

## Leadership Blair County welcomes 29th class

When the inaugural Leadership Blair County class was selected in 1994, co-founders John Schraff and the late Tim Sissler were hopeful that the program would attract enough applicants for at least the first couple years. They needn't have worried.

Leadership Blair County's 29th class is off-and-running and looking forward to a year of learning, interacting and professional development. The class consists of 24 members – the maximum accepted each year.

"We had several applicants beyond the number we could accept," explained Brittany Mayer, the Chamber staff member who oversees the LBC program.

"The fact that our number of applicants is actually increasing speaks well to the popularity of the program."

The 2024 LBC Adult Class started with an orientation on September 22nd and recently took part in a two-day retreat at Lake Raystown Resort. That retreat, according to Mayer, is when the class members really get to know one another.

"A number of the exercises that are part of the retreat focus on team building," she pointed out. "The leadership sessions can be fairly rigorous but create discussions that set the stage for what the class will



Discussing strategy at the LBC Orientation are, from left, Geoff Barton, Joseph Elder and Kelli Wigfield.



experience throughout the year. Even the social time that is built-in to the agenda has a relevance to bringing the class closer together."

Another key aspect of the success of the LBC Adult program is the return of Dr. Maureen Dodson as facilitator. Dodson is beginning her 17th year in that role.

"There is little question that the ongoing success of the Leadership Blair County Adult program is largely the result of having Maureen as the guiding force," stated Chamber President Joe Hurd. "We're extremely fortunate to have two outstanding facilitators like Maureen and Tami Chadick, who has led our Leadership Youth program for the same number of years."

Hurd credited the business community with being a critical factor in why the adult program has maintained such an incredible amount of support.

"Beyond being willing to fund the cost associated with participating in LBC, local businesses have helped to spread the word about the importance of the program to the future of Blair County," he noted. "When you look at the organizations in our county that are making a tangible impact here, it's no accident that many of them are being led by graduates of the Leadership Blair County program."

(For more information on Leadership Blair County, contact the Blair County Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or visit the Chamber website at [www.blairchamber.com](http://www.blairchamber.com).)

### CLASS OF 2024

DANA AVVAMPATO NPC, Inc.	TYLER MAGAHA Warrior Sports Physical Therapy
GEOFF BARTON Reliance Bank	SHEREE PETERSON Ward Transport & Logistics
ALISON CADDY Conemaugh Nason Medical Center	RICHARD SERVELLO Family Services Incorporated
CARTER CERULLY Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies	MEGAN SMITH Sheetz, Inc.
JOSEPH ELDER Curry Supply	JOSHUA SNOWDEN Steve & Nancy Sheetz Foundation
KELLY FEDELI Office of Senator Judy Ward	DAVID SNYDER Ward Trucking & Logistics
DAN FINELLI Blair Image Elements/ Blair Companies	EMMA SNYDER Young, Oakes, Brown & Company, P.C.
KATIE FULTON ARC Federal Credit Union	LEXIE STEINER American Eagle Paper Mills
GARRETT GIEDROC Blair County Convention Center	DANA TORNATORE M&T Bank
DELANEY HURD Hoss's Steak & Sea House	KELLI WIGFIELD Webber Advisors
BRAD KANUCH Altoona Housing Authority	CHRISTIE YINGLING SERVPRO of Ebensburg
BRANDON LEONARD Altoona First Savings Bank	DUSTIN ZAZWORSKY Sheetz, Inc.

## Value Drug program places priority on employee health and wellbeing

When the Blair County Chamber created a committee nearly a decade ago to help businesses address the growing concerns surrounding employee health, it seemed logical that participation would be considerable. Sometimes logic doesn't work out as planned.

"We've struggled in many cases, not because businesses aren't interested, but because they have so much on their plates that they can't get to everything," explains Superman Berrow, who chairs the Chamber's Healthy Workplace Committee. "We needed to identify a success story on wellness that we could point-to so that businesses could follow a lead. We think we've done that."

That lead turns out to be Value Drug Company, located in Duncansville. In 2016, Value Drug initiated a Workplace Wellness program as part of a partnership with ConnectCare3 for health and wellness and with KOA as a mental wellness platform. Those affiliations led to educational programs, wellness challenges and other efforts coordinated through local agencies such as Healthy Blair County Coalition.

"We also offer a greatly discounted gym membership through our health insurance provider," noted Robin Wallace, Director of HR at Value Drug. "As a health-care-based organization, we



Wellness participants at Value Drug Company review the current Wellness Program with Director of H.R. Robin Wallace (standing right).

have always had the health and wellness of our employees in mind. We have supported employee health through on-site flu clinics and employee discounts for OTC medications for many years."

The benefits to employees are well-documented, based mostly on the results of events like step challenges, active minutes challenges and healthy weight loss challenges. All challenges are optional but have incentives like additional PTO for those who take part.

"It's been a gradual process," Wallace admitted. "We started by just including wellness-focused articles

in our employee newsletter. We began to emphasize fitness and nutrition and even included healthy recipes for employees to try. We've had an amazing response to our program throughout the past several years with many more participants than we expected."

The employer has benefited as well, according to Wallace.

"We recognized that the key to keeping the costs associated with our health plan low was to keep our employees healthy," she pointed out. "So we migrated our health plan to a self-insured plan and it has clearly made a difference.

While we have been lower than the national average of healthcare cost increases, we can't claim that our Wellness Program is wholly responsible. We are certain that it does play a part in cost containment."

Wallace encourages other businesses to undertake some sort of wellness activity.

"Start with your employees in mind," she said. "You can't have a 'one size fits all' approach. Consider the overall diversity of your employees when designing your program and move forward optimistically."

(Value Drug Company has been a Blair County Chamber member since 1987.)

## Young Entrepreneurs begin new experience in building businesses



Ty Burket (2nd from left) discusses his business idea with Joseph Hofer, Torin Robertson and Elliot Egan, three of his YEA! classmates.

The eighth class of the Blair County Chamber's Young Entrepreneur's Academy (YEA!) set sail on October 3rd for a twenty-five week educational experience that will lead to the creation of several new businesses.

The 2024 YEA! Class consists of sixteen students representing five local school districts. There are five seniors, five juniors, three sophomores, two freshmen and one eighth-grader.

"It's a good mix," acknowledged Tim Gildea, YEA!'s Program Manager. "Based on the orientation and the first couple sessions, it seems like a group that will work well together."

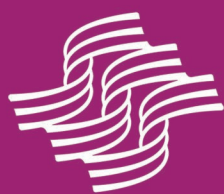
Gildea begins his third year at the helm of the program, which features simi-

lar classes at locations throughout the country. YEA! is headquartered in Rochester, New York.

"The program is incredible," Gildea pointed out. "What the students gain will be valuable to them no matter what they decide to do, career-wise. We've already seen evidence of great things being accomplished by YEA! graduates."

Gildea credits the local business community with guaranteeing the growth of the program.

"As mentors, instructors, speakers and investors, businesses here really step up," he disclosed. "They clearly recognize the importance of helping to insure that young people have as many opportunities as possible to be successful."



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