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Chamber committees still pave the way

There's a common saying in the chamber of commerce industry that goes like this: If you've seen one chamber, you've seen one chamber. The inference is that no two chambers are alike.

The Blair County Chamber is a good example of that, at least when it comes to committees. Where most chambers utilize three or four committees to deal with certain aspects of business, the Blair County Chamber currently boasts twenty-two. And that is down from twenty-four just two years ago.

"Clearly my fault," acknowledges longtime President/CEO Joe Hurd. "When I started 27-years-ago, we had six committees. Each time we identified a new priority or a group of members asked us to consider adding something else, we agreed to at least try it out. In most cases, they became perma-

nent parts of our organizational chart."

The chairs and vice-chairs of all those committees met on February 7th to hear an update on committee policy and to discuss some of the challenges and opportunities that invariably impact all committees at one time or another.

"The committees are a huge part of the Chamber's success," explained Megan Rossman, who was hired in 2023 as Member Engagement Manager. That new position oversees all committee programs, events and interaction. "It's been a lot to get my arms around but so many people have stepped-up to help. It's exciting to get to know what everyone does and how it all fits together."

Much of the discussion on the 7th centered on ways that committees recruited and retained members. Relevance also rated a signifi-



Chamber committee chairs who attended the recent Chairperson Summit are, left to right, seated: Sara Fiore-Gunnett, Sherri Stayer, Rebecca Culp, Leslie Estep, Nate Bowen, and Jodi Cessna. Standing: Holly Emerick, Marcus Edwards, Mark Harrington, Lisa Hann, Joe Diamond, Superman Berrow, Zach Beckel, Amanda Johnston, Chris Weidley, Tara Eneidy, Gary Drenning, Carol Gensimore, Matt Michrina, Laura Green and Cindy Harmon.

cant part of future strategy. "We spend considerable time evaluating whether the committees still represent their core missions," Hurd pointed out. "Some of them,

over time, run their course and lose effectiveness. Often an infusion of new committee members or a different direction can get them re-focused."

Helping to sort out committee direction is the Advocacy and Operations Board of the Chamber which met last week and has the ongoing responsibility of looking

at all programs, events and benefits. Recommendations from the A/O Board are then sent to the Blair Alliance Board for final approval. Both boards meet quarterly.

Meet the committees at HD500

When businesses that aren't members of the Blair County Chamber don't know what all the Chamber does, that's unfortunate but not unusual. When members of the Chamber don't seem to know either, that's a problem.

To heighten the awareness of the Chamber within its own membership, the organization is taking a proactive marketing approach that uses the 22 current Chamber committees as the impetus. For the second year in a row, the February HD500 event will showcase the committees in an informal networking environment at the Heritage Discovery Center in Downtown Altoona. That event begins at 5:00 p.m. and concludes at 7:00.

"Pulling together all of our committees serves a number of purposes," explained Jennifer Fleck, the Director of Chamber Operations. "It not only creates an opportunity for members to have access to all committees to learn more about them but also helps committee members to better un-



derstand how committees interact with one another for the effective functioning of the Chamber itself. And, of course, since non-members can attend HD500, it is a great recruiting tool for our membership people."

Chamber committees have long been a strength of the organization. That is unlikely to change as the details of the recent merger with Altoona-Blair County Development continue to move forward, according to Fleck.

"The Blair Alliance has emphasized the importance of retaining what has made each organization strong," she noted. "The committees are high on that list."

Beyond the educational value of this HD500, it also features great food from

LaJo's Italian Sausage and a variety of adult beverages from Levity Brewing Company. The cost? Absolutely nothing for Chamber members and just \$10 for non-members.

"This is the result of three of our member-businesses stepping-up as event sponsors," Fleck acknowledged. "We're really grateful for their generosity and for being willing to help promote this important effort." Those sponsors are: Park Security, Stuckey Automotive and Webber Advisors.

Despite not having a charge for admission, members (and non-members) still need to register by calling (814) 943-8151 or going online at www.blairchamber.com so that an accurate food count is realized.

Chamber Committees

- Ambassadors
- BASICS Attendance
- BASICS Steering
- BASICS Early Childhood
- BASICS Career Fair
- BASICS Career Shadowing Experiences and Lodging
- Farm City
- Golf Classic
- Healthy Workplace
- Home Show
- LBC Adult
- LBC Youth
- LBC Alumni
- Non-Profit Businesses
- Public Policy
- Sustainable Blair County
- Technology
- Transportation
- WE-LEaD
- YEA!
- Young Professionals



Strategic Planning topic of Best Practices Forum

Strategic planning for non-profits becomes more challenging than ever as economies become tight and priorities change. To gain insight on how to get the strategic planning process "off and running," the Chamber's Committee of Non-Profit Businesses will hold a Best Practices Forum on March 1st from 8:15 to 9:45 a.m. at the Devorris Center for Business Development.

"This has been a fairly consistent topic for our non-profits to focus-on," admitted Tara Eneidy of Altoona Community Theatre, who chairs the committee. "Great planning is an essential component of what we do and how we do it."

Dr. Kevin Sensenig, President and Chief Learning Officer with Good Leadership, will present, "Unlock-



ing the Power of Compelling Strategic Planning in Non-Profit Organizations." The cost to attend is \$10 for Chamber members and \$20 for non-members. To register to attend, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at www.blairchamber.com. Corporate sponsor of the March 1st Best Practice is Independent Catholic Foundation.

Home Show returning exhibitors admit long-term benefits

The Blair County Home Garden & Healthy Living Showcase kicks-off on March 1st for three days of great interaction, great information and even greater financial upside for attendees and exhibitors alike. It has been that way for the past 52-years and there's little indication that things are likely to change.

"For an event like the Home Show to continue for more than a half-century and do so with outstanding attendance and near-capacity participation from exhibitors really says something," acknowledged Dave DeBiase, Executive Officer of the Blair-Bedford Builders Association which partners with the Blair County Chamber on the Blair County Showcase. "A lot

of shows have fallen by the wayside, either through lack of financial oversight or because they've lost their relevance in the community. That hasn't happened here."

There is validation of the ongoing popularity of the event, just through conversations with exhibitors.

"If you look at the list of companies that are exhibiting at this year's show, there's a pretty good mix of old and new," DeBiase pointed out. "Some are trying it out for the first time and others have been with us for many years."

One exhibitor that bridges both categories is Central PA Blinds N Designs. They were new last year and now they're back. Returning was a no-brainer, according to Jodie Potter Neely.



SHOWCASE
March 1, 2, 3
Friday • 4 - 8 p.m.
Saturday • 10 a.m. - 7 p.m.
Sunday • 11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

"We got an outstanding response last year," she disclosed. "We filled our calendar for almost the next twelve months. We didn't sell everyone but there were so many referrals that came from the Show that we were amazed."

"We're really looking forward to this year's Show.

People seem to be looking for something specific when they come to this event. It's not an event where people come just to be nosy. The people we talked to were serious customers."

Potter believes that any business that has anything to do with homes should have a booth at the Show.



Jodie Potter Neely of Central PA Blinds N Designs is shown at last year's Home Garden & Healthy Living Showcase.

"It's a great experience," she admitted. "I really think that there should be two of these Shows each year - one in the spring and one in the fall."

(Hours of the Home Gar-

den & Healthy Living Showcase are listed elsewhere on this page. For further information, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or email chamber@blairchamber.com.)



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