

Did we solve the jobs crisis?

Mark Twain said “every-one talks about the weather but nobody does anything about it.” Twain would be fascinated by today’s climate change enthusiasts, many of whom talk about nothing but the weather.

Since Covid 19, many weather conversations have been replaced by conversations about the volatile job market. Initially, no one could find enough employees to keep businesses running effectively. Hours were reduced, wages inflated and “help wanted” signs posted everywhere.

While business leaders were talking about it, the Chamber and many of our partners were looking for solutions. One of those partners – PA CareerLink Blair County – was exceptional in creating opportunities for job seekers to make connections with local employers.

CareerLink held its fifth Job Fair since the pandemic on October 4th at the Jaffa Shrine in Altoona. The Chamber and Altoona-Blair County Development Corporation have had specified roles in all five of those events. We helped offset the cost of making it happen. CareerLink did everything else. We got off easy.

Some would wonder why we still need job fairs. Hasn’t everyone either replenished their personnel pools or creatively determined ways to move forward with fewer people? The Help Wanted signs are still in evidence but didn’t we all just forget to take those down? Isn’t the job crisis over?

The CareerLink Job Fair data would indicate otherwise. At the most recent Job Fair, 83 employers participated, 405 job-seekers attended and 1,905 employer/job seeker conversations took place. Forty-two of the attendees were veterans. Forty others were students from four area high schools. The 83 employers scheduled 863 interviews or follow-ups as they attempted to fill their 4,183 available jobs. Twenty-four conditional job offers were made on the spot. Not all those who attended the Job Fair were people without jobs. Nearly 24% were already employed, looking for some-thing new or for a second job.

Gwen Fisher and her staff at CareerLink once again did an incredible job in making the event a huge success. Despite the many accomplishments of that agency, they still fly under the radar far too often. They are planning to hold the next Job Fair sometime in the spring.

It would be gratifying to know that we’re making the kind of progress in workforce efforts that will eliminate the need for future job fairs. Sad to say, we’re still paddling upstream. Happy to say, we’re still paddling.

Walls happily follows her father’s lead

As the new president of Hoss’s Corporation, Billie Jo Walls has a lot on her plate. Hoss’s and Marzoni’s have outstanding reputations for quality and service and building on those reputations would be a challenge for anyone. Fortunately, Billie Jo is not just anyone. She has worked at Hoss’s in a variety of capacities from the time she turned 15. She’s also the daughter of Hoss’s founder, Bill Campbell. She’s learned from the best! Billie Jo and her husband Jason have four sons – Jacob, Calob, Colton and Campbell – and two grandsons – Abel and Ezra.

The Chamber: Hoss’s and Marzoni’s are both marking significant anniversaries of opening during 2023. Hoss’s is 40; Marzoni’s is 20. What have been the major reasons that these restaurants have enjoyed such success?

Billie Jo: We have had so much success hiring the right people. There are so many of them who have embraced our passion for good old fashioned HOSS’pitality. So, the dedicated employees that surround us are one of the major reasons for our success. We treat others the way we want to be treated and they in turn do

Chamber Q&A

the same. Hoss’s has been and always will be built on family. Each one of our restaurants has built their own family within their four walls. That, and we take care of each other, just like family does.

The Chamber: What have been the greatest challenges that each restaurant has faced in maintaining such an impressive reputation?

Billie Jo: Over the last couple of years, it has been the shrinking labor pool and the change in the workforce that have been our greatest challenge in many of our locations. Fortunately, some locations were able to bounce back already and were able to get back to where we need to be as far as staffing. But we are still putting a lot of focus on hiring and retaining good, quality people who want to work in a fun, but fast-paced family-friendly environment and we will continue that focus.

The Chamber: What would people in Blair County be surprised to know about Hoss’s Corporation?



Billie Jo Walls has been making a smooth conversion into her new role as President of Hoss’s Corporation by drawing-on what she’s learned through experience.

Billie Jo: Supporting the communities we serve and giving back are very important to us and this has always been one of our core values. We have given over 5 million dollars in various donations and fundraisers throughout our 40 years in business.

The Chamber: What would people in Blair County be surprised to know about Billie Jo Walls?

Billie Jo: When I was a child, my parents took us out to dinner every Saturday night. My brother would

order seafood, my sister ordered chicken and I would order steak. My Dad said he would build us a steak house so that we could all get what we liked...and here we are.

The Chamber: Bill Campbell is the founder of Hoss’s and Marzoni’s. He is also your father. What characteristics have you learned from your dad that help you in your transition as the company’s president?

Billie Jo: My Dad has taught me honesty, integrity, a hard work ethic, and how

important family is. We have family dinner every Sunday night with all his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. We all look forward to it. He has also taught us all to work hard, and nothing comes for free. You work for everything you have.

The Chamber: What is on Billie Jo Walls “bucket list”?

Billie Jo: Nothing too outrageous, it’s about family to me. So, just to be able to vacation and spend quality time with my family and friends.

LBC Alumni to stuff stockings with local non-profit for troops

Every year, the Leadership Blair County Alumni Committee chooses a non-profit organization to partner with on a servant leadership project. This year, that partnership is with Military Families Ministry (MFM USA, INC.).

MFM USA, INC.’s “Stockings for the Troops” sends hundreds of stockings to deployed service members who will not be home for the holidays. For many troops, this is the only gift they receive during the holiday season.

“Our first Stockings for the Troops project was in 2011. My son was deployed with an Army battalion in Afghanistan, and we sent stockings to him to share with his platoon,” said Tracie Ciambotti, president and director of MFM USA, INC. “Learning that there were so many soldiers who did not receive any care packages from home broke my heart. We do not just send one stocking to one service member, we send enough for everyone in the unit to receive one.”

Some items like tooth-



(Left to Right) Jodi Cessna, LBC Alumni, Tracie Ciambotti, MFM USA, INC., and Brittany Mayer, Blair County Chamber, stuff stocking for the troops with community donations.

brushes, toothpaste, beef jerky and small card games are popular with the service members and are often overlooked.

“People should donate because they will be able to spend Christmas day with their family members while many military families will have an empty chair at the Christmas dinner table,” says Ciambotti. “For the deployed service member, they will spend their Christmas day working, serving our country, protecting our freedom and sacrificing

their time with families so we can be with ours.”

Military members have expressed their appreciation for the gifts while they are away from home.

“Little acts of kindness such as your stockings really make an incredible impact,” said a Marine Capt. “For some of my younger warriors however, this is their first time being apart from friends and family during the holidays and I can’t stress enough what an impact your acts of kindness make!”

Stockings for the Troops items	
stockings (empty or filled)	crackers (peanut butter or cheese)
individually wrapped Twizzlers	individually wrapped cookies (not homemade)
hard candy (no chocolate) (must be in Ziploc bag)	Slim Jims and beef jerky
ChapStick	individual drink mixes for water
tooth brush and small tooth paste	packets of trail mix, nuts, pretzels, fruit, etc.
hot chocolate	deck of cards or small card game
oatmeal packets	holiday cards with message (homemade or bought)
Snack bars (granola, protein, cereal, nut)	

Once election’s over then what happens?

The general election on November 7th will settle a few local races and even a couple judicial races statewide. But at the federal level, not much of significance is happening. Not much yet.

Once this election ends, a new election cycle begins and 2024 promises to be a whopper! To discuss the details of what all is at stake, particularly for the business community, the Blair County Chamber will welcome Kevin Courtois, Vice-President of the Great Lakes Office of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, to help sort it out.

Courtois has spoken at Chamber Breakfast Clubs on two other occasions and he brings a perspective that will bring 2024 into workable focus.



Kevin Courtois

The presentation will take place at the next Chamber Breakfast Club on November 16th beginning at 7:45 a.m. at The Casino at Lake-mont Park. The cost to attend is \$20 for Chamber members and \$30 for non-members. A buffet breakfast is included.

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

Holiday experience in London and Paris among trips for 2024

For the first time ever, the Blair County Chamber will be offering five trips in a single year. And the fifth trip will also debut another Chamber-member travel agency.

Allegro Luxury Vacations, located in Altoona, will partner with the Chamber on “London and Paris Holiday” from November 20th to December 8th of 2024. Experience the holiday magic from London to

Paris, crossing the channel by train. Enjoy iconic sights like Big Ben, Buckingham Palace and the Eiffel Tower.

An informational meeting will be held on November 9th at 6:00 p.m. at the Devorris Center for Business Development located at 3900 Industrial Park Drive, Suite 12, Altoona. There is no cost to attend but call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 and we’ll save you a seat!

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