

**HURD IMMUNITY**

## Better vibes

In the last Hurd Immunity column just two weeks ago, I described the ongoing challenges facing local employers, played-out at a recent Job Fair.

While the business community steps-up its recruiting efforts at job fairs, the Chamber and the county's six Rotary Clubs have teamed-up to help high school sophomores learn about future opportunities. The BASICS/Rotary Career Fair just completed its 11th year and those of us who have been part of the event from the beginning feel at least one emotion. Relief.

In the early days of the Career Fair, our planning committee was convinced that the best way to predict the direction of our county's economic fortunes was to collect data from some rather obscure sources. Like 1,200 teenagers who couldn't care less about career aspirations.

We asked those teens to identify four occupations that they might like to pursue when it was no longer acceptable to live in their parents' basements. What they chose was, well, disturbing. They had no interest in medicine, law, engineering, human resources, education or banking. Instead, they wanted to be FBI agents, gamers, oceanographers, artists, dog groomers and professional athletes.

At one point, we eliminated several of the traditionally-high priority job categories like automotive mechanics, social workers, accountants and dentists because too few students wanted to know more about them. And no one expressed interest in the military as a career option.

Thankfully, the past three Career Fairs have experienced a sharp reversal in student interest, thanks in part to some targeted promotion aimed at the occupations that are in greatest demand, at least in Blair County. Many of those have also become more financially competitive as well. Is money still a major motivator? You bet it is! But so is the likelihood that previous areas of allure — like practically every big city — might make living and working close to home a pretty attractive option.

The final tally on the most requested careers for 2024: (1) Nurse, (2) Physician/PA, (3) Business Management Executive, (4) Psychologist, (5) Law Enforcement, (6) Chef/Food Service, (7) Electrician, (8) Cosmetologist, (9) Welder and (10) Sports Medicine/Trainer. The military, at least the Marines and the Air Force, took considerable jumps in popularity. There is still a cult following of sorts for the FBI. And forensics, which took a substantial dip with last year's sophomores, recovered nicely with this year's group.

So what's it all mean? Maybe a lot. Maybe nothing. Check with me in five years.

## Colleges look to increase internships

It's hardly a well-kept secret that Blair County businesses struggle to find qualified employees with an interest in long-term career aspirations. It's also no secret that students from colleges and technical schools throughout the Southern Alleghenies region often struggle to find opportunities to learn a profession in a professional working environment.

So why doesn't a better connection exist between employers and students that benefits both? The Blair County Chamber of Commerce wants to know that too and is hoping to create some dialogue to get some positive initiatives underway.

"It seems like it shouldn't be that difficult," acknowledged Chamber President/CEO Joe Hurd. "Unfortunately, like everything else, things get lost on the priorities list. Until a commitment is made to change that, not much will happen."

According to Hurd, that commitment involves establishing strong internship programs that set the stage for a valuable "win-win." Those programs, however, already seem to be in place

in several local colleges. "At Pennsylvania Highlands Community College, internships and clinical are incorporated into several academic programs," explained Susan Whisler, the school's Internship Coordinator. "Not only can participating students gain invaluable work experience, they can also earn up to three credits."

Mount Aloysius College has a similar set-up and a willingness to expand its internship offerings depending on student interest.

"Our internships are coordinated through the academic departments," noted Sarah Kordish, the Mount's Associate Director of Career Development. "Most often, they're offered to students as a for-credit class, either required by the major or as an elective. We do encourage students to seek-out internships even if their major doesn't require it, as internships help to prepare students for professional positions by teaching them new skills and giving them some valuable real-world experience."

It's sometimes a misnomer that the colleges place the onus of finding an internship squarely on the



Elleonna Willey (left) and Leah Shope, students at South Hills School of Business & Technology prepare for their upcoming internship at University Orthopedics.

student. Most don't and some like Penn State Altoona make the recruitment process easy.

"Our students are provided many resources for securing internships," admitted Penn State's Sherril McGregor. "Career Services and the Internship Office staff are available to assist students in their search for internships and actively identify employers hiring interns. There's help if they need it although we

don't frown upon students using their own personal networks as well."

At Juniata College, the internship program has yielded impressive results.

"On average 95% of seniors participate in at least two experiential learning opportunities while attending here," disclosed Tammy Stuber, Assistant Director of the Office of Career Development. "This leads to 96% of graduates being employed or enrolled in graduate

school within six months post-graduation. Students are able to use these opportunities as a means of career exploration, skill building and professional development. Nearly 80% of our students indicate that these experiences have helped them decide on a career path."

The Chamber will continue to seek new ways to help college's promote their internship opportunities to local businesses.

## Super 8 by Wyndham treats travelers like part of the family



David and Rachel Korman have been an effective father/daughter team at the Super 8 Hotel in Altoona. The hotel is marking 35 years in operation.

At a time in Blair County's business history when hiring and maintaining a committed workforce has been more than a little challenging, one local business is attributing its ongoing success to its dedicated and energetic staff.

Super 8 Hotel is marking 35 years in Blair County during 2024. The facility has built its reputation on a variety of factors, primarily related to being clean, comfortable and accessible.

We take a great deal of pride in what we do," admitted David Korman, who has been with Super 8 for the past 30 years, the last three as general manager. "Many of our employees have been with us for a decade or longer. It's been like a family."

For David, that family feeling has been accentuated by having his daughter, Rachel, as the hotel's assistant general manager. It wasn't designed to work out that way.

"My intention was to be a teacher," Rachel disclosed. "I was working on a Master's Degree in Middle School Education. Unexpected circumstances put that on hold. I decided to help my dad in the meantime and when it came time to return to education, I realized that I enjoyed working in the hospitality business. So I stayed."

That was fine with David. "We are very similar to one another," he pointed out. "Sometimes that can lead to some petty arguments with each other but overall we enjoy one another's company and we both understand the importance of setting and maintaining high standards."

For Rachel, the learning curve for being effective

## Working Together

has been well-defined for father and daughter.

"We have learned a lot from each other in the time we've worked together," she stated. "I have learned that things are a lot more complicated than they seem to be. Being a manager means making important decisions that affect peoples' lives."

"I have learned how (David) cares about the business, sometimes over his mental and physical well-being so I feel that I've taught him to find a balance between his work life and his personal life."

"All told, we make a pretty good combination!" (Super 8 has been a Chamber member since 2021.)

## Scandinavia added to travel options for 2025



Copenhagen, Denmark's capital city, is known for its lively streets, squares, canals and the famous Tivoli Gardens.

The Blair County Chamber's array of trips for 2025 has expanded by one and that one is a blockbuster. From August 14-24, 2025 (11 days), the Chamber and Ketrow KURTZ Travel will present "Highlights of Scandinavia."

Among the tour highlights are a visit to Stockholm, the Vasa Ship Museum, a tour of Oslo, the Norwegian Folk Museum, Vy

Train from Oslo, Aurlands Fjord Cruise, Sheep Farm with Local Beer and Snack Tasting, Bergen City Tour, Copenhagen City Tour and the Tivoli Gardens.

There will be an informational meeting this Wednesday, May 15th, at 6:00 p.m. at the Devorris Center for Business Development. If you plan to attend, contact the Chamber at (814) 943-8151.

## LBC Youth graduates 24



Margaret Brouse (left) and Kaya Sprankle, sophomores at Altoona Area High School, present to an audience at the Leadership Blair County Youth graduation.

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