

Blair Business Mirror



September 2019

Driving success

Cover story:
Courtesy Ford builds strong customer loyalty

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Chamber Notes

The slow evolution of a tree-hugger

The great outdoors has never been a destination of choice for me. I will admit to enjoying the sights and sounds of the ocean but only from the patio bar of a 5-star hotel. I've also looked with awe at the mountains of the Ameri-



JOE HURD

can south-west, happy that they were a healthy distance away. The forest? For-

get it. Between the bugs and the beasts, I have no desire to ever venture there.

So you can imagine my level of excitement in 2008 when a small group of Chamber members approached me about creating a committee to address Environmental Sustainability. It was at that point that I was relieved to be able to toss that request to our board of directors who I was quite certain would see the foolishness of adding an additional program, particularly one with such limited relevance.

Unfortunately, they didn't see the foolishness, thanks to the impassioned plea of that same small group who was convinced that sustainability was a topic that all businesses needed to both discuss and address. The vote to approve was unanimous.

It was not long before our new committee – The Committee on Environ-

mental Sustainability – sized-me-up. To say I was a reluctant participant would be an understatement. Rather than operating around me, they dragged me into the process, determined to create a disciple.

Little-by-little, I began to appreciate how certain businesses were committing to sustainable practices which reduced waste, conserved resources and, not coincidentally, impacted the bottom line. One practice that I have always embraced is the importance of recycling. It's absolutely ridiculous to me that recycling isn't mandatory for everyone at all times. In conversations with the committee, recycling was my "go-to" whenever I wanted to show how quickly I was evolving as a tree-hugger.

Beyond educating the business community on the advantages of sustainability, I was also impressed by the committee's willingness to direct many of its efforts to helping local schools implement environmental clubs that encourage young people to get onboard early with programs that promote sustainability. You'll be reading materials from the Chamber in the near future about an initiative that will invite schools to collaborate more effectively. Too many great ideas await consideration. It's time to have those discussions.

So, eleven years later, is the Committee on Environmental Sustainability meeting its mission? Well, first of all, it has under-

gone a name change. It's now Sustainable Blair County. It became that following the establishment of a relationship with a larger and more progressive organization called Sustainable Pittsburgh. The wonders of technology made it possible for Sustainable Blair County to "borrow" some ideas and concepts from Sustainable Pittsburgh's website. Did they mind? Absolutely not. In fact, they assisted in the development of a survey that we made available to our local businesses to help them assess their individual levels of sustainability.

This Thursday, at the Chamber's monthly Breakfast Club, we will pay tribute to the businesses that have completed the survey. A couple of those businesses will even receive certificates if they've reached certain milestones. Just as impressive is that the keynote speakers at the Breakfast Club will be from Sustainable Pittsburgh. They will share with our attendees the advantages to be gained by businesses of all sizes when they understand where sustainability fits within the framework of success.

If you are reading this column on Tuesday or Wednesday, there is still time to register to attend. Call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151. If you miss the deadline but would like to get involved in the Sustainable Blair County effort in the future, give me a call.

Just ask for the tree-hugger.



Business After Hours

Senior LIFE



1311 12th Ave., Altoona

Senior LIFE is an innovative program that uses a team approach to provide seniors with medical, social, nutritional and rehabilitation services. Senior LIFE makes it possible for seniors to remain at home, enjoying the comfort and reassurance of familiar surroundings while receiving the care they need.

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necessary services and provides members with a single point of contact to ensure a seamless coordination of care.

Members are welcomed into our Health and Wellness Center located in the old Gables building on 12th Avenue in Altoona. All members are provided with free transportation to and from the center as well as to any medical appointments. Members enjoy a host of fun activities every day hosted by our entertaining Activity Director as well as lunch and snacks. While at the center members take advantage of access to our health clinic, occupational and physical therapy as well as education and interaction with the whole interdisciplinary team.

To be eligible for the program at no cost, members must be 55 years old or older; live in Blair County, be able to live safely in the community, be determined as medically eligible based on health conditions, and be determined as financially eligible based on income and assets.

The LIFE Program is funded by Medicare and Medicaid. For seniors who meet these qualifications these services are provided at no cost; no copays, or premiums for medicine, physicians, specialists or insurance premiums.

Thursday, September 19 • 5 -7 p.m.

On the Cover: John Ventura has been in the automobile business for nearly 50 years.

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CORRECTION

In the August edition of the Blair Business Mirror Donna Sagaities was misidentified and her daughter, Shonna's, name was misspelled in the Ribbon Cutting for Skills of Central PA Respite Home.



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On the Cover

Courtesy Ford builds strong customer loyalty

When you've been in the automobile business for more than a half-century, you have a pretty good idea of what works and what doesn't.

"You need to build loyalty," emphasizes John Ventura. "Unless you treat people right, you're not likely to see them again. We've had an incredible history of repeat business which we're quite proud of. People have other places they can go. We recognize that and never take customers for granted."

Courtesy Ford in Altoona officially opened in 1991 and currently has nearly 200 full and part-time employees. Those employees, according to Ventura, have been an integral part of the company's success story.

"We've got an exceptional staff that works well together," he pointed out. "They understand what customer service is all about and they also recognize that in a small community like this one, it's important to be involved. We hold frequent fundraisers for local charities and schools, many of which are supported by Ford and Lincoln. It's what we're all about."

Simply overseeing a business the size of Courtesy Ford would be a fulltime job in itself. Ventura, however, also owns Courtesy Motors, Jethro's restaurant and the Altoona Grand Hotel. It's a balancing act that occupies a large percentage of his time and energy. There's little doubt that he enjoys it.

"We see ourselves as one big family," he explains. "We do as much for each other as possible.



Courtesy Ford has built a solid reputation for customer service, thanks to a dedicated staff. Pictured are some of the 200 employees that the business currently has.

We work hand-in-hand to support one another. It's a recipe that's worked for a long time and all the businesses remain successful."

From the Courtesy Ford side, Ventura takes particular satisfaction in being able to find what customers are looking for, even when that search goes beyond normal geographic limits.

"We cater to anyone's automotive needs," he noted. "We'll go far out of our way to get a vehicle that someone is interested in. And we'll also sell outside our area. We even sold a vehi-

cle in Australia this year."

Ventura marvels at the changes that have taken place in the automobile industry since he first became involved, many years ago. What have been the most dramatic changes?

"Certainly, the quality of vehicles has improved," he disclosed. "Safety features such as seatbelts, airbags and more sophisticated technology such as lane-keeping assistance and adaptive cruise control have been remarkable improvements."

And, of course, there is the Internet.

"The use of the Internet has enabled us to expand from local business to worldwide," Ventura acknowledged. "Our inventory is also accessible to anyone from home or on their Smartphone. Keeping up with trends and always being willing to adjust to whatever the customer prefers is a challenge that we accept on a daily basis. It has served us well."

Courtesy Ford has been a Blair County Chamber member since 1993.

Format change benefits readers

Beginning with this issue of the Blair Business Mirror, Chamber members will have three opportunities to access the publication.

Members will be able to continue receiving the Blair Business Mirror as a supplement to the Altoona Mirror on the second Tuesday of each month. They will continue to have a copy of the Blair Business Mirror mailed to them later that same week. And now, a link will be emailed to Chamber members to make reading the publication even easier.

"The Blair Business Mirror has been an incredible publication for nearly two decades," admitted Chamber President Joe Hurd. "By creating a digital version, more people will have access to it and more businesses will recognize the advantage of advertising in it."

Adding the digital format will create one noticeable change. Instead of having the cover feature story bleed into the two centerfold pages, it will now run only on page three.

"Since the digital format will necessitate that the reader scrolls the pages, it wasn't practical to have the centerfold story broken-up and displayed sideways," Hurd explained. "So the centerfold will now be treated as separate stories so that it maintains a flow with the rest of the pages."

The mailed copy of the Blair Business Mirror will continue to contain privilege pages that members can purchase as advertising inserts. The Chamber is looking into the possibility of creating digital inserts as well.



Have an opinion?

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* Letters must include first and last name

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It's Happening!

“Breakfast Club” to Feature Sustainable Pittsburgh Speakers

The Blair County business community is slowly beginning to understand the important role that sustainability plays in saving money and conserving resources. At the next Chamber “Breakfast Club,” set for this Thursday, September 12th at 7:45 a.m. at The Casino at Lakemont Park, that topic will be even more emphatically driven-home. Autumn Secrest and Jim Price from Sustainable Pittsburgh will present “Sustainability and Your Business.” With the assistance of Sustainable Pittsburgh, the Chamber’s Sustainable Blair County Committee put together a Sustainability Survey that businesses could complete to determine their strengths and weaknesses. The businesses that completed the survey will receive certificates at the Breakfast Club that correspond to their current level of accomplishment. Those businesses receiving certificates are: Great Commission School, Prime Sirlain, Roaring Spring Blank Book, Roaring Spring Library, Stiffler McGraw, U.S. Hotel, Veeder-Root, Advantage Resource Group and Keller Engineers. The cost to attend Breakfast Club is \$20 for Chamber Members and \$30 for non-members. To register to attend, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at www.blairchamber.com. Corporate sponsor of the September Breakfast Club is Gwin, Dobson & Foreman, Inc.

Chamber Recognizes “All-Stars” for August

The Blair County Chamber’s ability to offer quality programming, events, recognition and advocacy efforts depends largely on the willingness of sponsors to step up to help underwrite the costs associated with those efforts. So at the end of each month, we publish a list of businesses or individuals who sponsored anything Chamber-related during the month. They have helped us to make a difference in the business community. All-Stars for August are: Altoona-Blair County Development Corporation, Altoona Mirror, ARC Federal Credit Union, Altoona Curve Baseball, Anonymous Donor, Mama Randazzo’s, Inc., PC Works Plus, Reliance Bank, State Senator Judy Ward and Stiffler, McGraw & Associates, Inc.

Chamber’s Great Britain Trip Accepting Sign-Ups

If you missed the recent informational meeting on the Blair County Chamber of Commerce’s Great Britain Trip, don’t despair. You can contact the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 and we’ll be happy to send you information. And there will be another informational meeting on the trip sometime this fall. The Chamber is doing the Great Britain Trip in cooperation with Epic Journeys from July 12-21, 2020. The excursion includes guided tours throughout England, Scotland and Wales including stops at Big Ben, Westminster Abbey, Buckingham Palace, Stonehenge and Edinburgh Castle. Ground transportation from Altoona is included in the tour. Space is limited so call the Chamber today!

Chamber Partnering on October Job Fair

The Blair County Chamber along with PA Career Link, Altoona Blair County Development Corporation and Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Board will be hosting a job fair on Wednesday October 16, 2019 at the Jaffa Shrine from 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. The first 30 minutes will be reserved for Veterans only. There will be on-the-spot interview spaces available and refreshments available for purchase from the Jaffa food concession stands. Employers: There is no cost for this job fair and there are still spaces available. For information contact Greg Crooks, (814) 940-6219 or gcrooks@pa.gov.

Have You Given Your Employees Their Power Cards?

The Blair County Chamber has nearly 41,000 members. That’s because every employee of every member-business is considered a member. So, technically, there should be 41,000 Chamber Power Cards in circulation. The Power Card program provides Chamber members with the opportunity to offer discounted products and services to other Chamber members, thereby keeping more dollars circulating close to home. The list of participating businesses can be accessed from the Chamber Website or by scanning the QR-Code on the back of the card. If your employees don’t have Power Cards, contact the Chamber office at (814) 943-8151 and we’ll arrange to get some to you. If you’d like to place a Power Card offer, contact Jessie Covert at the Chamber. There’s no cost to Chamber members to place offers.

Save the Date: Down on the Farm

One of the Chamber’s largest family-type events will take place on October 10th from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. at 4 Seasons Farm in Tyrone. “Down on the Farm” has been a heavily-attended event for many years as it provides an opportunity for the community to experience the best of what the Ag community has to offer. The cost to attend Down on the Farm is \$10/person. Children 10-and-under are free. Stay tuned for registration information.

Congratulations . . .

. . . to Christopher Ringkamp, who was recently named President & CEO of the Independent Catholic Foundation, replacing William Hiergeist who retired.
 . . . to Joseph Harford, President and founder of Reclamere, who recently received his Ph.D. in Workforce Education and Development from Penn State.
 . . . to Blair Candy Company, which is celebrating its 80th anniversary during 2019.
 . . . to Holland Brothers Meats of Duncansville which recently won recognition at the American Cured Meats Championships, held in Mobile, Alabama. Holland Brothers was awarded Champion—Light Weight Bacon and Reserve Champion – Heavy Weight Bacon.
 . . . to Altoona Beauty School, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary of Chamber Membership this month.

Newest Chamber employee is Saint Francis Grad Assistant

The Blair County Chamber has hired a Graduate Assistant from Saint Francis University to oversee its social media and website responsibilities.

Sarah Losing will work 29 hours-per-week at the Chamber for the next two years while she completes her studies toward a Master’s Degree in Business Administration.

“It was a concept that was posed to us by Dr. Randy Frye, one of our board members who is also chairman of the Business Department at Saint Francis,” explained Chamber President Joe Hurd. “It gives us access to a quality individual with a solid educational background in a critical area of our organization. It also provides some continuity as Sarah will be with us at least two years.”

Losing graduated from Saint Francis in May with a B.S. in Business Management. She had previously earned an Associate Degree in Business Administration/Management/Marketing from South Hills School of Business & Technology. As the Chamber’s new Coordinator of Social Media and Website Development, Losing will work with Marketing Vice-President Linda Stotler to broaden the social media presence of the Chamber and to look for additional ways to generate revenue through the Chamber Website.

“I’m very excited to have the chance to use my degree,” Losing acknowledged. “The Chamber position fit what I was looking for. In the short time I’ve been here, I feel comfortable with what I’m doing. Right now, it’s just a matter of learning as much as I can about the Chamber so that I can direct social media efforts where they’ll be most effective.”



Sarah Losing, the Chamber’s newest employee, is a Graduate Assistant from Saint Francis University.

**Chamber Membership
is a great investment!
Call the Chamber today
at 943-8151.**

U.S. Armed Forces Mothers among Hall of Fame honorees

As the Blair County Chamber's Business Hall of Fame prepares to recognize its 30th class of honorees, one organization outside the normal business realm may end-up being the star of the show.

United State Armed Forces Mothers, a group of women with sons and daughters serving in all branches of the U.S. armed services, will receive the Committee Choice Award at the event, set for October 21st at the Blair County Convention Center. The award recipient, selected each year by the Hall of Fame Committee, recognizes individuals, organizations, events or projects within Blair County for their positive impact on the community.

"It's a great honor for us," acknowledged Armed Forces Mothers president, Patty Davis. "It means that people notice what

we're doing for our military. We're a good support group for one another." Currently the group has 31 members who volunteer in a number of ways. Their unselfish work, according to Hall of Fame Committee Chair Lisa Michelone, exemplifies what the Committee Choice Award is all about.

"It's incredible what these women do to help our military," Michelone pointed out. "Too often, we forget that we have troops all over the world who keep us safe. These women don't forget. Hopefully, this award will raise some awareness."

Four businesses will be inducted into the Hall of Fame this year. Those are: Beard Legal Group of Altoona, City Beverage of Altoona, Presbyterian Village at Hollidaysburg and Tender Love for Children of Altoona.

In the category of Excellence in

Small Business, the honorees are: Altoona Curve, Andrea's School of Dance of Bellwood and Okonak, Dean & Lechner, PC of Altoona. In Young Emerging Business, Delaney Insurance of Martinsburg, Greenbean Coffee House of Altoona and Trade Secrets, LLC of Altoona will be honored.

AnswerLinks of Hollidaysburg and Veeder-Root Company of Duncansville have won Technology Awards and Greenbean Coffee House gets the award for Community Service. Greenbean becomes the first business to ever receive two awards in the same year. The Business Hall of Fame started presenting awards in 1990.

For sponsorship information on the Business Hall of Fame Dinner, contact Jessie Covert at (814) 943-8151 or email her at jcovert@blairchamber.com.



Patty Davis (right) receives a certificate from Hall of Fame Committee Chair Lisa Michelone at the recent orientation for honorees. Patty is the President of U.S. Armed Forces Mothers, which will receive the Committee Choice Award in October.

No need to sell the family cow

by Jodi Cessna

To me, September means back to school and new beginnings. As the seasons change, and Fall starts, many are starting a new chapter in their life. Whether that is a true first day of school, the transition from elementary school to junior high school, junior high school to high school, high school to post-secondary education or even going back to college after a long period of time for new training.

These changes make me think of scholarships. What a wonderful way to provide financial assistance to help someone else and who wouldn't like to be recognized for their hard work? At the Community Foundation, we have had the opportunity through the generosity of our donors to provide well over 1,300 post-secondary scholarships. These scholarships have been for students attending trade schools, technical colleges, community colleges, and universities who have a wide variety of majors.

There are so many wonderful stories about why people want to create a scholarship. Many tend to involve memorializing someone as in the story I am about to tell you. In 2001, I had the opportunity to meet

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a permanent trust

a wonderful woman named Dorothy. Dorothy had been a nurse and her husband, Joseph, had been a pharmacist. They had saved money for their "golden years" but unfortunately Joseph passed away at a much younger age than expected.

Dorothy decided she would like to provide scholarships to help students who were attending 1 of 4 Pennsylvania Colleges majoring in the healthcare field. When I asked her why she wanted to do this she told me a story of how her aunt had sold one of the family cows so Dorothy could go to nursing school. Dorothy said she didn't want other families to have to make a sacrifice like that if she could help them.

Well to date, over 80 families have had their financial load "lightened" by this wonderful gift from Dorothy! If you would like to learn more about how you can help others through a scholarship, please contact us at (814) 944-6102.

Jodi Cessna is Executive Director of the Central Pennsylvania Community Foundation.

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Hiergeist relished opportunity to learn

Bill Hiergeist was born and raised in Blair County. He and his wife Judy have enjoyed 46 years of marriage, raised two daughters, and have stayed well-connected to the local community. Yet Hiergeist, in his role as President & CEO of Independent Catholic Foundation, welcomed the opportunity to learn more about the people and places close to home.

"Being involved with several (Blair County) Chamber committees, I had heard good things about the Leadership Blair County program," Hiergeist acknowledged. "Despite the fact that I've been here all my life, I figured that I'd learn things about the county through that program that I didn't know. And I did."

Aside from what he learned, Hiergeist also made some valuable connections.

"It's amazing how close you get to the people in your class," he remarked. "The things you experience together and the great flow of information and opinions really take you to the next level of personal and professional development. It's something that everyone in business or community improvement should do."



Since his graduation from the LBC Adult program in 2004, Bill Hiergeist has undertaken a variety of roles within LBC including the Chairmanship of the Youth Committee.

Each monthly LBC session focuses on some aspect of Blair County and corresponding ways that servant leadership can play a significant part in making the

county better. For Hiergeist, the session that made the greatest impact was one that highlighted "The Social Barometer." "This is a session that takes many peo-



ple out of their comfort zones," he admitted. "It really encourages you to value the opinions of others and not be judgmental. It really caused me to think about a variety of things that I hadn't taken time to consider before."

Once Hiergeist graduated from LBC in 2004, he immediately volunteered to get involved at the committee level of the program. He is a past chair of the LBC Youth Committee and helps select the class members each year. He also helps facilitate several sessions, among them The Social Barometer.

"Leadership Blair County is a great program that has made a huge difference both in the lives of people who have graduated from the program and the people who have benefitted from its projects and events," Hiergeist explained. "I'm proud to have been a part of it and hope others will consider it as well."

Investing in Education here in the First Frontier

By Matthew Fox



It's the unofficial end-of-summer ... no not Labor Day, we are talking about what some parents may describe as the most wonderful time-of-the-year...back to school time!!! As we prepare for another year of learning and friendships, it's a good time to take stock in the recent investments in educa-

tion here in the First Frontier Blair County.

Investment in education isn't just about the dollars spent. It's also about a community's investment in programming, events, mentoring and involvement in lifelong learning that begins years before kindergarten. The importance of education is multi-faceted, not only here in Blair County but throughout the world. An education system is a reflection on our community's ability to educate and prepare our next generation leaders and investors with the skills they need to meet the challenges of ever-changing market conditions. A competitive pre-K through post-secondary education system is critical in attracting people to fill current and future positions here in the First

Frontier.

The largest investment is reflected in ongoing construction of the new Altoona Area School District (AASD) High School which broke ground in May of 2018 and is expected to open in the Fall of 2020. This nearly \$90 million investment will replace the 90-year-old B building and contain spaces specific to science, technology, engineering, art and math (STEAM) as well as new performing arts venues. The progress made in just 15 months is a game changer not just for the students but the surrounding neighborhood.

Investment has been made throughout all of Blair County's public and private schools, especially in STEAM and Entrepreneurial Development. Notable STEAM programming is happening in the

Claysburg-Kimmel School District (CKSD) and the Blair County Chamber of Commerce's Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!). The CKSD in conjunction with the Claysburg Education Foundation has invested in excess of \$400,000 towards STEAM programs through new technology equipment, a summer STEAM program and establishing a Creator Club at Downtown Altoona's Catalyst (Maker) Space. The YEA! Program is a 25-week program that teaches students from 11-18 years old how to start and run their own business. Over the past 3 years over 50 students have worked together with local business leaders and instructors on creating businesses in Blair County.

Our post-secondary partners have been investing in both in-

frastructure and programs. Penn State Altoona, in partnership with ABCD Corporation, has been renovating and repurposing buildings in Downtown Altoona over the past 20+ years. This includes a one-of-a-kind in the nation Rail Transportation Engineering degree program. The Pennsylvania Highlands Community College Blair Center opened in 2013 and just recently completed an expansion quadrupling its size and now enrolls nearly 500 students.

If the kitchen is the heart of a home, our schools are the heart of a community. And from a scan of recent investments and programming, our heart is strong and getting stronger.

Matthew Fox is the marketing manager of the ABCD Corp.

Working Together

Blair Mill Outlet benefits from years of experience

As the saying goes, there really is no substitute for experience. Even with the onslaught of more sophisticated technology, the introduction of new trends and more emphatic customer demands, Jeff and Ginney Arthur barely flinch. They know their business – Blair Mill Outlet in Hollidaysburg – inside out.

“My dad, Ralph Arthur, Jr., started the business 31 years ago as Royal Tile and Carpet in Downtown Altoona,” Jeff pointed out. “I started working in the warehouse there when I was fifteen years old. So I have 40 years of experience in flooring. That experience has come in handy.”

Royal Tile moved to Logan Boulevard in 1978 and then to 115 Canal Street in Hollidaysburg – the current location.

“I joined the business 32-years-ago,” Ginney acknowledged. “I worked for my father-in-law in the office, part-time. I have been working full-time for the past 25 years.”

The Arthur’s bought the business from Ralph in 1999 and immediately established defined roles for the co-owners.

“I arrive each morning to meet the installers and go over the jobs for the day,” Jeff ex-



Jeff and Ginney Arthur at Blair Mill Outlet have always been successful at “leaving work at work”.

plained. “During the day, I assist customers, schedule future installations, meet with flooring vendors regarding new products and handle the business insurance.”

Ginney’s day is equally as busy.

“I work on completing the employee schedule, payroll and all accounts payable,” she

noted. “I also meet with advertising representatives, supervise employees (Blair Mill has nine) and handle employee health insurance.”

While their responsibilities sometimes take them in different directions, it’s hardly noticeable, according to Ginney.

“The advantage of working together is that we both under-

stand the operation of the business,” she disclosed. “We also know each other’s responsibilities. We are there to help each other at work and are able to spend time together as well.”

And when the workday’s over, it’s over.

“We have always left work at work,” Jeff admitted. “If there’s a problem that needs discussed, we talk about it the next day at work.”

The strategy, without question, has worked. Blair Mill Outlet is the largest, in-stock, flooring dealer in Central Pennsylvania. The company carries all types of flooring including hardwood, laminate, vinyl, ceramic tile, carpet and area rugs. So what does the future hold?

“We plan to continue to update the products we offer to keep up with the latest trends,” Jeff stated.

“We will continue to have a successful small business,” Ginney added. “We are able to be successful because of the great employees we have to assist customers with their flooring selections.”

Blair Mill Outlet has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 1984.

Welcome New Members...

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215 Allegheny Street
Hollidaysburg, PA 16648
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Retail

Open Season Outdoors

Mr. Chris Fedora
2572 E. Pleasant Valley Blvd.
Altoona, PA 16601
Phone: (814) 201-2558
Retail

Tapia Technology Consulting

Ms. Melany Tapia
214 Red Fox Drive
Duncansville, PA 16635
Phone: (814) 574-7617
Computer Dealers/Service

Penn State Extension assists extensive range of clients

Somewhere on the list of “What do they do?” resides the Penn State Extension.

A part of Blair County for more than a century, the Extension is a modern educational organization dedicated to delivering science-based information to people, businesses and communities. The Extension helps fulfill Penn

State’s mission as Pennsylvania’s only land-grant university by making the research done in its College of Agricultural Sciences available to the public as educational resources, such as articles, face-to-face farm visits, workshops, webinars, videos, guides and publications.

Even those who have had in-

teraction with the Extension might not know the broad spectrum of services that are offered, believes Jeff Hackenberg who is Client Relationship Manager for Area 7 which covers Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata, Mifflin and Somerset counties.

“While many people think of farms and 4-H when they think

of Penn State Extension, we also have teams of educators that conduct programs in areas of nutrition, families and health issues as well as economic and community development,” Hackenberg pointed out. “Extension is currently exploring how we can be of help in addressing the opioid crisis throughout the state,

mental health issues and rural broadband access.”

Penn State Extension is part of Penn State University’s College of Agricultural Sciences. It plays a critical role in helping counties like Blair to address a variety of issues that can’t easily be addressed elsewhere. Its track record for suc-

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Pittsburgh Glass Works
Stevens Mortuary, Inc.
Tri-State Industrial Solutions, Inc.

Celebrating 46 Years
Manpower Inc., of Altoona

Celebrating 30-34 Years
Bavarian Aid Society
Burgmeier Hauling, Inc.
Calvary Cemetery Association
Hoss's Steak & Sea House
Corporate Office
McCartney's Business Products
Smithmyer's Electronics, Inc.
Value Drug Company
Wick Copy Center
Your Building Centers, Inc.

Celebrating 20-29 Years
Altoona Symphony Orchestra
Benton Insurance Center, Inc.
Cumming Motors, Inc.
East Side Concrete Supply Co., Inc.
Econo Lodge
Edmiston Signs
Labor Specialties
Penn Mont Academy
Presbyterian Village at Hollidaysburg

Celebrating 10-19 Years
611 MRI Altoona
Allegheny Pain Management, P.C.
Always A Party Rentals
Answer Physical Therapy and Health Center, LLC
Atlantic Broadband
Blair County Conservation District
J.R. Brown Construction, Inc.
Courtyard By Marriott
Firestone Complete Auto Care
Hollidaysburg Area Public Library
Investment Savings Bank
Mihalko's General Contracting
PA CareerLink Blair County
Seltzer Financial Strategies, LLC
Top To Bottom Office Interiors, Inc.

Celebrating 5-9 Years
Altoona Lung Specialists
Bellwood-Antis Public Library
Bihary Family Dental
Bloom Yoga & Wellness, LLC
Buccinese Society
John J. Castle General Contractor, Inc.
The Everett Railroad Company
Healthy Blair County Coalition
Intermunicipal Relations Committee COG
Lake Raystown Resort
Mama Randazzo's, Inc.
Gerald L. Pastva, Professional Land Surveyor
The UPS Store

Celebrating 1-4 Years
A B Federal Credit Union
Brooklyn Deli
Collette Vacations
Eardley Financial Agency
Evolution Counseling Services, LLC
Global Power Line Academy, Inc.
Hoss's Steak & Sea House
ImmunoTek Bio Centers, LLC
KIZ Resources, LLC
Milanak Family Vision Center
NFP\Benefits Network, Inc.
Omni Bedford Springs Resort and Spa
QuatriniRafferty, Attorneys at Law
Rutter's Convenience Store
Safelite Autoglass
Shaffer's Full Steam Ahead
Hobby Shop
Talixa Software & Service, LLC

Off The Cuff



AMY MARTIN-SHANAFELT

1. How would you describe Blair HealthChoices to someone unfamiliar with it?

Blair HealthChoices is a 501(c)(3) owned by the County Commissioners to assume responsibility and manage the contract with the Department of Human Services for the Pennsylvania Behavioral Health HealthChoices Program. The Program serves individuals on medical assistance seeking behavioral health services. We sub-contract with Community Care Behavioral Health. Together we work toward creating a treatment system that supports Blair County residents in obtaining optimal mental health and wellness, including a life free from addiction.

2. What would people be surprised to know about what the organization does?

The contract with the Department of Human Services is a risk-based contract, which means sometimes the cost of treatment exceeds the funding we received and we are responsible to cover those losses through reserves. On the flip side, if treatment costs do not exceed the funding we receive, we are able to reinvest in the community. Through reinvestment dollars we have supported expansion of mobile crisis services, housing projects, and a Drop In Center.

3. What differentiates Blair HealthChoices from the Blair County Drug and Alcohol Program?

Together Blair HealthChoices and the Blair County Drug and Alcohol Program ensure that individuals struggling with a substance use disorder are able to get the help and support they need. Blair County Drug and Alcohol Program does an amazing job connecting with individuals in the community that are struggling with addiction and giving them hope for recovery. We make sure when the person is ready, that quality treatment is available to them.

4. How long have you served as Executive Director and what do your duties entail?

I started at Blair HealthChoices in 2007. The responsibilities are endless because of the constant change that occurs as the science of behavioral health improves, as governmental changes occur, and as the community needs change. My daily work revolves around continuously expanding and creating new services that will improve the well-being of the people we serve. We appreciate our partnerships with the other governmental entities and non-profit agencies in Blair County that share our goals.

The Blair Business Mirror is published on the second Tuesday of every month except January and July. Any suggestions or comments call Joe Hurd at (814) 943-8151 or email him at jhurd@blairchamber.com.



SPORTS ACTION!

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Among the many responsibilities of Penn State Extension is to educate the community on issues of importance. In the photo, taken at the Chamber's "Home Run for Safety," Jeff Hackenberg (left) and Tom Ford talk to trade show attendee about the Spotted Lanternfly.

EXTENSION: 'We've been lucky'

(Continued from Page 7)

cess has been impressive, particularly as it pertains to training and volunteer recruitment. It's not an easy job and it's not without its challenges.

"We've definitely got some challenges," Hackenberg disclosed. "I'd say staying current, delivery of our services and being publicly funded through federal, state and county taxes are our biggest ones. If any of our funders reduce their funding or it doesn't keep pace with inflation, it trickles down and can result in reduced staffing and program availability. For the most part we've been lucky."

So what is the next decade likely to bring for the Extension?

"We'll likely see artificial intelligence incorporated into Extension programs," Hackenberg explained. "This could allow remote sensing of pests and diseases in the fields, alerting farmers when these issues emerge. These sensors could automatically alert Extension educators and crop consultants so they can prepare customized recommendations. Those would be significant additions to what we do now."

Penn State Extension has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 1999.

Chamber's WE-LEaD program hosting 'Women Mean Business'

The potential perils of starting a business shouldn't outweigh the fabulous feeling of being your own boss. That message will come through loud and clear as the WE-LEaD Committee of the Blair County Chamber presents "Women Mean Business" on Friday, September 20th from 7:30 to 9:30 a.m. at The Casino at Lakemont Park.

Attendees will have the opportunity to hear the stories of four local women who became business owners. The four panelists will explain what drove them to start their own businesses, obstacles they've had to overcome and ways that they've dealt with financial and environmental challenges. There will also be a question-and-answer period.

The panel will consist of Jennifer Sois-

son of Brush Mountain Running and Outdoors, Inc.; Lisa Mancinelli of State Farm Insurance; Stephanie Hite of Trade Secrets and Charlene Dodson of The Fashion Boutique at Charlotte's Trove. Marty Malone will moderate the panel discussion.

The cost to attend the WE-LEaD event is \$25 for Chamber Members and \$35 for non-members. A continental breakfast is included. Corporate sponsor of the WE-LEaD program is Reliance Bank. To register, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at www.blairchamber.com.

WE-LEaD is an acronym for Women Encouraging: Leadership, Education and Development.



CHARLENE DODSON



STEPHANIE HITE

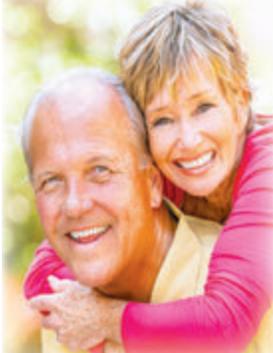


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New digs

PA CareerLink will have better access, awareness

As Blair County prepares to address workforce challenges that will make it increasingly more difficult for employers to find trained employees in a variety of industry sectors, PA CareerLink is getting geared-up.

A critical source of training, recruitment and placement, CareerLink provides workforce services to more than 9,000 job-seekers annually in Blair County. In addition, more than 200 employers posted more than 1,900 jobs during that same time period. Unfortunately, that number represents only 30% of the county's employers. That's not enough, believes Site Administrator Gwen Fisher who oversees Blair and Bedford counties.

"Awareness is a big issue for us," Fisher acknowledged. "We're perhaps the best kept secret in town. We have some work to do to let the public know of all the incredible things we have to offer to job seekers and employers. Our services are no charge, ranging from resume building to interview practice to skill assessments to one-on-one coaching with career planners as well as educational workshops."

The awareness challenge has already received some positive reinforcement on two fronts. One dealt with location, the other with interaction. On August 15th, Ca-



The official grand opening of PA CareerLink's new offices in the Altoona Area Public Library culminated with a ribbon cutting attended by: Front row, from left: Joe Hurd, President/CEO, Blair County Chamber of Commerce; Patrick Fanelli, Altoona Area Public Library Board President; State Senator Judy Ward; Jennifer Knisely, Altoona Area Public Library; Eric Palmer, Executive Director, Greater Altoona Career & Technology Center; Dr. Charles Prijatelj, Superintendent, Altoona Area School District; Back row, from left: State Representative Lou Schmitt; Mayor Matt Pacifico, City of Altoona; Gwen Fisher, Site Administrator Pennsylvania CareerLink® Blair & Bedford Counties; Jesper Neilsen, Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Board Chair

reerLink cut the ribbon on its new offices in the Altoona Area Public Library.

"Our old location was a great space but it offered limited access to many job seekers," Fisher pointed out. "We were not on the public transportation route and

knew of scenarios where job seekers had to arrange multiple rides to meet with us. Space was available at the library and one of our other major partners – Greater Altoona Career & Technology Center – was right next door."

That partnership, as well as

ones with the Blair County Chamber, Altoona-Blair County Development Corporation and Southern Alleghenies Planning & Development Commission has already yielded positive results.

"Collaborating with these organizations has opened a number

of doors," Fisher disclosed. "They are valuable resources that have been helpful in identifying where to direct our efforts. We look forward to being part of the strategy that will allow Blair County to weather the workforce obstacles that seem to be heading our way."

An example of upcoming collaboration is a Job Fair that will take place on October 16th at the Jaffa Shrine Center. All partners are onboard for what Fisher sees as a great event.

"We did a similar event a few months ago in response to some layoffs that took place locally and the response from businesses and job-seekers was outstanding," she noted. "We expect even greater participation this time."

In the meantime, CareerLink will continue to transition and distribute information to potential clients. The Altoona Center has sixteen employees that also cover CareerLink's second new location in Duncansville. They include career planners, a Business Services Coordinator, career advisors, as well as Veteran's representatives.

"We've got great people here," Fisher, who has only been in her position a couple months, explained. "We look forward to making a positive difference for Blair County."

ZombieTown

NOVA6 continues a fun event to bring people together

Some of the best ideas often come about when people least expect them. Just ask Chris Peters. The co-founder of Altoona marketing firm, NOVA6 Studios, Peters and his wife, co-founder Lori, were having a casual conversation back in 2011.

"We noticed that in our area, so many groups were doing their own little events without a great deal of success," Peters pointed out. "It made us wonder what would happen if we were able to pull everybody together for one big event. So we shopped it around to different groups and were pleasantly surprised. They were willing to give it a try."

ZombieTown USA was born.

A collaboration among local businesses, non-profits, city leaders and volunteers, ZombieTown is a zombie-inspired event, a one-of-a-kind unique festival in Downtown Altoona. Technically, this is its fourth year and the first time that it will take place in October – specifically October 5th.

"It's an overall day of music, vendors, contests, kids games and more," Peters explained. "Everyone is dressed-up and having a great time comparing costumes, taking pictures, sharing makeup, ideas and advice. It's a cool thing to watch, even if you don't like to dress-up. It's really all about kids and families all being able to

do something together and enjoying a day in the Downtown."

And it all culminates in a parade, which this year begins at 7:00 p.m.

"Anyone can participate in the parade," Peters acknowledged. "We invite all businesses to be involved. Make a float, decorate a vehicle, get a group of your employees to dress-up. It's all in the name of fun, it creates many fond memories and it's free."

To learn more about the ZombieTown event or to register for the parade, go to www.zombietownusa.com.

NOVA6 has been a member of the Chamber since 2017.



ZombieTown is a haven for the creative.

Andrew overseeing vibrant growth of VA

Sigrid Andrew has a big job. As Director of the James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center in Altoona, Andrew manages an annual budget of approximately \$160 million, more than 800 employees and five Community Based Outpatient Clinics throughout a 14-county catchment area. The Maryland native has a BS in Nursing from Wilmington University and Master of Science from the University of Maryland University College. Andrew lives in Hollidaysburg with her husband Doug and their dog Izzy.

Chamber: Describe the career path that led you to where you are today?

Sigrid: I started my career in the Department of Veterans Affairs as a Registered Nurse (RN) on an orthopedic rehabilitation floor. What shaped my career was those early years as a young RN, working nightshift, on an orthopedic rehab floor. During those long night hours, I would sometimes medicate Veterans for pain. Sometimes, once the pain subsided, their inhibitions were also loosened, they would begin to share stories of their service, sometimes during wartime. Those things they kept in the secrets of their mind. I listened. I listened to those Veterans talk about their experiences. I was moved by the sheer viciousness these young men endured, at a time in their life when they were younger than I was, at the time they were telling me the stories. I knew then that these experiences were something they held onto their entire lives, and some may have never talked about it until they were willing to tell me. I couldn't unhear what I heard from them. It began to shape what I thought of our Veterans. After that, working for the VA became more than a job. I became their advocate. Those moments helped me understand the true meaning of nursing and I gained an even deeper respect for our country and our Veterans. Since then I have been dedicated to helping



Sigrid Andrew began her VA career as a Registered Nurse and is now the Director of the James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center in Altoona.

Chamber

Q&A

those men and women who wrote a blank check to our nation.

Chamber: What would most people in Blair County be surprised to know about the James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center?

Sigrid: Every day heroes walk our hallways. Some of them have been aged by the slow ticking of time, while others have just left the service, returned home from a deployment and

still have their whole lives in front of them. Despite their place in life, they all answered the call from our nation to serve and sacrificed so much. I always encourage my team to take a moment and recognize that they are working among those who dared to change the course of history for the betterment of a nation.

Chamber: Of what are you most proud regarding your current facility and why?

Sigrid: I am proud that over the course of 18 months, we added more than 120 staff and 17 services so that we can better serve our Veterans. That has led to us being regional leaders in telehealth medicine, having the largest behavioral health services in the region, being nation-

ally recognized for improvements in Best Places To Work, and having the highest All Employee Survey participation in the nation. Additionally, we developed the largest chemo telehealth infusion clinic within the United States and we are on the brink of having one of the most advanced imaging and radiological services within the Department and within the region we serve. Most recently, we were approved to perform ambulatory surgeries ranging from dermatological needs to cataracts.

Chamber: Many healthcare facilities are finding it difficult to attract and retain a quality workforce. What do you see as the most pressing workforce challenges for the

VA and how are you likely to address them?

Sigrid: We have grown more than 120 personnel in the last year, and we have more opportunities to grow moving forward. That requires us to attract highly qualified people who have passion, vision and skills to take care of our nation's heroes. To do that, we offer tuition assistance, student loan reimbursement, along with professional development opportunities. Recently we have done salary surveys and were able to increase some payment plans by 13-25 percent. We also use avenues like usajobs.gov to recruit on a national level.

Chamber: Who are your personal and professional role models and what makes them special?

Sigrid: I grew up in a household with a mother who happens to be blind. She lost her vision when I was a child. Despite her lack of vision, she taught me amazing life skills. She does everything except drive a car! She taught me how to 'see' other people regardless of their religion, skin tone, sex or gender. For her, because she never 'saw' the person, it was more important how they treated others. While some may consider blindness a disability, it gave my mother the opportunity to determine who a person was, as a person, and not all the judgements we may make as someone who can see. Ultimately, her ability to teach me compassion for other human beings was the main reason I chose to become a nurse.

Chamber: What's still on Sigrid Andrew's "bucket list"?

Sigrid: My bucket list is long. But some of the things I would like to do involve travel. I would like to see every Frank Lloyd Wright home. I would love to see the Galapagos Islands. And, maybe eat paella in Spain.

Shining Brightly

Dorman's Jewelry marking 40 years of success

If you track the history of some of the more long-standing businesses in Blair County, it's amazing how many were created and endured as the result of the relentlessness of their founders.

Dorman's Jewelry, celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, is one of those businesses. Opened in 1979 by John and Norma Dorman, the circumstances of its founding speaks to both creativity and adjustment. John was working at Crane Company and at the same time got his watchmaker's education through the G.I. Bill. When Crane Company closed, John began doing watch repairs from the family home on Hudson Avenue.

While John was building a business, Norma found a location for that business that suited their needs. Dorman's Jewelry was born.

The couple retired in 1990 and their sons, John, III and Mike took over the business. After having locations at the Station Mall (1981-92), Walmart Plaza (1993-95) and Kauffman Gallery (1995), Dorman's Jewelry settled in at its current location at 712 Pleasant Valley Blvd. in Altoona.

"My mom and dad are both gone now," noted Mike Dorman. "They never got an opportunity to see our expansion in 2012. I think they would be proud of what we are today."

Mike has seen the growth of the business from a relatively early age. He was 14-years-old when he began working after



Mike Dorman (left) and his son Devin welcome a customer at Dorman's Jewelry. Dorman's is celebrating its 40th year in business during 2019.

school and on work study, prior to his graduation in 1989. Before he knew it, he was running the day-to-day operations.

"I earned my GIA diamond degree in 1995 and learned the repair side of the business from watching over my brother's shoulder," Mike admitted. "It's made an

incredible difference." It also helped Dorman's Jewelry to develop a niche, beyond just the sale of jewelry and related products.

"I think that people are always surprised at the number of things that we can do that other jewelry stores can't," Mike

explained. "Not a day goes by that someone comes here with an unusual repair that another jeweler has sent them to us. Referrals are a huge reason for our success over the past 40 years."

From the sales end, Mike points to Dorman's Jewelry's success in building a solid reputation. He's not blind to the fact, however, that brick-and-mortar businesses have worthy competitors in online companies.

"Online has impacted us," he pointed out. "It impacts every business in some way. But we believe that the internet doesn't provide the advantages that we feature. With things like jewelry, you really have to see it and touch it to understand and appreciate the quality."

With four decades of outstanding performance in the books, what does the future hold for Dorman's Jewelry? Mike's son Devin is now working in the business so it's likely that the business will enjoy many additional anniversaries.

"It's great to know that another generation of Dorman's will be around to continue the family business," Mike disclosed. "It's likely to get pretty exciting over the next few years. There are big things to come."

Dorman's Jewelry has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 2004.

Sports Executive keynote speaker at Annual bizX Trade Show



JOE BATTISTA

Joe Battista, a former Vice-President of Hockey and Business Administration for the Buffalo Sabres of the National Hockey League and a noted author, will be the keynote speaker at the bizX Trade Show, set for September 26th at Pegula Ice Arena on the Penn State Campus.

The bizX event is a partnership between the Blair County Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber of Business & Industry of Centre County.

Battista is a 1983 graduate of Penn State with a degree in Mar-

keting. He has 30-years coaching experience and is a member of the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame. He was also instrumental in securing the largest donation in Penn State history, an \$88 million gift from Terry and Kim Pegula for a new ice facility. It is that facility that hosts bizX.

This year's bizX show promises to be a great way for businesses from throughout the region to interact with potential clients. Subtitled, "Your Business. No Boundaries," the show will feature more than 80 ex-

hibitors, a variety of seminars, a keynote luncheon as well as Corridor Cuisine.

Booth costs for this year's bizX are \$200 for small businesses, \$300 for large businesses. The cost of attending the keynote luncheon remains \$25. Reservations are required for the luncheon which will begin at 11:30 and conclude at 1:00 when the show floor officially opens. The show will be open until 5:00 p.m.

Hospitality Asset Management will be the Presenting Sponsor; AmeriServ Bank is the Keynote Luncheon Sponsor and

Your Cigar Den is the Seminar Sponsor. Supporting sponsors are: Advantage Resource Group; First Commonwealth Bank; McCartney's/Steelcase; Moore Power Sales; Okonak, Dean & Lechner, P.C.; Penn State Small Business Development Center; PSECU; Roberts Oxygen Company; The UPS Store - Altoona & State College and Zito Business.

WTAJ-TV is Media Partner for the bizX show.

Anyone interested in reserving a booth should contact the Blair County Chamber at (814) 943-8151.

Icing-on-the-cake

Dual Enrollment Credits available to YEA! students

The Blair County Chamber's Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!) program is one of the most outstanding educational opportunities available to young people in our county. The fact that it also comes with Dual Enrollment Credits increases the value even more.

"Any middle school or high school student who has completed the YEA! program will tell you that the educational component is the key," explained Chamber President Joe Hurd. "Nobody else in our region provides the information and instruction to students at these grade levels, at least in terms of business development. The Dual Enrollment piece is simply icing-on-the-cake."

At the present time, two post-secondary – Saint Francis and Mount Aloysius – offer three credits to students who complete the YEA! program and who maintain the required grades. Penn State Altoona is hoping to be able to offer the credits at some point as well.

"We're fortunate to have colleges in our area that understand what the program teaches and how it fits into higher education," Hurd pointed out. "We're also lucky to have Royce."

Royce Boyd is beginning her third year as YEA! Program Manager. The retired school superintendent oversees the requirements of Dual Enrollment and makes certain that students toe the academic line.

"I'm a tough grader, as any of the past YEA! students will tell you," Boyd disclosed. "If students want college credits, I make sure that they earn them."

Applications are still being accepted for the 2020 YEA! class. The 25-week program begins on October 8th and ends in early April. To make application, visit the Blair County Chamber website at www.blairchamber.com and click on the YEA! link.



Matt Stuckey of Stuckey Automotive is one of the three YEA! instructors who make sure that the educational component of the program is always front-and-center.

Setting the Pace



Debbie Eckenrode Chamber Ambassador

Place of work: Farmers Insurance.

Position: Agent/Owner.

Years with current position: 2 yrs with Farmers - 32 years insurance experience.

Positions held in the Chamber: Chamber Ambassador.

Age: 56.

Family: Married to Craig Eckenrode, 35 years. Two daughters, Autumn & Dalton Wood and their daughter 19 month old Freya. Amanda & Teddy Albright.

Community organizations: Blair County Chamber of Commerce. **Hobbies/Leisure:** Avid boater at Lake Raystown. My husband and I hike many trails in Pennsylvania.

Education: Graduated from Chestnut Ridge HS. Obtained insurance license. Diploma from the Essentials of Agency Management at the University of Farmers in Grand Rapids, MI.

First job: When I was 14, I got my first job at Shawnee Lake in the concession stand in the summer.

Personal pet peeve: People not putting their shopping carts back in the cart return.

Words that describe your personality: I am extremely family oriented. I spend every opportunity available with them.

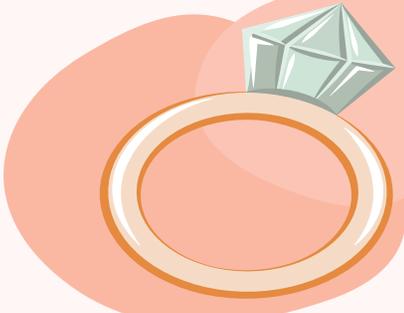
Secret ambition: Some day I would love to own a large home and land at the Chesapeake Bay so my family and I can visit together often.

I would like to be known for: Being a compassionate listener. I love listening to everyone's story on how they became who they are today.

Business role model: My husband Craig. He is like a sponge when it comes to business. He is very knowledgeable, confident, and hard working. I respect all advice he gives me regarding business.

Your thoughts on the Chamber: It's excellent if you get involved. It doesn't benefit a business if you just pay your membership dues and not attend the functions. I have enjoyed getting to know as many Chamber Members as possible.

Your thoughts on Altoona & Blair County: I am from Bedford County so I am new to Blair County. I absolutely love Blair County. I am connecting the dots between Bedford and Blair.



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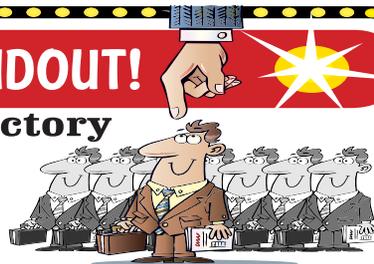
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Bellwood-Antis Library has Gold Star status

Despite struggles with funding, libraries everywhere are being asked to do more with less. And thanks to some creativity and a high level of commitment, they are more of a valuable resource than ever.

One of the outstanding libraries in Blair County is the Bellwood-Antis Public Library. That library was founded in 1965 and has been at its current location at 526 Main Street in Bellwood since 1980. That location is ideal because it's the center of the Bellwood-Antis community.

"We've been fortunate enough to be able to expand the library three times, most recently in 2007 when we built-on a larger children's room," explained Jessica Cameron, the Library Director. "People are frequently surprised by our scope of services. If you have a library card, you can get access to hundreds of free ebooks, free online databases, as well books, movies and audiobooks from any library in Blair



County, Bedford County, Cambria County, Huntingdon County and Lackawanna County."

In terms of clientele, most of the Bellwood-Antis patrons are families with young children and senior citizens.

"One of the great things about public libraries is that our demographic is literally everyone," Cameron admitted. "We have patrons in the 90's and patrons who are newborn babies. It's a privilege to be able to serve so many people at so many different stages of their life."

As a non-profit organization the Bellwood-Antis Public Library faces a number of challenges that often restricts its ability to offer as many programs as it would like to.

"Only two librarians

work here so finding the time to offer extra programs and services can be hard," Cameron points out. "By teaming-up with other non-profit organizations, community groups and local businesses, we are able to do more."

For example, this summer the library teamed-up with Blair Senior Services to present Tai Chi classes for people over age 60. The classes were extremely popular.

"We do our best to be what the community needs us to be," Cameron noted. "We are a Gold Star Library in the PA Forward Star Library Program and we annually present an Annual Health & Safety Fair with the Tyrone Regional Health Network. We're currently in the process of revising our Long Range Plan so I'm certain that we'll be asking for input on what makes the most sense in looking at our future."

Bellwood-Antis Public Library has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 2014.

New Members



The Blair County Chamber of Commerce welcomed its newest members at the 545th Breakfast Club in August. Pictured, seated from left: Liang Bartkowiak, BEING LIANG; Kristen O'Hara, INDIANA UNIVERSITY OF PA, OFFICE OF EXTENDED STUDIES; Liz Curfman, VETADVISOR SERVICES; Becky Stevens, MORGAN STANLEY; standing from left: Jesse Ickes and Chip Helsel, ALTOONA DISTRICT USBC; Kaitlyn Hallinan and Paige Nyanko, THE STUDIO ON 5TH.

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Making It Happen For You



Among the activities hosted by the Bellwood-Antis Public Library was a "Tai Chi for Health" class for individuals over age 60, presented by Blair Senior Services.



Quality Corrections & Inspections has built an international reputation for "fixing issues quickly."

Problem-Solvers

Quality Corrections & Inspections playing critical role

In recent years, 98% of shoes and 97% of the apparel sold in the U.S. were imported. Percentages for other products such as accessories and consumer goods were rather high as well.

With so many retailers and e-commerce companies relying on imported goods for their stores and fast-changing selling seasons throughout the year, how do they handle those "uh oh's" when merchandise arrives from overseas with problems?

Many companies, and overseas factories, rely on Quality Corrections & Inspections (QCI) based right here in Duncansville to turn the problems around...not the ships. QCI also has a facility on the west coast in the Las Vegas, Nevada suburb of Henderson to provide a nationwide presence to service retailers and their distribution centers dispersed across the country.

QCI fixes issues quickly, by performing critical inspections and making repairs to non-conforming merchandise. Problems faced by companies vary widely and

dozens of case studies are on QCI's website.

"We've worked on numerous apparel and footwear projects for over 30 years," said Mark Shaw, Global Operations Manager for Quality Corrections & Inspections. "Sewing repairs and reinforcement, hardware replacement, insole repairs, color bleeds, mold, odor and mildew remediation are just a few examples of the services we have provided regularly to customers."

QCI also performs many other related services to help companies across a spectrum of industries to meet their needs in handling production overloads. Services in this area include contract assembly operations, kitting, or packaging and repackaging services for example.

Many look at QCI as a large production workshop handling different projects for multiple companies simultaneously. The array of services provided by QCI are not only beneficial for the large national firms that QCI regularly services, but they are also

of great use to local and regional companies in Pennsylvania involved in importing, manufacturing or distribution that often need to seek these services in times of need.

With global supply chains undergoing new changes as a result of various factors such as tariff implications, proximity to raw materials, and diversifying production into multiple countries to name a few, QCI expects to continue playing an important role in supply chain management and logistics. New factories and new product sourcing locations are likely to put some strains on logistics teams as product problems are likely to be discovered in making their way from overseas locations to U.S. retailers and distribution centers. With east coast and west coast locations, QCI will be well positioned to support logistics leaders and decision-makers in times of need.

QCI has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 2000.

Explore Altoona promotes Altoona hotels and game day shuttle to PSU football fans

Joy Weidel, Social Media Specialist, Explore Altoona

Explore Altoona has once again initiated a cooperative marketing campaign with Fullington Trailways to promote the PSU football shuttles from Altoona hotels to Nittany Lion home games and back, encouraging fans to stay at a hotel in Altoona with competitive room rates, free onsite parking, and other amenities as well as easy access to I-99. The buses allow overnight guests to experience Nittany Lion football without the hassles of congested traffic, parking, and stopping for gas.

Explore Altoona is targeting

football fans in Pennsylvania, Maryland and West Virginia with ads in publications such as The Penn State Football Annual, The Martinsburg, WV Journal's The Gridiron, a high school preview publication, and in the Hagerstown, MD Herald-Mail Crossroads Business Journal. A full page has also been included in this year's Explore Altoona Visitors Guide.

For more information, visit explorealtoona.com and select the PSU Football Hotel Bus Shuttle button at the bottom of the page.



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Submissions can be sent to Walt Frank at wfrank@altoonamirror.com

Please include the individual's name, present address, original hometown, high school & college graduated from and information about the accomplishment(s).

It's Best to be ForeWARNed

by CJ Meese



CJ MEESE

It's always problematic to have to shut down a business or to be an employee of a business that is closing. Virtually everyone in the company has to deal with economic loss. A customer base

is no longer being supplied with the company's products/services. There are feelings of failure/grief to deal with. There are often legal issues that need to be addressed. Bottom line - everyone associated with the closure of a business loses in one or more ways.

Four well known PA businesses with a total of 4,800 employees closed in the last two months. Possibly most notable was for-profit Hahnemann University Hospital in Philadelphia. Founded in 1885, Hahnemann is/was both a teaching hospital in partnership with Drexel University and a consultative/referral care center. It was revered as a quality health care refuge for Philadelphia's financially/insurance challenged citizens.

The result of its decision to

close - 2,500 employees (including Residency Physicians) lost their jobs. Hundreds of patients had to be transported to other area health care facilities. The result was tremendous upheaval and dislocation. This closing intrigued me (a non attorney) enough that I did some research to learn what laws might apply when a business ceases operations. What I learned was eye opening and information all businesspeople should be aware of.

On August 4, 1988 the 100th US Congress passed legislation titled Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act ("WARN", or "The Act"). A summary of the key provisions of The Act are as follows:

■ It requires that both for-profit and nonprofit companies

having a facility of 100+ employees must give each employee 60 days written notice with specific information regarding the company's intent to close operations at the end of the 60 day's written notice.

■ Its ruling includes hourly and salaried workers.

■ It holds companies that do not provide proper notice liable to each employee for back pay and benefits that would have occurred during the 60 day period.

■ It provides for enforcement of The Act through the US District Court system.

In addition to the features of The Act noted above, there are many legal nuances in The Act that can be difficult to navigate. I suggest if you are in a situation in which the shutdown of a 100+ employee facility is a possibility,

do the following before the 60 day clock starts ticking! Seek guidance from a law firm that understands the complexities of WARN. There's nothing to gain to be in a situation in which your only hope is that an exclusion will absolve your company of its responsibility under The Act.

For those of you who are research inclined, The Act can be found at Public Law 100-379 (29 U.S.C. 2101, et seq.). The Department of Labor's final regulations are in The Federal Register (Volume 54, No. 75).

CJ Meese is a native of Blair County. His company - Business Development Associates (BDA) - has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 2002.

Ribbon-cutting



events

Better Homes & Gardens Real Estate/GSA Realty



The Chamber held a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the grand opening of Better Homes & Gardens Real Estate/GSA Realty located in the TrolleyWorks Business Park, 3316 5th Ave., Suite 200, Altoona. Better Homes & Gardens Real Estate/GSA Realty is committed to helping homebuyers find their dream home. Experienced agents customize home searches based on the individual needs of each buyer. Customers can download the Better Homes & Gardens Real Estate/GSA Realty app for the ability to shop anywhere at anytime. For more information go to www.gsarealty.com. Pictured at the ribbon, from left: Sherri Stayer, Chamber Ambassador; Joe Hurd, President/CEO Blair County Chamber of Commerce; Amanda Walker, The Office of State Senator Judy Ward; Jodi Carts, Realtor; Greg Swope, Realtor; Lora Larimer, Associate Broker; Chuck Gambone, Broker; Carol Latini, Realtor; Mary Ann Scordo, Associate Broker; Sandy Detwiler, Realtor; Nita Sanders, the office of State Representative Lou Schmitt; Luke Whitteker, Faxon Settlement; Nancy McClelland, Chamber Ambassador.