

A partnership with the Altoona Mirror and the Blair County Chamber of Commerce

**HURD IMMUNITY**

## The next chapter

Next Sunday, I'll be 70-years old. Two weeks later, I'll be officially retired. Time, as the saying goes, flies when you're having fun.

During this segment of my employment career, I've had four jobs that have kept me occupied and fairly-solvent for 48-years.

I've loved every one of them. I don't know many who can make that claim.

I refer to this "segment" of my working career because I'm not prepared to close the book on gainful employment. In fact, I'm hoping retirement amounts to taking a week off, just to validate that a week is too long. Credit Covid for my epiphany. Being captive at home for even a few days was more than enough to convince me that spending hours watching Hogan's Heroes and the Beverly Hillbillies wasn't a viable continuity plan.

The subject of retirement hasn't inspired me to make a huge commitment of either research or emotional buy-in. I've found, without solicitation, that friends and acquaintances are more than willing to offer advice or ask the magic question: "What are you gonna do now?" I seldom answer the same way twice.

It's not for lack of imagination. It's the comforting feeling of knowing that I can be a little selective. If that sounds arrogant, it's certainly not meant to be. My next job could well be my last job. As I already indicated, my current batting average in terms of satisfaction is 1.000. Dropping .200 points is a statistic I'd like to avoid.

Maybe I'm overthinking it. Working, even at a bad job, is still working. I've been reminded of that on several occasions. One person bluntly predicted that if I don't find a stimulating spot in the workforce, I'll be dead within a year. That person is a friend. Imagine the inspiration I'm likely to get from my enemies.

To date, I've had some conversations with business acquaintances who think I can still be an asset, albeit in the right situation. My twisted sense of humor wonders if I should pursue opportunities in wrong situations instead. I'm aware of plenty of employers with low expectations that would snap-me-up in a minute.

Whatever happens, I'm looking with great anticipation for the next challenge in a work life that's been heavy on good fortune. I've started a fiction novel (writing one, not reading one) and I'm excited to see where it goes.

I'll send you a copy!

## Public Service Academy marks return

Following a few years of frustration in which too many elected officials in Blair County ran unopposed and too many volunteer positions went unfilled, the Public Policy Committee of the Blair County Chamber had had enough.

"The committee figured that there was a better way to get important things accomplished than hoping that interested people would understand the process well enough and step-up," explained Lisa Hann of Family Services, chair of Public Policy. "We decided to look for a solution."

That solution arrived two years ago when the Chamber's Board of Directors approved a recommendation from the Public Policy Committee to form a Public Service Academy. The Academy would be a six-hour instructional program – three hours each on two evenings in September – that would explain the opportunities available to either run for elected office or be considered to serve on boards, agencies or commissions. Although only fourteen people participated in 2022, the overall impact was deemed successful.

"We were looking for ways to engage people who might have the interest and the availability," former County Commissioner Donna Gority pointed out. Gority and former Senator John Eichelberger co-chair the Academy.

Each believes that a bipartisan co-chair arrangement is essential for moving the Academy forward. "The Chamber is a non-partisan organization and it is ideal to have both parties represented to keep the information and presentations neutral," Gority acknowledged. "It also sets a baseline that individuals from the two parties can work together in a positive manner."

The outcome of Academy Year I yielded a Blair County Commissioner, an Altoona City Councilwoman and a trailblazer in the field of County Planning.

David Kessling was contemplating running for Commissioner and was looking for some way to validate that interest.

"I was confident, based on what I knew but I really needed to gain a better understanding of the process," he stated. "The Academy program brought a lot of experience and knowledge to the table. When it ended, I felt it answered most of the questions I had. I was ready to be a candidate."

Shelley Clinich felt that she could be a strong contributor to help Altoona City Council undertake some important initiatives related to growth. Like Kessling, she wanted to learn more before throwing her hat into the ring.

"When I heard about what all the Academy would be addressing and that Donna Gority and John Eichelberger would be teaching a



Among the attendees at the 2022 Public Service Academy who have since pursued political involvements are, left to right: Devin Saylor, David Kessling and Shelley Clinich.

lot of the material, it was a no-brainer for me," Clinich said. "It provided a terrific comfort level."

Devin Saylor had no immediate aspirations to seek elected office. He did, however, leave the door open for a future run.

"I've always felt that my life's purpose is to bring people together and I had an interest in learning where I could help make that happen," Saylor disclosed. "The Academy gave me a strong basis for getting involved in political and public service." Saylor's volunteer activities include becoming the youngest person ever appointed to Altoona's Planning Commission.

The Academy program will be offered again this fall.



Former Blair County Commissioner Donna Gority and former Commissioner/State Senator John Eichelberger co-chair the Chamber's Public Service Academy.

The dates are September 10th and the 24th from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. at the Devorris Center for Business Development. The cost is \$25/person which covers both

sessions as well as pizza and soft drinks beginning at 5:30 p.m. To register, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or online at [www.blairchamber.com](http://www.blairchamber.com).

## Mount Aloysius student enjoys opportunity as Chamber intern



Intern, Alexis Weyandt (right), and Digital Media Manager, Brittany Mayer (left), collaborating on the digital component of a Chamber marketing campaign.

For more than two decades, the Blair County Chamber has offered internships to business and marketing students from local colleges. This summer, that internship has been in the hands of a young lady with two local connections.

Alexis Weyandt is a 2021 graduate of Central High School and will graduate in December from Mount Aloysius College. A Marketing major with a minor in Communication Studies, Weyandt began her internship on May 22nd and will complete it on August 8th. She's had a wide range of responsibilities which fit her objectives to a tee.

"I was looking for something in Marketing that would allow me to put the skills I learned in classes into practice while also teaching me new skills," Weyandt acknowledged. "This internship has been everything I'd hoped for."

Linda Stotler, the Chamber's Marketing Manager, has been impressed by what she's seen from Weyandt. "From the beginning, her approach to the duties of the organization has been strong," she noted. "She's organized and eager to pitch-in wherever we need something done. She's been an asset to what we do."

That part has been easy,

according to Weyandt. She feels fortunate to have been selected to be the Chamber's intern.

"I know that others had also expressed interest in the internship," she pointed out. "The Chamber has a strong reputation among business students for helping them develop a broad range of talents and also connecting them with potential employers."

Stotler takes pride in that reputation.

"We've had an incredible number of young people come here as interns and stay in our area to live and work," she admitted. That's been important to our business community."

## Chamber Leaders meet with top Federal Reserve Officials



St. Francis University, Curry Innovation Center, and Blair Alliance Board Members hosts economic roundtable with Philadelphia Federal Reserve Chief and Senior Leadership.

On July 10th, Blair Alliance leadership and Chamber members hosted an economic roundtable discussion with President of the Philadelphia Federal Reserve, Patrick Harker. The panel also included senior Federal Reserve staff Bill Spaniel, Erin Mierzwa, and Olivia Ness along with Blair Alliance Board Chair Ron McConell, Vice Chair Mark Ritchey, and President and CEO Stephen McKnight. The topics ranged from economic policy impacting Blair County Businesses to workforce development strategies post-pandemic. A special presen-

tation was made by St. Francis University's Frank Montecalvo who highlighted their new Center for Innovation Competitiveness which is designed to help small to mid-sized manufacturers.

"We valued this important conversation on the regional economy, trends and opportunities with President Harker and his team and appreciate their open lines of communication on all things economic development," said McKnight.

The meeting was held at the Curry Center for Innovation in Downtown Altoona.

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