

**HURD IMMUNITY**

## The jobs dilemma

Although I wouldn't stick it too high on my list of treasured memories, I remember quite vividly the call that I received from Gwen Fisher of PA Career-Link nearly four years ago. Gwen invited me – or more correctly she invited the Chamber – to partner with her organization on a job fair. In my more than two decades at the Chamber, we had either initiated or partnered on a variety of events in the business community that addressed some aspect of workforce development. Most were informational. A few of those, like trade shows, also had a networking component. Without too much elaboration from Gwen, it was apparent that this one had something that the others did not.

A sense of urgency. Pandemics have a way of changing the playing-field. We had little way of knowing just how much.

When we accepted Gwen's invitation, we also foolishly figured that a well-conceived job fair would solve a whole bunch of the human resources challenges facing our county. At least for the next fifty years. One-and-done should more than do the trick, shouldn't it?

Two weeks ago, the Chamber partnered with Career-Link again on a job fair. For the sixth time. The first five times, there were eighty businesses each looking for employees. This time there were a hundred. As I walked through the aisles of exhibitor booths at the Jaffa Shrine, it was like Old Home Week. Everyone looking for employees at the first five job fairs were still looking. And many of them were running out of patience.

"We're all looking for the same people," one of them told me. "We're looking for people who will show-up for work, can pass a drug test and won't jump ship every time someone offers them a quarter more an hour. Too much to ask? Apparently it is."

Blair County's unemployment numbers, in the meantime, continue to fall. Logic would tell you that the job fairs are at least partially responsible and that's likely true. However, many of the job fair attendees are people who are already working and are simply looking for better jobs. Where post-Covid employment is concerned, throw logic out the window.

Because Gwen Fisher and her staff are on the ball, the next job fair is already being planned for October 9th. Do we need another job fair that soon? Undoubtedly. Doing nothing gets us nowhere. It never has.

## Sixteen Young Entrepreneurs graduate

The eighth class of the Blair County Chamber's Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!) program graduated last Tuesday at a luncheon held at the U.S. Hotel in Hollidaysburg. All sixteen of the students who started in the program last October completed the graduation requirements which included building a business.

"We've had a number of exceptional classes since this program was launched eight years ago," acknowledged Carol Gensimore of Value Drug Company, who has chaired the YEA! Committee since 2019. "This year's class was one of the best in all aspects. The caliber and variety of the business ideas that they developed were extremely impressive."

It was clearly a group effort, according to class member Kenly Bennett, a student from Spring Cove.

"The knowledge that I gained through the whole experience was more than I could have imagined," Bennett pointed out. "I also made friends with a lot of



great people who were willing to help me when I needed help."

Rhea Liss, a student from Altoona Area High School is sad that the 25-week program is over. "I wasn't sure when YEA! started whether or not it was something that I was capable of doing. I got more confident as time went on and I was ultimately able to build a successful business."

Daniel Theys, a Hollidaysburg Area High School student, set a goal prior to applying for the program and never deviated from that goal.

"I expected to have an opportunity to learn how to start an actual business and that's what I experienced," Theys noted. "YEA! provides a very thorough way of understanding what all is involved and it's easy to stay on-track."



The 2024 Class of the Blair County Chamber's Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!) graduated from the program on April 23rd. The Class is the eighth to graduate.

Classmate Torin Robertson of Bishop Guilfoyle agreed.

"It's truly been amazing," he explained. "I was able to learn from great people and make connections with others who were determined to build the best businesses possible. This was really a big step for all of us."

## BASICS/Rotary Career Fair helps students make decisions



Brad Krater of Krater Services (top photo) talks to students with interest in becoming electricians at the BASICS/Rotary Career Fair. In the bottom photo, Andrew Baughman of UPMC explains the finer points of phlebotomy.

Nearly 1,200 high school sophomores converged on the Blair County Convention Center last Wednesday for the 11th Annual BASICS/Rotary Career Fair. The students, representing eleven area schools, had the opportunity to choose from 76 career categories.

"We were fortunate to be able to accommodate what the majority of the students had indicated an interest in," admitted Steve Dalecki of the Altoona Sunrise Rotary Club, who co-chairs the Chamber's Career Fair Subcommittee along with Holly Emerick of the Greater Altoona Career & Technology Center.

Dalecki has been part of the planning and execution of the Career Fair since its inception and has always been impressed with the willingness of the business community to step-up as presenters.

"Again this year, we had outstanding representation from throughout the county," he noted. "Taking a day



out of the office might not be a big deal for some people but to many presenters, it can be a financial sacrifice."

This is Emerick's first time as a co-chair for the Career Fair although she's worked at the event in other capacities.

"The success of this event requires a great deal of coordination, particularly as it pertains to scheduling the students," she pointed out. "I was fortunate to have a great mentor – Nicole Zernick – who had a wealth of experience in the scheduling area and who made sure that everything stayed on-track."

Both Dalecki and Emerick believe that from their vantage points, high school sophomores appear to be more open to careers that exist in Blair County.

"Clearly, the number of solid opportunities that exist in our region for family-sustaining employment seems to have caught the attention of high school students," Dalecki acknowledged. "There's no doubt that can be a good thing."

## Blair County's newest CEOs

**John Bauman** - Hollidaysburg High School

**Kenly Bennett** - Spring Cove Middle School

**Ty Burket** - Hollidaysburg High School

**Elliot Egan** - Altoona Cyber Academy

**Cadence Ellick** - Altoona Area High School

**Joey Hofer** - Bishop Guilfoyle Academy

**Adrian Leroux** - Altoona Area High School

**Rhea Liss** - Altoona Area High School

**Miley Naugle** - Altoona Area High School

**Leah Petrunak** - Hollidaysburg High School

**Torin Robertson** - Bishop Guilfoyle Academy

**Daniel Theys** - Hollidaysburg High School

**Jackson Whitaker** - Altoona Area High School

**Cristian White** - Hollidaysburg High School;

**Skyler Wolfe** - Altoona Area High School;

**William Zhu** - Hollidaysburg High School

Applications now accepted  
for the class of 2025!  
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[www.blairchamber.com](http://www.blairchamber.com)

## Chamber Breakfast Club to welcome entrepreneur

The importance of entrepreneurship will be front-and-center at the next Blair County Chamber Breakfast Club, set for May 9th at 7:45 a.m. at The Casino at Lakemont Park.

Chloe England, whose business – Chloe Renee Media – was named the 2023 Most Outstanding Business in the Chamber's Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!) program will be the keynote speaker at the Breakfast Club. England, a senior at Williamsburg High School, will provide an overview of YEA! and challenge employers and schools to help students not only build their own businesses but to keep those businesses local when at all possible. She represented the Chamber at the National YEA! Competi-



**Chloe England**

tion last summer.

The cost to attend Breakfast Club is \$20 for Chamber members and \$30 for non-members. To register, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at [www.blairchamber.com](http://www.blairchamber.com). Corporate sponsor of the April Breakfast Club is South Hills School of Business & Technology.



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