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Business After Hours gets a facelift in '23

In terms of networking opportunities, nothing has been quite as effective for members of the Blair County Chamber than Business After Hours. That program has been a monthly staple of the organization for more than a half-century.

Beginning in 2023, change is in the wind.

"We're looking at a number of our programs, especially ones that may have lost a little bit of enthusiasm," explained Marketing VP Linda Stotler. "Business After Hours continues to attract businesses interested in hosting but a few less attendees that we're used to. Clearly, we needed to consider some alternatives."

Stotler, along with counterparts Jessie Covert and Brittany Mayer, brainstormed after talking with a cross-section of Chamber members. What emerged was an array of surprises that should make the experience one to check-out.



The initial change was in the day of the week that the event is to be held. Instead of the traditional Thursday, the event will move to a Wednesday.

"We're rebranding with a racing theme," Stotler pointed out. "Instead of Business After Hours, we're now calling it HD500. The HD stands for 'Hump Day,' an opportunity for people to enjoy some socialization midweek. That's why we moved to Wednesday."

The new look includes a "pit crew" consisting of Chamber staff and volunteers.

"Our message to members is to make a pit stop on their way home from work, grab some food and beverages

and some great conversation," Stotler explained. "We want them to get refueled for the rest of the week."

The change to HD500 will take place on January 25th at Leonard S. Fiore, Inc. It's not likely to be the only change at the Chamber during 2023. The ability of the staff to continue its foray into more effective ways of reaching members through social media and other forms of technology will no doubt open additional lines of communication that are essential to organizational growth.

"Like everyone else, we've made use of Zoom in many of our committee meetings which has helped



Networking at events like Business After Hours has been a major reason why businesses have joined the Chamber.

to increase some member involvement," noted Mayer, the Chamber VP who oversees all aspects of digital media. "But we've been able to create other avenues of interaction that not only

heighten awareness of the Chamber but benefit the entire business community."

The Chamber is also looking at ways to better engage other chambers in the region in efforts aimed at

advocacy and inclusion.

"It's really exciting to see the potential that exists for organizations like ours to move into areas of focus where we haven't been before," Covert added.

Chamber check-up reconnects members

As any chamber of commerce will tell you, without a high priority placed on membership education, member retention is an uphill battle.

The Blair County Chamber is no different. The Chamber does an orientation program whenever a new business joins. But what about the businesses that are already members and don't know what the Chamber does? According to Chamber President Joe Hurd, it happens rather routinely.

"Businesses change leadership all the time," Hurd acknowledged. "Often those new leaders come to Blair County from outside the region. They may know that their business is a member of the Chamber but usually that's all they know. We need to change that."

Beginning last November, the Chamber offered a program called "Chamber Check-Up." The program is essentially an orientation for any member who would like



Tim Davis of IMC-Innovative Manufacturers' Center and Kathy Greenland of Bell Mansion and Greenland's Lodge were among those who attended a recent Chamber Check-Up.

to learn more about the Chamber and what the organization can do for that member. Chamber Check-Up will be offered each month during 2023.

"The people who participated in November felt it was very worthwhile," Hurd admitted. "We also encourage non-members to take part. There is no cost to

attend and no obligation to get involved in anything the Chamber does."

The next Chamber Check-Up is January 17th at both 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m.

Three great trips added for next year



Spain, Morocco and Portugal are home to some of the world's most unique art collections and historic landmarks.

The Blair County Chamber and Epic Journeys have added three exciting destinations to the 2023 trip schedule. The best part is that all three destinations are part of the same trip.

From September 11th to September 24th, travelers can experience Spain, Morocco and Portugal. Among the cities included are Madrid, Toledo, Granada, Costa Del Sol, Tangier, Seville, Lisbon, Fatima, Avila Segovia and Salamanca.

"This was a trip that people suggested we consider," acknowledged Chamber President Joe Hurd. "We traveled to Spain a few years ago and we had a trip to Portugal

planned that was disrupted by the pandemic. To be able to add Morocco was a bonus. This trip is ideal for people who like variety."

An informational meeting about the Spain, Morocco and Portugal trip is scheduled for January 11th at 6:00 p.m. at the Devorris Center for Business Development. There is no cost or obligation but interested travelers are asked to contact Marilyn at the Chamber to assure that everyone can be accommodated. Her number is (814) 943-8151.

For information on other Chamber trips visit the Chamber Website at www.blairchamber.com.

LBC Youth embrace servant leadership

Servant leadership is the hallmark of the Chamber's Leadership Blair County programs. Both the adult and the youth programs place a strong emphasis on graduates being ready and willing to assist those in the community who can always use a helping hand.

The current class of LBC Youth got an up-close opportunity to put words into action at its Community Service Project Session. That session split the class into small groups and assigned them to various non-profits. Class member Emma Bettwy, sophomore at Altoona Area High School, was assigned to the Altoona Teen Shelter.

"It was both touching and eye-opening," Bettwy admitted. "There aren't many homeless people that we see on the streets. Knowing that there have been

nearly 18,000 people from ages 12-17 at this shelter for one reason or another since 2017 is incredible."

Bettwy and her classmates helped with some cleaning and preparing for upcoming events while at the shelter.

Brodie Soler of Claysburg-Kimmel was part of a group that went to The Healing Patch. "We reorganized their library and cut out 'dream catchers' for the kids in their program," she pointed out. "They provide such a great service to kids who have experienced a loss. We were happy to help in some small way."

Holden Schreier of Bellwood-Antis spent the morning with his group at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Blair County. "We helped them organize some things so that they can more easily reach out to people who



Coreena Detrich, (left), of Quaint Corner Children's Museum & Discovery Center, mentors LBCY students Laura Reed and Anastasia Ranalli, as they volunteer during a recent community service project.

can become volunteers," he noted. "They do a really good job at something that's really important for our community."

Among the other sites that class members visited were Saint Vincent DePaul Food Bank, Quaint Corner

Children's Museum & Discovery Center and the Mountain Lion Back Pack program.

"We emphasize to students that giving-back is what servant leadership is all about," stated LBC staff member Brittany Mayer.

Happy New Year

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