

Chamber A/O Board creates optimism

The creation of the Blair Alliance for Business and Economic Growth will mean considerable change for a business community looking for new and greater ways to offset many of the challenges facing local employers. A part of that change is not likely to be much change at all.

“In the initial planning process, our objective was to retain as many of the really effective aspects of both the Chamber and ABCD,” acknowledged Steve McKnight, President/CEO of the Alliance. “One of those involved the Chamber’s Board of Directors, which has given-way to an Alliance Board comprised mostly of former ABCD board members. We wanted a way to have oversight of the programs and events that the Chamber would be continuing to do.”

To accomplish that, an Advocacy/Operations Board

was formed. That board would meet quarterly and make recommendations to the Alliance Board for anything that would be needed to strengthen the overall operation, particularly as it pertained to the Chamber.

“In recruiting people to the A/O Board, we felt it only fair to offer the initial opportunities to the former Chamber Board members,” McKnight disclosed. “The A/O Board would have twenty-one members, just as the Chamber Board had. We were hoping that at least a few would be willing to stick around.”

The “few” turned-out to be twenty. Only one board member, transitioning to a new position, was unable to be continue.

“It was incredible,” McKnight admitted. “We couldn’t have asked for a more seasoned group to get things started. That was truly one less thing for us to worry



Members of the Chamber’s Advocacy and Operations Board are, left to right, seated: Nick Sefchok, Rebecca Crilly, Diana McClure, Leonard S. Fiore, Superman Berrow, Vice-Chair, Alex Seltzer, Kirsten Stratton. Standing: Jan Fisher, Richard S. Fiore, Darin Tornatore, Glenn Nelson, Dr. Randy Frye, Donna Fisher, Leslie Estep, Jamie Stumph, Chair, Joe Diamond, and Rebecca Culp. Absent from photo are Cory Gehret, Matt Muccitelli, Clark Stapelfeld, and Paul Randazzo.

about as we continued to put all the pieces together for the Alliance.”

At its first meeting on January 18th, the A/O Board selected Jamie Stumph of

Advantage Resource Group as chair and Superman Berrow of B4 Club Therapy as vice-chair. At its next meeting, the Board will commit at least two hours to

take a program-by-program look at the current committee structure.

“The information generated at that meeting will provide a starting point as

we begin the task of asking Chamber members and non-members how they envision this new organization,” McKnight noted. “Their input will be valuable.”

Double Tap helping to alter community bias on firearms



The Double Tap team consists of, left to right: Daniel Ramsey, Colt Shope, Jesse Moyer, John Mowrey, Allen Smith and Jerry Harten. Absent was Paul Jendrzewski.

It would not be much of an exaggeration to say that very few good things happened in the Blair County business community during 2020. Pandemics have a way of ruining businesses and dispositions.

One good thing that did happen was the opening of a new Altoona business at 704 Eighth Avenue. Double Tap Indoor Gun Range and Training Center opened on September 26, 2020 and has made a made a positive impact in a number of ways. The range is owned by John Mowery and Jesse Moyer.

“The reason we chose this location is because it was formerly an indoor shooting range,” Mowery

pointed out. “Most of the components were already in place. We updated and re-modeled everything prior to opening.”

The Double Tap facility consists of a firearms retail area, a classroom for training and six indoor lanes of 25 yards for shooting pistols and rifles.

“Our mission is to provide the best customer experience whether purchasing a firearm, shooting on the range or taking one of our training classes,” Mowery acknowledged. “You can purchase or rent pistols, shotguns or rifles to use on our range.”

Not surprisingly, one of the greatest challenges that Double Tap faces is offsetting the bias against

firearms that dominates social media.

“We spend a lot of time getting our name out there to let people know who we are and what we do,” Mowery noted. “Once we create a level of understanding, it’s easier to move forward. Our customers range from everyday blue collar workers to law enforcement, doctors and teachers. We have a vast clientele who all enjoy shooting in a climate-controlled environment.

Double Tap is currently looking at expansion opportunities, particularly to add more lanes for the range and more retail area.

(Double Tap Indoor Gun Range and Training Center has been a member of the Chamber since 2020.)

Providing a safe haven essential for Central PA Humane Society

Although it seems like a rather uncomplicated goal, it comes with a heavy price and a high level of commitment. That’s the way it’s always been for the Central PA Humane Society.

“Our goal is to find ‘happy-ever-after’ homes for those neglected, abused and unwanted animals as well as to medically treat those in need,” admits Becky Felton, Director of Outreach and Development for the organization during the past eight years.

That objective comes at a high cost. To cover utilities, medical care and shelter and vehicle maintenance sets the Humane Society back more than half-a-million-dollars each year. Felton is grateful for the many people in the community who step-up to help offset those expenses.

“Donors mean everything to our fur babies,” she acknowledges. “Without donations our shelter doors couldn’t stay open. We live in the best community ever! Donations of food, kitty litter, detergent, cleaning supplies and even trash



Becky Felton of the Central PA Humane Society and her friend Gucci share a moment...

bags are such a blessing. Our donors give hope for a brighter tomorrow to these poor, innocent animals.”

Getting the word out regarding the opportunities to make a difference is an ongoing challenge to Felton and her very committed board.

It’s a daunting challenge,” she pointed out. “We save and rescue more than 1,700 animals each year. We try to promote the advantages of getting

involved. Unfortunately, there are also misconceptions to deal with. For instance, we do not euthanize healthy animals. For some reason, that misconception just won’t go away.

“We continue to do our best because we understand how essential it is to these lovable animals.”

(Central PA Humane Society has been a member of the Blair County Chamber of Commerce since 2000.)

Breakfast Club to help inform businesses about Court System

The Court System in Blair County plays an integral role in the health and safety of the community. It also helps businesses operate more effectively by assuring that lawbreakers are punished for any of a number of crimes that impact the local economy.

Recent surveys indicate that how the courts operate is still a mystery to a lot of citizens, particularly in the business community. To unravel some of that mystery, the next Chamber Breakfast Club on February 8th will feature a Q&A with Blair County President

Judge Wade Kagarise. Judge Kagarise will answer questions submitted by the Chamber’s Public Policy Committee as well as from the audience.

Blair County’s other three judges – Jackie Bernard, Dave Consiglio and Fred Miller are also expected to attend the event. The cost to attend Breakfast Club is \$20 for Chamber members and \$30 for non-members. The event begins at 7:45 a.m. at The Casino at Lake-mont Park. To register, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or online at www.blairchamber.com.



President Judge Wade Kagarise

Chamber books Danube cruise

With some great travel experiences already available in 2024, the Blair County Chamber has made some exciting commitments for 2025. And the opportunity to learn about them will take place very soon.

The Chamber will hold an informational meeting

on March 12th at 6:00 p.m. at the Devorris Center for Business Development for a “Romantic Danube River Cruise Tour. That tour, scheduled for April 29 – May 10, 2025, includes stops in Prague, Regensburg, Vilshofen, Passau, Linz, Weissenkirchen,

Vienna, Bratislava and Budapest.

The Chamber is partnering with Ketrow KURTZ Travel and Ama Waterways on this cruise. If you plan to attend the informational meeting, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151. We’ll save you a seat!

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