

Brunner stepping-up at Gloria Gates Foundation

As the new executive director at the Gloria Gates Foundation in Altoona, Jess Brunner inherits the challenge of continuing to help children who, through a variety of circumstances, often need a boost. She's well-qualified to meet that challenge. She has two degrees – one in Early Childhood Education and the other in Child Development. Jess and her partner Travis have two children of their own: Aurielle and Theo.

The Chamber: How would you describe Gloria Gates Memorial Foundation to someone unfamiliar with it?
Jess: GGMF is a nonprofit after-school program designed for children living in low-income housing. The after-school programs reach children ages 6 through 12 by providing them with structure and routine outside of the normal school hours. After-school operates Monday through Thursday from 3:30 p.m. to 5:45 p.m.
The Chamber: How did you personally get involved with the Foundation and what motivated that involvement?
Jess: Twelve years ago, I

had the honor of working for the after-school program at the Logan Hills site and instantly fell in love with the foundation's mission and what it did for children living in low-income. I truly admired, and still do, Dr. Zane Gates, the founder, and believed in his passion for helping the underserved. I worked with a few students during my time there that made an everlasting impression on me.
The Chamber: Your predecessor Toni Bilik had a long history with the Foundation. What made her so effective and what impact did she have on you?
Jess: I could not effectively put into words what Toni has done for GGMF over the years. She ran this foundation like a well-oiled machine. Her knowledge and constant education made the after-school program highly effective. She laid a solid foundation for GGMF to continue and grow. I knew stepping into this role that I would have "big shoes to fill."
The Chamber: What would people in Blair County be surprised to know about the Gloria

Chamber Q&A

Gates Memorial Foundation?
Jess: I think that people in Blair County would be surprised to know that Gloria Gates Memorial Foundation was founded in 1999 and is going into its 25th year next year. In those 25 years, we have reached close to 1,000 children living in low-income areas of Altoona.
The Chamber: What would they be surprised to know about Jess Brunner?
Jess: I guess I would have to say that I have known since fourth grade that I wanted to work with children in some capacity. At the time, I had wanted to be a child psychologist. I had also wanted to be a kindergarten teacher at Milton Hershey School. Some people may be surprised that I am no longer teaching. One comical fact that may surprise people, I have a paralyzing fear of chickens!
The Chamber: In what ways can people make an impact on the Foundation?



Jess Brunner brings degrees in Early Childhood Education and Child Development to her role as Executive Director of Gloria Gates Foundation.

Jess: We are always looking for volunteers to share their time and talents with the after-school programs. Guest speakers and agencies/organizations are invited to come speak and present at the programs. The Foundation relies on grants, some fundraisers, and donations to fund the after-school programs. All

donations can impact GGMF.
The Chamber: What's still on Jess Brunner's "bucket list?"
Jess: Obviously, the first item on my bucket list is to continue watching my children grow and achieve all their dreams. The second item on my bucket list is to travel to New Orleans, there

are several things I want to see and do while there. I have been a New Orleans Saints fan since I was 17 years old, so this has been on my bucket list for many years. Third, I want to continue growing GGMF and making sure that it is around for many, many more years. Reaching as many children as we possibly can.

The Summit Tennis & Athletic Club offers health and fitness plans well suited for all

As organizations like the Blair County Chamber, through its Healthy Workplace program, and Healthy Blair County Coalition look for more ways to help people get in shape and stay there, one local business is marking thirty years of having done just that. The Summit Tennis & Athletic Club, located at 2900 Plank Road in Altoona, has built a strong reputation for being whatever the community has needed, particularly as it has pertained to fitness. It started with the purchase of a 20,000 square foot fitness facility staffed by twenty-three employees. The purchasers were Dr. Alan Kivitz and Dr. Gary Raymond who were confident that there was a growing interest in all aspects of exercise and competition.



Chris Glunt (right), Executive Director of The Summit Tennis & Athletic Club, plans upcoming events with Front Desk Manager Jess Suhoney.

"Our objective was to be an all-inclusive facility offering everything you could want to reach your fitness, health and wellness and athletic goals," Glunt pointed out. "It was a pretty ambitious goal that we feel pretty good about as we look at where we are."
 Glunt is especially proud of the way the Summit has adjusted to the needs of the community. "With sports, in particular high school sports, being such a big part of family life in Central PA, it made sense for us to push our focus in that direction. We've stayed within that framework, both in our program offerings and our facilities."
 As it looks at its future plans, the Summit is aware that it faces some new chal-

lenges that haven't been as persistent in the past. And, according to Glunt, they are not facing those alone. "Just as all clubs and gyms in the nation, we are learning how to deal with the ever-growing 'free' and low-cost memberships that people are getting through their health insurance and various other programs," he disclosed. "These companies have a low reimbursement rate to clubs, which makes balancing a club's budget quite challenging. So we're beginning to investigate other potential revenue sources that complement our current services."
 "Moving forward, we will continue to look for ways to add or enhance the services we provide. We are currently looking for

additional businesses that can work synergistically with us."
 Where partnerships are concerned, the Summit has one in particular that began thirty years ago and has remained strong ever since. "We've been members of the Blair County Chamber since the beginning," he acknowledged. "The Chamber has been a strong advocate for us over the years and we value what they do for every one of their members and the local community. Those are the type of affiliations that have helped us to maintain a strong presence as we continue to grow."
(The Summit Tennis & Athletic Club has been a Blair County Chamber of Commerce member since 1993.)

Breakfast Club focus on upcoming merger

The highly-anticipated merger between the Blair County Chamber and Altoona-Blair County Development Corporation will bring greater benefits and resources to the Blair County business community. What those benefits and resources will entail will be the topic of the next Chamber "Breakfast Club" on December 14th.
 Steve McKnight, President/CEO of ABCD Corporation will present, "Blair County Alliance: A Merger and New Beginning." McKnight will present an overview of the process leading to this merger and what is anticipated for 2024. "We're extremely excited about what this merger will mean to the business community, not only in Blair County but throughout our region," acknowledged Chamber President Joe Hurd. "The many organizational hurdles that have already been eclipsed in a relatively short amount of time leave little doubt that this move is practical and will be well-received when



Steve McKnight

all the details come together." Hurd is particularly encouraged by the fact that the merger will be taking place while both organizations are at the top of their games. Both the Chamber and ABCD are strong and well-positioned for future success," he pointed out.
 The cost to attend Breakfast Club is \$20 for Chamber members and \$30 for non-members. To register, contact the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at www.blairchamber.com.
 Corporate sponsor of the December Breakfast Club is Levy Brewing Company.

BUSINESS AFTER HOURS...RECHARGED!

HD500

HumpDay@5:00

12/13/23

5-7 PM

BREWING SINCE 2014

Lexity

PA COMPANY

1411 Eleventh Ave., Altoona

RESERVATIONS • 814-943-8151

McCartney's

Workplace Solutions

• Furniture
• Supplies
• Copiers

Visit our website at **McCartneys.com**

Follow Us: [f](#) [X](#) [i](#) [in](#) [v](#)

Read Our Blog: [w](#) **McCartneys.blog**

Shop Online: [s](#) **ShopMcCartneys.com**

Meet your installation team at

McCartney's

Brian K.

Ted E.