

Fiore helped keep Chamber on solid footing

As Richard Fiore, Jr. passed the ceremonial gavel to Clark Stapelfeld at the Blair County Chamber's Annual Meeting, you could sense a mix of satisfaction and relief. For the past two years, Fiore has chaired the Board of Directors at perhaps the most challenging time that the organization has ever experienced.

"At a time of great uncertainty, Richard – and Darin Tornatore before him – grabbed hold of the situation and kept us moving forward," acknowledged Chamber President Joe Hurd. "A lot of organizations like ours struggled to regain their footing. Some are still trying."

Without question, Covid-19 set the Blair County business community into a tailspin. Many businesses were not permitted to remain open. Those that were had a host of restrictions that threatened to set them back for long periods of time. The Chamber actually called its entire membership – more than 1,000 busi-

nesses – to determine where it could help. Fiore helped spearhead that effort.

"We needed people to know we were behind them and willing to do whatever we could to get them through an unbelievably rough time," he pointed out. "We also helped a lot of non-members. As a business community, under circumstances like these, it makes no sense to pick and choose."

The pandemic created significant financial difficulties for Chamber members when it came time to renew their memberships. Fiore worked with the Chamber staff to create a Unity Fund in which businesses that could contribute money to help those that had run short were encouraged to do so.

"We said from the beginning of Covid that we wanted to guarantee that no one would lose their membership in the Chamber due to an inability to pay," Fiore explained. "We were so impressed with the businesses that stepped-up. It said a lot about our community."

While many of the busi-

nesses were trying to stay afloat, the Chamber itself had a difficult time as well. Program and event income ground to a halt. For more than a year, the primary source of funding were some dues revenue and some rainy day resources that had accumulated over the years. It became necessary to furlough a few staff while new strategies were set in place.

"I was disappointed about the cancelled events, programs and committee meetings during Covid," Fiore admitted. "But I believe the organization is stronger today having been through the many challenges thrown our way. I believe it refocused us and showed us the importance in coming together as a community to honor, learn, teach and network together."

He's confident that he leaves the Board Chair role in good hands.

"Clark is a dynamic leader who always has thoughtful opinions that get directly to the point," Fiore disclosed. "He brings his experience at New Pig as a multinational



Richard Fiore, Jr. (right) helped guide the Chamber as Board Chair in 2021 and 2022. He's now passed the gavel to Clark Stapelfeld of New Pig Corporation.

corporation CEO to our board, broadening our view and helping us to think big beyond our region."

As far as Fiore's future involvement with the Chamber is concerned, he must first serve as Immediate

Past Chair until the end of 2023, a role that will keep him engaged with a number of initiatives that were introduced during his tenure. After that?

"I plan to become involved in some of the com-

mittees where I started my Chamber involvement," he noted. "I've lost touch with a lot of those during the time that I've needed to focus on my board leadership duties. It will be good to help wherever I can."

Committee leadership rates high marks

Few associated with the Blair County Chamber would question the value of Chamber committees to the overall value of the organization. Fewer yet would question the quality of those who lead those committees.

"It would be a great misconception for anyone to assume that the leadership of the Chamber was solely the responsibility of the board of directors," acknowledged Board Chair Clark Stapelfeld. "Our committee chairs, vice-chairs and co-chairs provide the direction at the grassroots level that makes the whole process run smoothly. They run interference for the board."

The connection between board members and committee chairs is practically seamless. A high percentage of board members chaired committees prior to being elected to the board. In fact, four current board members – Superman



Committee Chairs have played an integral role in the success of the Blair County Chamber. They have also been a good feeder group for the Chamber Board.

Berrow, Joe Diamond, Alex Seltzer and Matt Muccitelli – are still chairing committees.

"When our Nominating Committee looks at potential board members, committee service is one of the factors they consider," Stapelfeld, a former chair

of the Public Policy Committee, explained. "When a board can reduce the learning curve for new members, it has the ability to gain momentum a lot earlier."

So how does someone become a committee chair?

"The standard joke is that they are usually nominated

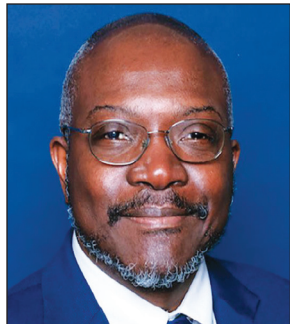
when they miss a meeting," Stapelfeld kidded. "In reality, it's someone with a passion for what a committee is hoping to accomplish. They mostly self-identify. It seldom happens that a person who has great enthusiasm turns-down a chance to chair."

Next "Breakfast Club" introduces Chancellor of Penn State Altoona

The new Chancellor of Penn State Altoona is a man of science who has built an impressive reputation for institutional effectiveness and won numerous awards as a fellow of the American Chemical Society.

Dr. Ron Darbeau will be the keynote speaker at the next Chamber "Breakfast Club," set for this Thursday at The Casino at Lakemont Park. The event begins at 7:45 a.m.

The cost to attend Breakfast Club is \$20 for Chamber members and \$30 for non-members. To register,



Dr. Ron Darbeau

call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at www.blairchamber.com.

Corporate sponsor of the February Breakfast Club is HoopsFest.

Chamber Committee Chairs 2023

Ambassadors

Sherri Stayer

Attractions/Hotel Roundtable

Patrick Schurr and Nate Bowen

BASICS Steering

Chris Farrell and Neil Hollander

BASICS/Rotary Career Fair

Steve Dalecki, Nicole Zernick and Holly Emerick

BASICS Early Childhood

Rodney Green

BASICS Career Development

Jamie Stumph and Jaime Bianconi

BASICS Attendance

Kaytlyn Clapper and Drew Yingling

Committee of Non-Profit Businesses

Holly Keller and Tara Eneidy

Data Security Roundtable

Zach Beckel

Executive Roundtable

Philip Devorris

Farm-City

Joe Diamond

Golf Tournament

Chris Weidley and Brandi Noye

Healthy Workplace

Superman Berrow and John Myers

Home Garden & Healthy Living Showcase

Jimmy Burchfield and Randy Colyer

Leadership Blair County Adult

Amanda Johnston and Rachel Prosser

Leadership Blair County Alumni

Jodi Cessna

Leadership Blair County Youth

Gary Drenning

Membership

Alex Seltzer and Matt Muccitelli

Presidents' Forum

Philip Devorris

Public Policy

Lisa Hann

Safety

Lynn Gardini

Sustainable Blair County

Matt Michrina

Transportation

Tracy Plessinger

WE-LEAD

Sara Fiore-Gunnett

Young Entrepreneurs Academy

Carol Gensimore

Young Professionals of Blair County

Rebecca Culp and Marcus Edwards



**FOOD
BEVERAGES
PRIZES**

**Register online at
blairchamber.com
call 814-943-8151**

**5-7 p.m.
Altoona Heritage
Discovery Center
1421 12th Ave., Altoona**

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