectful. We love our community!"

As a community bank, Campbell believes that there are certain advantages that are best defined by its mission, focus and actions.



Troy Campbell, President/CEO of Altoona First Savings Bank, reviews mortgage information with Jessica Altman, the bank's AVP-Mortgage Loan Originator.

"I believe a community bank is a bank that is established and rooted within a community, where decisions are made locally and customers are known and valued as people," he disclosed. "I think our size better positions us to know the pulse of our community and make adjustments that help our community prosper."

Still, he admits, there are challenges.

"A challenge with being a local bank is overcoming the misperception that we do not offer the convenience of great technology or similar products and services. I can assure you that Altoona First Savings Bank offers

top-of-the-market digital banking solutions and products partnered with excellent staff and customer service."

Altoona First is a mutual bank instead of a stock bank. That puts the goals of his bank in line with its mission, Campbell emphasizes.

"We are not focused on pleasing stockholders. We are focused on serving our customers. I believe a culture of customer focus is a great benefit over a stock price focus."

The recent economic downturn has created a variety of headaches for banks of all sizes in all parts of the country. Altoona First, as well as other community

banks, have tried to offer stability by doing what they do best.

"The rapid rate in which the Fed has increased rates has certainly made it difficult on local families and small businesses," Campbell noted. "The rate of increases is the fastest in decades and the rapid rate certainly puts a pinch on net interest margin which is how community banks manage to grow and strengthen the bank rather than the fees and non-banking products which many non-community banks utilize."

(Altoona First Savings Bank has been a Blair County Chamber member since 1941.)

## New terms extended to Board members



Superman Berrow



Joe Diamond



Diana McClure



Pat Miles

There won't be much of a learning curve for most members of the Blair County Chamber's 2023 Board of Directors.

Fifteen of the Chamber's twenty-two board members will be returning to the Board with some time remaining on their current board terms. And five more were just elected to serve additional terms. Those five were approved at the October meeting of the Chamber Board. They are: Patrick Miles and Matt Muccitelli, who will begin second three-year terms, and Superman Berrow, Joe Diamond and Diana McClure, who will begin initial three-year terms after serving one-year "Board Chair" appointments during 2022.

There are three board members whose terms will end in December. They are: Richard Fiore, Jr., Neil Hollander and Amy



Matt Muccitelli

Mearkle. Fiore, however, must remain on the Board for an additional year to serve as Immediate Past Chair. He therefore has the dubious distinction of appointing himself as a Board Chair appointment. Two more of those appointments will be made in December.

For more information on the Chamber Board or the election process, contact Joe Hurd at (814) 943-8151 or email him at [jhurd@blairchamber.com](mailto:jhurd@blairchamber.com).

## Coming-Up at the Blair County Chamber

- The Chamber and Ketrow KURTZ Travel will be offering a trip to Sandals Grande Saint Lucian next October. The informational meeting about the trip will be this Wednesday at 6:00 p.m. at the Devorris Center for Business Development. All are welcome!

- Business After Hours will be held this Thursday from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. at Better Homes and Gardens/GSA Realty, located at 3316 5th Avenue, Suite 200 in Altoona. Cost is \$10 for Chamber members; \$20 for non-members. Register online at [www.blairchamber.com](http://www.blairchamber.com).

- The Chamber will hold a "Chamber Check-Up" on November 29th for anyone who would like to learn more about the Chamber. There are two one-hour sessions (8:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m.). No cost to attend. Call (814) 943-8151 to register.

- The WE-LEAd (Women Encouraging Leadership, Education and Development) program will hold a networking event November 30th from 5-7 at Marzoni's (Duncansville). Cost is \$22 for members, \$30 for non-members. Call the Chamber or register online.

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