

YEA! Mentors excited to make a difference

In evaluating a program like the Blair County Chamber's Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!), Program Manager Tim Gildea is in an enviable position.

"It's really an embarrassment of riches," Gildea acknowledges. "We have so many people committed to making YEA! an ongoing success, that it's really hard to single-out one particular group or individual that's most integral to what we do. It's truly a team effort and this team continues to be outstanding."

In its seventh year, YEA! carries-on the process of helping young people to build businesses from the ground up. This year's class consists of 19 students building 18 separate businesses. That's unusual, according to Gildea.

"In previous years, we had a lot of students who partnered on a business so the number of actual businesses was much smaller," he pointed out. "This year, only two of our students are partnering. That's changed our dynamic a little."

In particular, it has increased the need for additional mentors. The mentors work with the students for an hour each week over a six week period. The one-on-one interaction provides



One of the critical components of a program like the Chamber's Young Entrepreneurs Academy is a quality group of mentors (like those above).

the students an opportunity to examine their original concepts and get insight from people who have "been there, done that."

While many of the past YEA! Mentors have returned for another year, the influx of new mentors has brought additional expertise and enthusiasm.

"Just listening to the mentors at their orientation was really invigorating," Gildea admitted. "They bring an element to YEA! that kids can sense and look forward to each week. It takes their businesses to another level

and instills the confidence that the students need to begin to work on their presentations."

Cory Gehret of Stiffler McGraw is a first-time mentor who is also a member of the Chamber's Board of Directors.

"I've attended YEA! presentations in the past and have always been impressed by how committed the students are to business development," Gehret disclosed. "Having met with my mentee, I'm looking forward to helping wherever I can as he develops

his product. His level of preparedness and excitement are contagious. I've heard that from other mentors as well."

Angie Yasulitis of YaZo Group, another new mentor, has witnessed that excitement as well.

"From starting my own business, I know the thrill and passion that comes from doing something you love and seeing it come to life," she explained. "Everyone should experience that. Knowing my student is pumped-up about this project makes it



MENTORS

Betsy Lehman
P. Joseph Lehman Inc.,
Consulting Engineers

Connor McConnell
Abominable Toys

Jayme Rhodes
Serviam Construction

Alex Seltzer
Manpower

Kirsten Stratton
KMS Interior Design
& Home Staging

Darin Tornatore
Keystone Environmental,
Health & Safety Services

Rob Wentz
LIT Coaching

Katie Whysong
CNB Bank

Angie Yasulitis
The YaZo Group

Superman Berrow
B4 Club Therapy

Dan Bon
Business Owner

Sara Fiore-Gunnett
Leonard S. Fiore, Inc.

Gwen Fisher
PA CareerLink

Matt Fox
ABCD Corporation

Bud Fulton
Fulton Financial Advisors

Cory Gehret
Stiffler, McGraw
& Associates

Jared Keller
Keller Engineers

even more special."

Connor McConnell, a YEA! graduate from the program's first year, has stepped up as a mentor.

"I'm doing a number of

real-world things right now that come from my YEA! experience," he stated. "I'm really happy to be able to help the young people who are now where I was."

James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center earns Gold Certification for Sustainability

When the Blair County Chamber's Sustainability Committee issued a survey in 2018 to assist businesses in measuring their effectiveness against a fairly rigorous set of standards, it could not have predicted that someone would jump to the head of the class.

"We devised a certification program that we imagined would be incremental," explained Matt Michrina of Sheetz, who chairs the committee. "It seemed logical that the businesses that completed the survey would score at the lower level (bronze), move to the next level (silver) after addressing issues where they had scored low, and ultimately aspire to at least come close to the gold certification. And, until now, that's the way it's happened."

Until now. The most recent business to complete the survey is the James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center.

"(The VA) skipped the first two levels and went straight to the gold," Michrina acknowledged. "It's really impressive how thorough they are with all aspects of sustainability. Our committee was quite impressed."

They shouldn't have been surprised. Glenn Holsinger is an Environmental Health Specialist at that facility who oversees the VA's Green Environmental Management System (GEMS) as Program Manager.

"GEMS is an entire program dedicated to environmental stewardship,"



Carl Parrish (2nd from left), Acting Associate Director of the James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center accepts the Gold Certification from Matt Michrina, Chair of the Chamber's Sustainable Blair County Committee. Also taking part are Glenn Holsinger (left) of the VA's GEMS Team and Chris Foster of the Chamber's committee.



Holsinger pointed out. "It allows us to effectively serve and care for our Veterans while ensuring sustainable systems for air, land, waste and water. Our GEMS team also ensures that our facility complies with environmental law and permitting requirements for all operations."

Needless to say, a Gold Certification from the Chamber isn't the only form of recognition that has come the VA's way. For seven consecutive years, from 2013 to 2019, the Altoona

facility was named on Practice Greenhealth's list of Top 25 Hospitals for Sustainability. Beginning in 2020, that distinction became the Emerald Award which recognizes facilities with sustainable programs and comprehensive exemplary scores in eco-friendly practices.

Still, the Chamber's Gold Certificate is a significant source of pride to the VA emphasizes Dr. Derek Coughenour, Medical Center Director at James E. Van Zandt.

"Given our strong duty to ensuring the health of our Veteran community, staff and community-at-large, we valued the opportunity, presented by the Chamber's

Sustainability Survey, to measure our overall efficiency," disclosed Dr. Coughenour. "It was our goal to use this survey as a method to ascertain which facility practices are ecologically sound and on-par with the Chamber's standard for sustainability."

The Chamber continues to recruit businesses to complete the survey. The committee has also created an additional survey for restaurants.

"Helping businesses assess their strengths and weaknesses is a high priority of our committee," Michrina admitted.

(James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center has been a Chamber member since 1995.)

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