

HURD IMMUNITY

Homey Gardners

In the Chamber World, uncertainty is a staple. So often our programs and events, despite the best laid plans, often go astray. Even John Steinbeck knows that and he dropped his Chamber membership quite awhile ago.

The only Chamber event that never deviates is the Blair County Home Garden & Healthy Living Showcase. How confident am I of that assertion? Let me show you.

I am writing this column on February 26th, a full week before the earliest that you can read it. For you, the Show ended yesterday. For me, it won't start for four days. So let me tell you how it went:

Weather was a factor. In the 52 years of this Show, weather has always been a factor. Snow and ice keep people at home. Bad! Sunny and warm get people outside. The Show, however, is inside. Also bad! Overcast, cold but no rain? Wonderful!

Attendance was light on Friday, much better Saturday and Sunday. For some reason, the first weekend in March sends a message to many organizations that winter is over. So they schedule events on top of one another and then complain when no one hits their anticipated numbers. We do it too. Throw-in high school basketball playoffs and a bad situation gets worse. Better that we all endure winter a few weeks longer.

Home Show vendors didn't fixate on event attendance. At some point, every vendor will admit that it's not how many attendees come through the door of the Show, it's the motivations of those attendees. The one's who come just to kill time or to filch the giveaways are viewed with disdain. I watched a near-altercation a few years ago when an attendee grabbed a handful of Snickers and was reminded by the vendor that "this is not Halloween."

Kids enjoyed the Show for all the wrong reasons. While an adult will occasionally grab a vendor's giveaway, the main perpetrators of guileless thievery are the children. Why are they at the Show? Because in an effort to lure their parents, we not only let them in free, we arrange activities to keep them busy. Those activities usually spill-out onto the exhibit floor. No Snickers is safe.

Of all my Home Show memories over the last twenty-seven years is hearing my daughter McKenna, then six, plead to go to the "Homey Gardners Show." It was a great event again this year. I just know it will be.

Detwiler's building a "donut experience"

As co-owners of Mansion Donut Company, Brian and Amy Detwiler know a good donut when they see one. And smell one. And taste one. The Detwiler's grew-up in Williamsburg and moved to Altoona in 2019. Brian had previously worked for 19 years at Laurel Eye Clinic; Amy spent several years in the banking industry and was borough secretary in Williamsburg. While Brian does the day-to-day, Amy handles "the financial stuff" and scheduling in addition to her other role as executive administrator at Center City Church. Together, Brian and Amy have seven kids, two sons-in-law and a granddaughter.

Chamber Q&A

The Chamber: How would you describe Mansion Donuts to someone completely unfamiliar with it?

Amy: At Mansion Donut Company, we strive to serve the best products, and provide excellent service! Our coffee is roasted by Standing Stone Coffee Company in Huntingdon. Our gourmet cake-based donuts are made fresh daily and topped when ordered. We also serve Penn State Creamery ice cream.

The Chamber: What would people in Blair County be surprised to know about Mansion Donuts?

Brian: It's actually not located in the Mansion Park area. The inspiration for our name, however, came from two places. We live in the Mansion Park area (and hope to have a shop there again someday) and wanted to honor our wonderful neighbors. The second place was John 14:2. Jesus was telling his disciples that in His Father's house are many mansions, and He is preparing a place for us.

The Chamber: As the owner of a new business, especially in a downtown



Brian and Amy Detwiler started the Mansion Donut Company in Downtown Altoona and has plans to grow the business in the near future.

area, what are some of the challenges you face and how are you currently meeting those challenges?

Brian: Given our location, the biggest challenge has been parking. As more businesses open downtown, and attract more people, parking becomes even more of a premium. From a business standpoint, we encourage our employees NOT to park on 11th Avenue and preserve those spots for customers (not just ours, but other businesses as well). We are currently working on finding ways to get our products out to businesses, offices and schools.

The Chamber: Yours are a more sophisticated donut than, say, Dunkin Donuts. Is Blair County ready for that level of sophistication in a donut?

Amy: Yes! The response to our donuts has been overwhelming! We often get asked if we have filled donuts? Our donuts are cake-based, circular in design, and because of their density, cannot be filled. All of our toppings are on top of the donuts. It's less messy if you eat with a fork!

The Chamber: Any plans for expansion?

Brian: We are planning

for expansion in-house. We want to make visiting Mansion Donut Company an experience by stimulating several of your natural senses! The smell of donuts, getting to see them be topped in front of you, hearing other patrons comment on how good everything is, and finally experiencing it for yourself when you taste them! We plan on our donut truck being utilized more in 2024 for fairs, weddings, private events and pop-up locations. We also recently rolled out a fundraising program for organizations, schools and programs.

Young Entrepreneurs Academy students impress local CEO's with willingness to learn, motivation

Among the many opportunities afforded to students as part of the Blair County Chamber's Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!) program is access to business leaders as part of the CEO Roundtable event. That event was held this year on February 20th at the Blair County Convention Center.

Comprising the panel of CEO's was: Reggie Gadsden and Amanda Sullivan of Executive Barberz 2, Jim Kilmartin of Pinnacle Cleaning, Joshua House and Center City Church, Kira McCall of Maddie Cakes, Tim Parnell of CrossRoads Physical Therapy and Anthony Snare of Snare & Associates Mortgage Services.

"It was an impressive group that really made things fun," acknowledged Cadence Ellick, a senior YEA! student from Altoona Area High School. "I liked

being able to talk to successful people about my own business idea."

The experience was just as impressive for members of the CEO panel.

"This event was informative for the students and eye-opening for the panel," explained McCall. "It allowed the students to hear the positive and negatives that can come with business ownership. It also gave us a chance to witness the eagerness to learn that was inspiring among local young people."

Parnell agreed. "I was surprised that the age range of the students included eighth graders and seniors," he noted. "I was also impressed by the depth of questions and content of what was being asked. Like when to add additional staff and how to project growth. I really didn't expect that level of sophistication."

Since four of this year's



The panelists at the recent CEO Roundtable are (left to right): Reggie Gadsden and Amanda Sullivan of Executive Barberz 2; Anthony Snare of Snare and Associates; Kira McCall of Maddie Cakes; Jim Kilmartin of Pinnacle Cleaning, Center City Church and Joshua House; and Tim Parnell of CrossRoads Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation.

YEA! class members – two each - are building their businesses in tandem, it was especially helpful to include panelists who started building their businesses together.

"It was great for me to be able to talk to Amanda and Reggie about the different elements of partnerships," admitted Bishop Guilfoyle student Torin Robertson, who is collaborating with

classmate Joey Hofer on a business called "Second Swing."

The next major YEA! event will be the Investor Panel on March 26th at the Devorris Downtown Center.

It's Happening at the Chamber

- The Chamber's WE-LEAd Committee will celebrate "Equal Pay Day" with a luncheon program on March 12th from noon to 1:30 p.m. at 33 on Mac, 2206 7th Avenue in Altoona. Mary Kay Loftus, president of Impresia Bank, will present, "Women, Business and Banking." Cost is \$25 for Chamber members and \$35 for non-members. Register at www.blairchamber.com.

- The Young Professionals of Blair County, a Chamber program, will hold a March Madness Trivia Night on March 12th from 5:30 to 7:30 at Zach's Sports & Spirits in Altoona. Mix of Saint Patricks and March Madness Trivia. Cost to attend is \$10 for Chamber members and \$15 for non-members and includes appetizers and a cash bar. Register at www.blairchamber.com.

- The Blair County Chamber and Operation Our Town will partner on the next Breakfast Club, set for March 14th at 7:45 a.m. at The Casino at Lakemont Park. District Attorney Pete Weeks will provide an overview of drug trends and law enforcement awards will be presented. Cost is \$20 for Chamber members and \$30 for non-members. Register at www.blairchamber.com.

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