

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

Blair Chamber staff attend PACP conference

By Brittany Mayer

The Blair County Chamber staff attended the Pennsylvania Association of Chamber Professionals (PACP) Conference in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The PACP is a membership that consists of the largest network of chamber professionals in the state.

The conference offers educational sessions led by chamber and industry professionals. This year, the three-day conference had keynote speakers for topics like advocacy, community engagement and chamber structure.

"This is my first conference, and it's been really exciting to be able to come so close to home. Reading and Lancaster, we're neighbors and we're similar in Chamber style and size and philosophy," said Lucine Sihelnik, president & CEO of the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance. "The

biggest thing for me was awareness of my peers and how we fit in as a Chamber with other Chambers here in our commonwealth. It was invaluable to come and meet everybody and learn that."

Along with the Blair County Chamber and the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance, chambers from Bedford County, Cambria County, Centre County, Chester County and Lancaster County are just a few that attended the conference as well.

"The PACP conference was a wonderful gathering of Chamber professionals," said Melissa Hassler, membership coordinator for the Greater Reading Chamber. "It was refreshing to lean in with my peers and share both weaknesses and strengths to help one another grow."

Many of the sessions con-



Pennsylvania Association of Chamber Professionals

sisted of staff members gathering together to discuss common practices at their individual Chambers. The goal was to learn different styles and policies to possibly replicate and create a better Chamber for each county's community.

"I enjoyed the comradery I felt speaking with other like-minded professionals," said Hassler. "Chamber life is not for the faint of heart and I gained some tips on best practices that I will implement right away."

While there were many educational sessions, the PACP conference also offers the opportunity to explore the county it is being held in and network with others during a night out and an



Megan Rossman (left) of the Blair County Chamber of Commerce, shares ideas with Melissa Hassler, Membership Coordinator and Lucine Sihelnik, (right) President/CEO, Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce.

awards dinner.

"This conference in particular is important because we're all within the commonwealth so there is some

shared practice that is unique to Pennsylvania," said Sihelnik. "The CEO roundtable that was hosted yesterday was a nice inti-

mate opportunity to have a peer group and create a network, especially for someone like me who just started."

Repurpose, reuse remains as the central focus of land development

We can't create more land, but we can reuse it. Over the years the Altoona Blair County Development (ABCD) Corporation has constructed 8 business parks. More than 25 businesses and 3,000 employees call those locations home. Topography combined with environmental regulations, agricultural restrictions and rising infrastructure costs have greatly limited industrial land development opportunities in Blair County. That is why we are aggressively looking to reinvent, repurpose and reuse former industrial locations.

Earlier this year, Governor Shapiro and legislators announced a new \$500 million fund to help communities like ours to do just that. ABCD Corporation, in partnership with the Chamber, is in the planning phases of identifying and qualifying a primary industrial reuse opportunity that could support new business expansions. We intend to apply for funding through



Although limited industrial land presents challenges when building a robust infrastructure, taking a creative approach to repurposing existing sites offers a feasible solution.

this new program. If awarded, the investment is expected to help with access improvements, site grading, environmental remediation and utility extensions. It is desperately needed. In the meantime, we will be working to

cross market sites in neighboring counties. We are all a part of a single labor and housing market, so a win nearby is a win for all.

If you have a site or building that could accommodate a new business expansion,

please contact Matt Fox at mattf@abcdcorp.org for more information and a listing determination. We are in search of scalable properties that could host larger single tenants or smaller multiple tenancies.

Breakfast to explore ethanol production impact on economy

The Chamber's November Breakfast Club will be held Thursday, November 14 beginning at 7:45 a.m., at The Casino at Lakemont Park. As a nod to the agricultural industry the Chamber's Farm-City Committee has invited Brian Kelly from Pennsylvania Grain Processing, LLC as keynote speaker.

Considered a renewable fuel, ethanol is produced from crops such as corn, grain sorghum, wheat, sugar and other agricultural feedstocks. Most fuel ethanol produced in the United States is derived from corn. Latest figures indicate that almost forty-percent of corn crops in the United States is dedicated to ethanol production.

Agriculture in Pennsylvania generates billions of dollars each year for the Commonwealth, whereas locally, it takes first place as



Blair County's top industry.

In his role as Corn Originator with PGP, Kelly builds relationships with local farmers, commercial elevators and traders to supply the plant's need for 40 million bushels of corn every year. His presentation, "Keeping the Economy Moving", will address the important role ethanol production takes in supporting the economy.

Cost to attend Breakfast Club is \$20 for Chamber members and \$30 for non-members. A breakfast buffet is included. Register online at www.blairchamber.com or call 814-943-8151.

Corporate sponsor for the event is Graystone Grande Palazzo.

Chamber announces new website

By Brittany Mayer

The Chamber is getting a new, updated website and an entirely new database.

Staff of the Chamber and ABCD Corporation have been working collaboratively on a new more modern website that will integrate the GlueUp membership platform offering robust tools.

"We are excited to unveil our new, modern website and membership portal, designed to streamline access to resources and enhance the overall member experience," said Matt Fox, vice president of Business Retention & Expansion at ABCD Corp. "This upgrade reflects the Chamber's commitment to innovation and providing our members with the best tools to thrive in today's

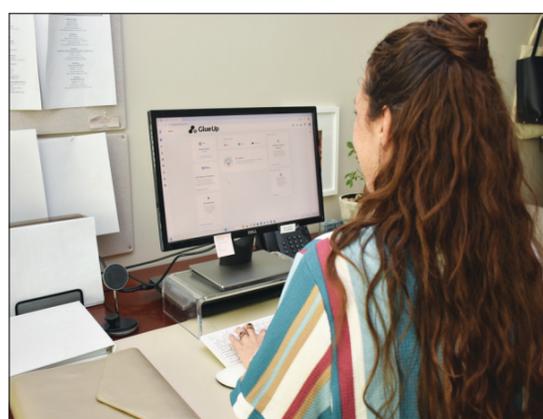
business landscape."

The new homepage of the website will take you to the Blair County Alliance for Business & Economic Growth page. From there, you can navigate to the Blair County Chamber side of the website or the ABCD Corp. side.

Once users are on the Chamber side of the site, they can then search through events, programs and more.

With Glue Up, members will be able to personalize their business page and how it shows up in the membership directory. They will also be able to post about job openings and their business news.

"I'm looking forward to utilizing a customizable portal with a more user-friendly experience," said Rebecca Culp, director of Human



Rebecca Culp of Berry Solutions Group previewing the Blair County Chamber's new website.

Resources at Berry Solutions Group.

The date for the switch has not been announced yet. The goal is to start 2025 with the new system and website. There will be tuto-

rials scheduled to show how to use these customizable features.

Follow the Chamber on social media to find out when the official launch date will be.

Chamber selected as Shop Small Champion

By Brittany Mayer

This year marks the 15th annual "Small Business Saturday" that the Chamber is celebrating in partnership with American Express.

Small Business Saturday will be on November 30 this year. The purpose of this day is to rally the community to support small businesses in the area.

Last year, the Chamber posted a video showcasing some of our small business members like Adler's Landscape Nursery, Inc., Alto Markets and Humble & Kind Boutique. This year, promotional items like flyers, posters, stickers and bags will be available at the Chamber Office to use at your small business.

Save the date for this year's Small Business Sat-



urday and follow the Chamber's social media pages for updates on small businesses participating in the program.

If you are interested in receiving promotional items for Small Business Saturday, email Brittany Mayer at bmayer@blairchamber.com while supplies last.

Promote your small business with #ShopSmall and #SmallBizSat on social media. And if you are looking for great gifts or unique items, don't forget to shop small!

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