

Blair Business Mirror



November 2019

Trade show remodel

Cover story:
50th Home & Garden Show to add Healthy Living component

.....PAGES 3

Chamber again to support Small Business Saturday

.....PAGE 7

Ribbon Cuttings

.....PAGE 15-16

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Chamber Notes

The Employment Quandry

As contradictions go, this one's a head scratcher: Blair County has too many people who need jobs. Blair County has too many open jobs. Which one of those is true?

Incredibly, they both are. In mid-October, the Chamber and three other organizations sponsored a Job Fair. The intention was to connect job seekers with job providers. While it would appear to be a perfect marriage, the challenge was to at least get it to the dating stage. The results were mixed yet hopeful.

From the positive side, there were many employers who had conversations with job seekers and found that they were close matches to available jobs. We expected that, knowing that the recent business shutdowns and downsizing at a couple local companies would yield

people with significant skills and experience. It was encouraging to see that so many of those impacted by employment adversity were doing their best to remain in our area rather than packing-up and relocating. We need to retain everyone that we can.

Most of the employers that we talked to following the Job Fair viewed it as time well-spent. The number of attendees alone spoke to both the atmosphere of opportunity and the level of desperation.

Among some other observations from the Job Fair would be:

■ A fairly high percentage of the job seekers were people who already have jobs. That's not surprising. Blair County might not have a high unemployment rate but we have no shortage of people who are considered under-employed. Employers might be intrigued to know just how many of their call-offs on October 16th were for something other than illness.

■ Healthcare-related employers

were heavily represented as were hospitality businesses. It would have been a small miracle if those industry sectors, along with retail, hadn't been there in abundance. Post-Fair comments indicate that retail and hospitality got plenty of feelers from prospective applicants. Healthcare wasn't quite as fortunate, at least in the career categories that are hardest to fill.

■ Sadly, many of the Job Fair attendees were well-intentioned people who simply have no idea how to make themselves "hirable." One even wore a t-shirt with the following message displayed on the front: "I used to be a people person. People ruined it." Clever? Absolutely. Enthralling to a potential employer? Not so much.

■ It was readily apparent which Job Fair attendees saw the event as an ideal destination to comply with the regulations associated with extending their unemployment benefits. At a time when many employers include creativity among the qualities that they're looking for in employees, it's a shame that a segment of the population is determined to direct their creative juices to tasks that help them avoid work.

■ It's great that events like Job Fairs, which address so many critical areas of workforce development in our county, can actually be planned and executed by a cohort of organizations that don't care who gets the credit. Altoona-Blair County Development Corporation, Blair County Chamber, PA CareerLink and Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission joined forces to make this Job Fair successful. Expect more of that collaboration in the future.

Also, a special thanks to the Jaffa Shrine Center, which hosted the Job Fair. Heather Chestney and her crew made things ridiculously easy for everyone involved. The renovations that have taken place at that venue have been quite impressive. Those renovations will be on display in December when the Jaffa hosts the Chamber's "Business After Hours."



JOE HURD

New Members



The Blair County Chamber of Commerce welcomed its newest members at the 547th Breakfast Club in October. Pictured, seated from left: Vincent Meukel, Amerway, Inc.; Jason Houck and Crystal Burley, Harry's Construction, LLC; Sam Liberman, RT&T Logistics; standing from left: Danielle Stalter and Carl Kenyon, YTI Career Institute; Chris Fedora, Open Season Outdoors.

On the Cover: Randy Colyer (left) and Jimmy Burchfield, co-chairs of the Home & Garden Show Committee, debut the new name and logo of the Home Garden & Healthy Living Showcase. That event, in its 50th year, will be held February 28-March 1 at the Jaffa Shrine Center.

St. Francis Athletic Director to speak at Breakfast Club

Susan Robinson Fruchtl, Director of Athletics at Saint Francis University in Loretto, will be the speaker at Thursday's Chamber "Breakfast Club." That event will be held at The Casino at Lake-mont Park beginning at 7:45 a.m.

Robinson Fruchtl's presentation will focus on the challenges associated with guiding an NCAA Division I sports program, particularly as a small school. She was hired in 2016 as AD following a stint as Women's Basketball Coach at Providence College. Prior to taking the Providence position, she held the same role at Saint Francis where she was named NEC

Coach of the Year in 2011.

Robinson Fruchtl's career as a player was even more impressive. She is regarded as one of the best players in Penn State history, scoring more than 2,000 points and grabbing more than 1,000 rebounds. In 2010, she was named by Town and Gown magazine as one of the Top Twenty All-Time Great Penn State Athletes. She also won the Margaret Wade Trophy in 1992 as National Player of the Year which honors community service, academic and athletic success.

The cost to attend Breakfast Club is \$20 for Chamber Members and \$30 for non-members. To register, con-



tact the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at www.blairchamber.com.

Corporate sponsor of the November Breakfast Club is Weber Murphy Fox, Inc.

On the Cover

Branching-Out

50th Home & Garden Show to add Healthy Living component

The 50th edition of one of Blair County's most successful trade shows will have a new look, a new logo and a new name.

The Blair County Home & Garden Show is now the Home Garden & Healthy Living Showcase. The 2020 Showcase will be held on February 28, 29 and March 1 at the Jaffa Shrine Center in Altoona. What hasn't changed is that the event will once again be a collaborative effort between the Blair County Chamber and the Blair-Bedford Builders Association.

"We've already generated quite a bit of excitement within the two organizations," acknowledged Stacy Hoover, the Chamber's Vice-President of Events and Technology. "Being the 50th year of the show gave our committee an opportunity to head in some different directions with the planning and the expectations. The more we discussed ways to make it more attractive to exhibitors and attendees, the more creative the discussion became. We're looking forward to a great show."

Dave DeBiase, Executive Officer of the Builders Association, agreed.

"From the Builders perspective, our industry is constantly changing and evolving with new products for the home," he pointed out. "Home safety and green building is a hot button issue in the 21st Century. Builders have incorporated exercise areas in home design along with the newest technologies for building products that make the home environment a safer place to live. This, coupled with the fact that more people seem to be eating healthier diets and are concerned with longevity, has changed their lifestyle so that they can be more mobile in later years."

So the healthy living addition to a home and garden show



Stacy Hoover (left), the Chamber's Vice President of Events and Technology assists businesses in reserving booth space for the 2020 Home Garden & Healthy Living Showcase.

is not that much of a reach?

"It has become a closer connection pretty much every year," Hoover disclosed. "So many of the organizations in Pennsylvania that do home shows have already added a healthy living component and been successful with it. In a few cases, it has more than doubled the number of attendees. People are concerned about their health so they can improve their health and their homes, all at the same show."

Both partnering organizations expressed enthusiasm about the changes that the committee had recommended.

"The Builders are 100% on-board with the changes," DeBiase noted. "We have had several conversations with our counterparts from across the state and they've assured us it was a great move to make."

"Our Chamber Board has always been great at supporting what our committee recommends," Hoover stated. "They approved these changes unanimously. They like that we did our homework on this before bringing it to them."

At a time when trade shows have been struggling for ongoing acceptance, the Blair County Home & Garden Show has man-

aged to stay viable for five decades. Vendor participation has stayed relatively steady and although attendance at the show has dropped, most vendors point to the number of qualified leads that they get at the show as the main reason they keep coming back.

"Some trade shows, people attend just to get the giveaways," DeBiase admitted. "Our show continues to attract the people who are really looking to conduct business. The face-to-face interaction between buyer and seller is still something that beats online sales."

The Home and Garden Com-

mittee held an informational breakfast at the Jaffa Shrine Center on October 4th. More than 50 businesses attended. That's impressive, according to Hoover, but not necessarily surprising.

"It's really the first opportunity that businesses have to reserve booths," she said. "We're now in recruiting mode for additional vendors, particularly from the healthy living side. And we even have a couple sponsorships still available. Since this is the 50th show, it's a great chance for businesses to raise their profiles by sponsoring."

Any business interested in becoming an exhibitor for the 2020 Home Garden & Healthy Living Showcase should call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or email Hoover at shoover@blairchamber.com.

"At this point, four months out, we still have a number of booths available," she reported. "We expect to sell out before the end of 2019. So lock up your booth or your sponsorship as soon as possible."

Looking for a place to fit in?
TOP JOBS



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in the
Altoona Mirror

Career Shadowing Week: Life-changing opportunities



One of Blair County's most important programs to help students to gain first-hand experience in a workplace environment will kick-off its eleventh year later this month.

Career Shadowing Week, a program of the Blair County Chamber's BASICS initiative, will be held from November 18-22 at businesses throughout the county. This year, 418 students will participate.

"It's been a remarkable program," acknowledged BASICS Committee Co-Chair Leslie Estep. "Career Shadowing is a win-win for students and businesses. It's an essential component of any effort aimed at career development."

That's what the BASICS Committee believed in 2008 when committee members Judy Rossi and Jim Oswalt visited Lancaster to look at a shadowing program that was having success there. The two returned determined to create a similar program in Blair County. In 2009

that program was launched and has gained support and effectiveness ever since.

"We started small and did everything by hand," Rossi pointed out. "We've since created a database that has made the process much easier." She remains the co-chair of the Career Shadowing Week Subcommittee, along with Leanne Sidney. Both co-chairs are retired school teachers.

"We work incredibly well together," Rossi noted. "Leanne is extremely organized and has a wealth of contacts in the schools and in the businesses." Together, the two energetic ladies have assembled a group of volunteers from the business and education communities who recruit and coordinate, the most difficult aspects of making Career Shadowing Week a success.

"These volunteers give their time and effort and let me tell you, it takes an enormous amount of time to confirm a shadowing opportunity for a stu-

dent," Rossi admitted. "Almost all the volunteers have fulltime jobs and each year the same volunteers keep coming back. It is truly a labor of love and I am forever grateful. This program could never succeed without them."

All high school juniors in Blair County are eligible to participate in Career Shadowing Week.

"We felt that juniors are at the point of deciding what field of interest they'd like to explore," Estep explained. "For many, the shadowing opportunity confirms or rejects their career choice. We greatly appreciate the tremendous number of businesses that are willing to help students to really see what a particular career is all about."

For more information on Career Shadowing Week, contact the Blair County Chamber at (814) 943-8151. BASICS is an acronym for Businesses And Schools Investing in Cooperative Solutions.

Working Together Mutual respect helps Barr's to stay focused

Rick and Cindy Barr have been married for 38-years. They've worked together "off-and-on" for the past forty-one. As a result, Barr's Auto Electric in Altoona has built a strong reputation for high quality work at a fair price, done on-time.

"We're a small business with the same core of employees that have been with us for many years," Cindy acknowledged. "We try to do our best for our customers, whether they're commercial customers or private individuals. It's a formula that's been successful."

That formula has been simple, mostly through a well-defined delineation of duties. Rick serves as president of the company. His duties are rebuilder

and head of customer relations. Cindy is the office manager, handling customer service and bookkeeping.

"Working together allows us to keep each other's best interests at heart as well as doing what is best for the ongoing well-being of the business," Cindy admitted. "Sometimes, we find that we try to micromanage one another. It can get annoying so when that happens, we just remind ourselves how counterproductive that is to what we need to get accomplished."

Unlike some couples who can't resist the urge to discuss business long after the end of the workday, the Barr's have managed to keep after-hours shop-talk to a minimum.

"It doesn't happen very often," Rick pointed out. "We have other things in our lives to keep track of. Occasionally, when we have to make a trip out of town for a pickup or a delivery, we may discuss something at the business that still needs addressed. Otherwise, we're able to keep things separate."

So what advice would the Barr's give to other couples who suddenly find themselves working together?

"Understand that you won't always agree on everything," Cindy explained. "You need to try to work out those issues without getting angry. Anger serves no purpose and always makes things worse. The biggest thing is to always respect one another



Cindy and Rick Barr of Barr's Auto Electric have worked together, on-and-off, for 41 years.

and be supportive of each other. Try to leave work related issues at work as much as possible."

Barr's Auto Electric has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 2013.

Morrisons Cove Herald debuts Hollidaysburg edition

It's been more than three decades since the Borough of Hollidaysburg had its own newspaper. Allan Bassler, who owns the Morrisons Cove Herald with his wife Karen, believes three decades is long enough.

"I know from growing-up in the Hollidaysburg area that the community has always wanted its own newspaper," Bassler acknowledged. "There's a thriving community there but it lacks the 'center' that a news source provides. The Hollidaysburg Herald will be the place to go to find out not only what's happening this weekend, but also what the community is talking about and where it's going. A visitor will be able to glance at the website and see what a vibrant place Hollidaysburg is."

Did I mention that the Hollidaysburg Herald is an online publication?

"For now, it's online only," Bassler pointed out. "It's live and available to the public at www.hollidaysburgherald.com. One of the advantages of an online publication is that there is essentially unlimited space. So we've got a lot of room for the community to send us news, photos and updates. We're posting fresh content to the site every few days, as our correspondents turn in



Allan Bassler, owner of the Morrisons Cove Herald, is bringing a similar publication to Hollidaysburg.

stories and photos."

The newspaper industry has gone through tough times nationwide. Bassler is not convinced, however, that newspapers and similar print publications are on their way out.

"It's a myth that newspapers are dying," he emphasized. "In truth, they're just changing. Twenty years ago, no one got their news from their phone. Today a lot of people rely on their phones to provide at least updates on the news. A lot of news still comes from newspapers and other traditional news-gathering sources. What is changing is how people access that news."

Bassler doesn't believe that adding another newspaper to the local media climate will impact others in the industry.

"Like the Morrisons Cove Herald, the Hollidaysburg Herald will complement publications like the Altoona Mirror," he noted. "The Altoona Mirror is a larger provider with a wider reach. Our papers have a much narrower focus. Readers benefit when news organizations offer them choices. The area benefits as well."

The Morrisons Cove Herald has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 1988.

It's Happening!

Chamber Recognizes "All-Stars" for October

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 October are: AgChoice Farm Credit, Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries, Altoona Blair County Development Corp., Altoona Mirror, Blair Companies, Blair County Conservation District, DeGol Organization, DelGrosso Family of Companies, FirstEnergy, First National Bank, Hampton Inn Altoona, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, J.V. Meadows & Sons, Inc., Keller Engineers, Inc., KIZ Resources, LLC, Leonard S. Fiore, Inc., M&T Bank, New Enterprise Stone & Lime Co., Inc., Penn State Altoona, Reliance Bank, Ritchey's Dairy, Inc., Roaring Spring Water/Spring Cove Container, Saint Francis University, Seltzer Financial Strategies, Sheetz, Inc., Smith Transport, Stiffler, McGraw & Associates, Inc.,

Stuckey Automotive, The Hancock Group, Inc., UPMC Altoona, Ward Transport & Logistic Corp. White Deer Run Treatment Network, Wingate by Wyndham Altoona Downtown/Medical Center and Young, Oakes, Brown & Company, P.C.

Chamber Board Approves Four New Members

At its October 17th meeting, the Blair County Chamber's Board of Directors approved the following new members: Marcia's Chocolates of Altoona, Premier Cleaning & Restoration of Claysburg, Sport Clips of Altoona, and Verilla Real Estate of Altoona.

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 clicking-on 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.

Check Out the Chamber Website for More Business Advantages!!

Among the many exciting opportunities displayed on the Chamber Website are two icons that businesses can access to improve the way they do business. One icon includes the Toolkit for Workplace Wellness; the other has the Sustainability Survey that allows businesses to determine how environmentally prudent they are. Check them out!!

Congratulations . . .

. . . to Tim Parnell, CEO of Crossroads Physical Therapy and Seth Davis of the facility's Martinsburg Office who recently earned certifications from the American Institute of Balance for Vestibular Therapy.

. . . to Beth Evans, a registered nurse at Blair Gastroenterology Associates, who has been accepted into the City of Hope Intensive Course in genomic Cancer Risk Assessment Program.

. . . to Cynthia Hershey of the Railroaders Memorial Museum who was just elected Board President of Explore Altoona.

. . . to Cheryl Rawlings of Altoona, who was presented the Realtor Active in Politics Award in Harrisburg. The award recognizes exemplary legislative volunteerism on behalf of the Pennsylvania Association of Realtors. Rawlings works for Stultz Real Estate in Hollidaysburg.

. . . to Louann Hoffman, broker/owner of Lang Real Estate and Tax Service in Cresson, who recently earned the Commitment to Excellence endorsement from the National Association of Realtors. The endorsement goes to realtors who have demonstrated knowledge and competency in ten core areas of real estate practice.

Any suggestions or comments about the Blair Business Mirror, call Joe Hurd at (814) 943-8151 or email him at jhurd@blairchamber.com.

Encouraging

Job Fair gets high marks from attendees, businesses

The workforce challenges facing Blair County were front-and-center on October 16th at the Jaffa Shrine Center in Altoona as job seekers and those hoping to fill open positions got together for a four hour Job Fair.

The event was held through the collaboration of the Blair County Chamber, PA CareerLink, Altoona-Blair County Development Corporation and Southern Alleghenies Planning & Development Commission. Among the attendees was Eileen Cipriani, Deputy Secretary of Workforce Development.

"It was an exceptional event," acknowledged Gwen Fisher of CareerLink. "We were hopeful that the level of interest would match the needs that exist for employers and those looking for jobs. It more than accomplished that." One of the employers, Sherri Steward of NPC, Inc. agreed.

"We're thrilled by what we experienced here," she pointed out. "The building was packed. We were able to talk to a lot of people who are definitely good prospects. We're expecting to receive a lot of applications."

The numbers for the day were impressive. Exactly 100 employers had registered to attend; 92 actually did. A total of 489 job seekers attended. Thirty-seven of them were veterans. Local high schools were invited to make the Job Fair available to their seniors. Sixty-eight of those seniors did.

As far as the breakdown of industry sectors represented as employers was concerned, healthcare had the most, followed by manufacturing. Retail and hospitality were also prominent. And finally, the average number of positions available per-employer was 12.5.



Akari Smithmyer (left), Employee Training Coordinator at Cracker Barrel, talks to prospective clients at the recent Job Fair, held at the Jaffa Shrine Center.



Nearly 500 people inquiring about employment and 92 businesses seeking employees came together at the Job Fair.

"We knew that a need existed for a Job Fair, based on some of the layoffs that the area has endured," Fisher noted. "We now understand that we'll need to

hold similar events periodically so that we help connect the people who have jobs available with those who need them."

Welcome New Members...

MarCia's Chocolates

Ms. Marcia Cumming
122 Greenwood Road
Altoona, PA 16602
(814) 201-2504
Food Products/Services

Sport Clips

Mr. AJ Rodriguez
216 Park Hills Plaza
Altoona, PA 16602
(814) 934-0233
Beauty Salons/Barbers

Premier Cleaning & Restoration Inc.

Mr. Jeff Dietzel
191 Locust Street
Claysburg, PA 16625
(814) 239-8211
Cleaning & Restoration

Verilla Real Estate

Mr. Nathan Verilla
800 Valley View Blvd.
Altoona, PA 16602
(814) 201-2767
Real Estate/Appraisers

Economic Forecast

Federal Reserve Advisor to address Executive Roundtable

The Blair County Chamber's Executive Roundtable members will hear a presentation on November 20th that will likely influence some of their decisions for 2020.

Ryotaro Tashiro, Regional Economic Advisor for the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, will make that presentation and will cover a number of key issues. Among those issues will be: How has our economy performed so far in 2019? What are the challenges for 2020 and beyond? And how have Blair County and surrounding areas performed, relative to the rest of the state?

"As of this summer, we are in the longest economic expansionary period in modern U.S. history," Tashiro reports. "That makes for some interesting projections."

Denny Doll of Reliance Bank, who chairs the Executive Roundtable, is looking forward to hearing what Tashiro has to say.

"The Federal Reserve Bank has



RYOTARO TASHIRO

an understanding of the economy based on data that is current and accurate," Doll pointed out. "We're delighted to have access to information that will drive many of our decisions during 2020."

For more information on the Executive Roundtable, contact Joe Hurd at (814) 943-8151 or email him at jhurd@blairchamber.com.

Chamber Membership is a great investment!
Call the Chamber today at (814) 943-8151.

Chamber to again support Small Business Saturday

Nearly 85% of the membership of the Blair County Chamber is small business (50 employees or fewer). That makes it even more important that the Chamber does whatever it can to help promote and support small business.

One promotion that the Chamber has been solidly onboard with since its inception is Small Business Saturday. That initiative was created by American Express to educate shoppers to the importance of buying from small businesses and then encouraging them to do so.

"The Chamber has been very vocal in advocating for small businesses and reminding people of their importance," explained Darin Tornatore, Chamber board chair and himself a small business owner. "Our small businesses often feel lost among the big box

stores. In so many ways, we offer better value and more personalized service. That shouldn't be a secret."

In Blair County, it's not just the small businesses that rally to support Small Business Saturday. A number of large businesses display signage during Black Friday to remind people to shop small the following day. And some local providers step up to create a more convenient environment for shoppers. One of those is Amtran, which offers free rides all day on all routes. The company has been making that offer for the past five years.

"Amtran supports Small Business Saturday because it believes in the importance of local small businesses," noted Deputy CEO Josh Baker. "These community partners are a vital thread in the

fabric of our area, providing quality goods and services as well as employment opportunities for the people of Blair County. We feel our commitment to provide free rides on Small Business Saturday as a way to support the very people who work, shop and play in our community every day."

This year, Small Business Saturday is on November 30th. The Chamber has once again been approved as a partnering agency with American Express. That usually means that the Chamber is provided promotional materials to make available to its members.

"The past couple years, that process has been very last-minute," admitted Stacy Hoover of the Chamber. If and when those materials arrive we will do our best to get them to those businesses that express an interest."



Josh Baker of Amtran is looking forward to once again making Small Business Saturday a success by offering free bus rides to shoppers.

National Philanthropy Day Event set for November 15th

By Jodi Cessna

The Allegheny Mountains Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) will hold their annual National Philanthropy Day Workshop and Awards Event on Friday, November 15th at Park Hills Golf Club.

AFP is the professional association of individuals and organizations that generate philanthropic support for many different types of charitable organizations. Founded in 1960, AFP has more than 31,000 members in more than 240 chapters. Their mission is to strive to stimulate a world of generosity and positive social good through fundraising best practice. To meet this mission, AFP requires members to comply with a Code of Ethical Principles and Standard and was instrumental in creating and maintaining A Donor Bill of Rights. AFP also provides educational programs about fundraising.

The Allegheny Mountains Chapter of the AFP, of which I am very proud to be a

charter member, began in 2002 and has been hosting this event since 2004. Our chapter covers Blair, Bedford, Cambria, Centre, Clearfield, Fulton, Huntingdon, Indiana, Mifflin and Somerset counties. The speakers for this year's event will be:

Stacey-Ann Okoth, Vice-president of Patient Care Services, Chief Nursing Officer, UPMC Altoona and UPMC Bedford, speaking about "Diversity in practice" and Joe Scialabba, Manager of Annual Leadership Gifts and Annual Giving at Penn State University speaking on "Developing a successful annual appeal that works for your organization." The event will

begin with a light breakfast, continue with the speakers and will end with the Chapter's Awards Luncheon where the Outstanding Professional Fundraiser and Outstanding Volunteer Awards will be presented. The sponsors for this year's event are UPMC Altoona, Central Pennsylvania Community Foundation, Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries and the Independent Catholic Foundation. The cost to

attend is \$30 per person. If you have not yet made your reservation please do so immediately by contacting Sally Ernest at UPMC Altoona Foundation. If you would like more information about becoming a

member of our AFP chapter, please contact me at cessna@centralpagives.org.

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



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Chamber's Sustainability Committee part of Educational In-Service

For Sustainability to have its rightful place within the local business community, it's essential that the concept be effectively communicated to students in area schools, all along the educational path. And just as essential that educators understand how to make that communication part of the instructional process.

As part of the recent Blair County In-Service for K-12 teachers and central office staff, the Chamber's Sustainable Blair County Committee presented, "Sustainability in Blair County," a two-hour long session addressing a number of key topics.

"The topics delivered by our presenters focused on Sustainability as it applies

to schools, the general public and businesses," explained Tim Gildea, principal of Longer Elementary School and a member of the Sustainable Blair County Committee. "The primary goal was to establish a teacher team that had a special interest in Sustainability and was responsible for delivering the sustainable message to our youth within our Blair County schools."

The teacher team will meet semi-annually to share ideas. In addition, the business arm of the Sustainable Blair County Committee will share its thoughts and provide support to the team. It creates a reciprocal benefit, according to Gildea.

"Through the efforts of

our committee, it is becoming more obvious that businesses located within Blair County are realizing the need for increasing the awareness and need for sustainable practices," he disclosed. "These business owners know that in order for sustainable practices to become commonplace, we must start with the mindset of those young people who will soon be leading our county. They may be students today, but in a few years they'll be young adults looking for a place to call home where sustainable practices are acceptable and expected."

For more information on Sustainable Blair County, call the Blair County Chamber at (814) 943-8151.



Tim Gildea (right), Principal of Longer Elementary School in Hollidaysburg and a member of the Chamber's Sustainable Blair County Committee, talks to educators at the recent Blair County In-Service about the importance of having local schools working together on sustainable programs.

Rail king

Schmitt updates Chamber Transportation Committee



State Representative Lou Schmitt (2nd from left) spoke to the Chamber's Transportation Committee on October 31st about the challenges that the state has in funding passenger rail. In the photo are, from left: Jim Pruss of PennDOT, Schmitt, Don Rossman of ARROW Land Solutions and Chuck Myers of Lehman Engineers.

For several years, the Blair County Chamber's Transportation Committee has had difficulty addressing issues that deal with rail transportation.

"We really haven't had anyone on the committee who brings an extensive level of knowledge on rail, so our emphasis hasn't often moved in that direction," acknowledged Pat Miller of ABCD Corporation, who chairs the Transportation Committee.

That transportation sector, however, got a positive shot in the arm earlier this year when State Representative Lou Schmitt was appointed by House leadership as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Railroads. Schmitt spoke to the Chamber's Transportation Committee on October 31st and is likely to be a frequent visitor to that group as issues with passenger rail become more prominent. On passenger rail, he left little doubt where he stands.

"I'd like to see two or three more


passenger trains," Schmitt pointed out. "We need to step up to the plate and recognize how underserved we are between Pittsburgh and Harrisburg. There are a dozen trains a day east of Harrisburg and they're packed. It could be that way here as well."

He's realistic enough to know that the obstacles, particularly from the finance side, are steep.


"We're not heading toward a funding crisis. We're in a funding crisis," Schmitt explained. "We're paralyzed at the federal level. The state needs to take the lead."

Schmitt believes that much of the support necessary to move the needle on passenger rail will come from millennials.

"They prefer being able to get work done as they ride to work on a train," he noted. "They don't want to sit in a car in slow traffic. Their input will be valuable as this issue becomes more controversial."




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Ever After**



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the Altoona Mirror**

Forms and details
are available at the
Mirror office or by emailing
couples@altoonamirror.com



Five elected to Chamber Board

Four current members of the Blair County Chamber's Board of Directors and one new member have been elected to the 2020 Board.

Richard Fiore, Jr. of Leonard S. Fiore, Inc., Neil Hollander of Altoona Pipe & Steel, Todd Lewis of Shoefly Stores and Amy Mearkle of DelGrosso's Amusement Park were elected to second three-year terms. Patrick Miles of AmeriServ Bank was elected to an initial three-year term.

"It's great to have the continuity that these board members bring, particularly with some of

the initiatives that we have coming up," remarked Chamber Board Chair Darin Tornatore. "And it will be great to add Pat Miles, who has played a significant role in chairing our BASICS/Rotary Career Fair since its inception."

Three additional members will be added to the Chamber Board in December to serve one-year terms. The Chamber Board consists of twenty-one members. Board members Matt Stuckey of Stuckey Automotive and John Beyer of PennCrest Bank will complete their board terms in December.



RICHARD FIORE



NEIL HOLLANDER



TODD LEWIS



AMY MEARKLE



PAT MILES



Best Practices in Marketing Research

By Explore Altoona staff

According to the Travel and Tourism Research Association, few industries are as dynamic or as exciting as travel and tourism. The industry is being reimagined each day and, thus, remade by tectonic shifts in culture, economics, and technology. Professional practitioners, university academics, and users of research are in constant need of quality research upon which to make informed decisions. TTRA has provided such resources and best practices in research for more than 45 years and has been the travel industry's go-to for evidence-based global data and analysis.

As a result of having additional budget dollars to invest in seasonal marketing and realizing that marketing research has been one area that Explore Altoona has had the need to increase, Executive Director Mark Ickes and Marketing & Membership Manager, Jennifer Fleck attended TTRA's annual Marketing Outlook Forum, held in Bethesda, MD in early October.

Renowned speakers during the three-day conference included Adam Sacks, President of Tourism Economics, who spoke on the Outlook of the Tourism Economy; Tourism Economics is the agency which produces PA's Department of Community & Economic Development's annual tourism impact reports. "I have heard Adam speak on many occasions at conferences for both our state associations like the PA Association of CVBs as well as the PA Association of Travel & Tourism and our national association, Destinations International. He has an extremely well-versed knowledge of the importance of the economic



Several PA tourism marketing colleagues gather at the recent Marketing Outlook Forum hosted by Travel & Tourism Research Association. Left to right, Michael Chapaloney, Executive Director of the PA Tourism Office; Ashley Schroeder, PhD, Assistant Professor of Recreation, Park & Tourism Management for Penn State University; Leslie Kistner, Director of Public Affairs of the Happy Valley Adventure Bureau; Jennifer Fleck, Marketing & Membership Manager of Explore Altoona; and Mark Ickes, Executive Director of Explore Altoona.

analyses of travel spending and combines it with his own unique style of making the numbers interesting at the same time," says Ickes. "I attended my first marketing research conference with MOF in Philadelphia in 2015 and found the sessions to be not only interesting but very timely for our destination having met reps from Smith Travel Research, the leading global provider of hotel stats and analyses."

For more than thirty years,

the Marketing Outlook Forum's philosophy has been centered on one simple formula: Research and Forecasts + Marketing Insights + Informed Strategy = Success.

The anticipated takeaway from this year's conference has provided Explore Altoona with key ingredients for its 2020 budget planning, marketing campaign strategy, and for potential partnership programming speakers.

Find what you need in the **Altoona Mirror**
CLASSIFIEDS

Bob Perks Fund impacting cancer patients

One of the worst predicaments that cancer patients face when fighting to stay alive is how to pay their bills and feed their families. Bob Perks, a State College native with a wife and two small children, witnessed that predicament on a regular basis during his own battle with melanoma. He was determined to help in whatever ways that he could.

When Bob succumbed to the disease in 2006, his wife Doreen, his family, friends and colleagues established the Bob Perks Cancer Assistance Fund to help struggling cancer patients pay for non-medical basic expenses. During its first seven years, the Fund operated primarily as a volunteer organization. With a pressing need to spread its wings in Blair, Clearfield and Huntingdon counties, its board of directors hired Norma Keller as its first executive director in 2013. Much has been accomplished as the result of her efforts but much more, she admits, needs to be done.

"Because we are such a small organization and have focused much of our attention on our relationships with referral sources, we currently face the great challenge of raising our profile to inform potential funding sources and the community-at-large about our mission," Keller

disclosed. "In some cases, the message has resonated quickly, in others it is taking a little longer."

Blair and Clearfield counties could use a boost.

"We are proud to say that every dollar raised in the four counties that we serve is allocated exclusively to the residents of those counties," Keller acknowledged. "However, in Blair and Clearfield counties, the need is much greater than the funds that we raise."

In 2018, the Bob Perks Cancer Assistance Fund allocated \$93,968 donated dollars to Blair County Cancer patients and received \$34,863 from Blair County donors.

"Most of these dollars were received from UPMC Altoona, the UPMC Altoona Foundation and Sheetz," Keller pointed out. "We assume the responsibility for this discrepancy. We need to inform more Blair County donors what a huge difference they can make in the lives of their neighbors battling cancer."

There have been some local fundraisers that have generated needed dollars. Linda Cruz, owner of the Beauty Salon in Tyrone has spearheaded a number of efforts that have raised more than \$20,000, the most recent in partnership with the Bellwood Eagles Club. In Southern

Blair County, a grassroots organization called Cove Cause for Cancer also held fundraisers with proceeds going to the Bob Perks Fund.

"These are fantastic examples of what a few people can do to change the lives of people who depend on the generosity of our communities," Keller noted.

The process to apply for funding is simple. Referral sources in local hospital and local medical facilities submit patient applications to a nine-person Bob Perks Allocation Committee. The Committee reviews all circumstances related to the cancer diagnosis, treatment plan, the patient's cancer struggles and financial needs. Cancer patients may submit applications up to four times annually, if their continuing need is documented by members of their cancer treatment team.

More information about the Bob Perks Fund is available at bobperksfund.org. Online donations can also be made on this site. Groups, businesses, churches, local foundations wanting to hold an event or make a donation should contact Norma Keller at nkeller@bobperksfund.org.

Bob Perks Cancer Assistance Fund has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 2015.



"Feet UP" from the Rock the 80's Concert at The State Theatre in State College featuring Olivia Jones and Mark Toci, of the JR Mangan Band

BASICS Committee holding Business Advisory Sessions

The Blair County Chamber's largest committee is looking for balance. At least in terms of input.

The BASICS Steering Committee, which oversees a number of programs that deal primarily with workforce and career development, is largely comprised of members from the education community. Only a few of the committee members come from the business side.

"It's important to get more of the business perspective," acknowledged Leslie Estep of the Tyrone Area School District, who co-chairs the committee. "Businesses have always supported our programs and events. We really want to find more ways to get

them to the table."

So the BASICS Committee put together a Business Advisory Session on September 25th and invited a number of CEO's and Human Resources people. Paul Hutchison, a retired businessman who serves on the committee, served as moderator.

"We wanted to make sure that these people had a good understanding of what we're doing and why it's important for them to be involved," Hutchison noted. Much of the Business Advisory Session focused on two subjects in particular: Career Shadowing and Work-based Learning.

"These programs are ones that require a high degree of business involvement," Hutchison pointed

out. "The business people seemed interested in having further discussion and we've since provided follow-up."

Another Business Advisory Session has been scheduled for December 12th. This one will solicit feedback on what the businesses would most like to see from the committee in terms of workforce initiatives.

"We provided information to the businesses at the first session," Hutchison explained. "This time we hope to do more listening to what they consider to be valuable."

For more information on BASICS, contact Joe Hurd at the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or email him at jhurd@blairchamber.com.



Brandon Burns (center) of Appvion was one of the business leaders who attended a meeting with members of the Chamber's BASICS Committee. Shown with Burns are BASICS Committee members, Neil Hollander (left) and Paul Hutchison.

LinkUp

Annual Technology Conference in its 22nd year

With technology playing a more significant role in the ability of businesses to stay relevant, Blair County enjoys the good fortune of having one of the largest technical conferences in Central and Western Pennsylvania in its own backyard.

LinkUp was first held in 1998 as the Link Computer Corporation in Bellwood looked for new and innovative ways for customers and prospects to understand the breadth of the products and services that the company provided.

"Even longtime customers will understand something new that we do that can help us strengthen our business relationship with them," explained Jack Collins, Link's COO. "By holding it in the fourth quarter, it also helps to work with customers on their technology budget for the upcoming year."

This year's LinkUp was held October 9th at the Blair County Convention Center. As always, it was well-attended, hardly surprising since it featured global speakers from industry leading technology companies like Cisco, IBM and Microsoft.

"The typical attendee is a technical person with a title of Director of IT or Network Administrator," Collins disclosed. "LinkUp does attract some owners and executive managers but not as many as the technical staff. The type of the organiza-



Jack Collins (right), COO of Link Computer Corporation, greets Tim Serbin of Link Computer (left) and Joe Pacuska of 8x8 at the recent LinkUp event.

tion they represent is cross-industry including finance, manufacturing, distribution, services, non-profits, along with education and governmental entities."

So what were the differences between this year's LinkUp and those of the recent past?

"The key technology trends were the strong interest of the attendees in cloud solutions and security strategies," Collins pointed out. "Overall, we saw growth in attendance over 2018 which we believe is a sign that organizations are putting more investment into technology to drive productivity and profit."

The 2020 LinkUp will likely be

similar to this year's conference, he acknowledged.

"We made several key changes this year that proved to be key enhancements," Collins noted. "As a result, the 2020 show will have much of the same focus. We added some longer 'deep dive' sessions allowing vendors to outline a technology area in more depth while also creating a demo area where vendors could highlight a specific product or concept. Both were well-received and will continue in 2020."

Link Computer Corporation has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 1987.

Thanks...

For continuing to recognize the value of Chamber Membership

(Chamber Memberships renewed in the month of October.)

Celebrating 53 Years

First Commonwealth Bank

Celebrating 40 Years

Bill Wertz & Sons, Inc.

Celebrating 32 Years

Greenwood Drugs

Celebrating 20-29 Years

Allegheny Supply

and Maintenance Co., Inc.

Altoona Area School District

Barton's Plumbing & Heating, Inc.

CBIZ Insurance Services, Inc.

Suzanne Egan, Inc.

Hess & Marino, CPA

Homewood Retirement Community

Ritchey's Dairy, Inc.

The Summit Tennis & Athletic Club

Celebrating 10-19 Years

Alleghenies United Cerebral Palsy

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CrossRoads Physical

Therapy & Rehabilitation, Inc.

Forney, White & Wagner

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J & P Auto Mart

Lightner Electronics, Inc.

Rizzo & Wiegner Chiropractic

Sounds Good Media

Veteran Community Initiatives, Inc.

Celebrating 5-9 Years

Advanced Chiropractic

Bestway Pizza

Blue Knob Auto Sales, Inc.

DQ Grill & Chill Logan Town Centre

DVJ Enterprises, Inc.

dba Slinky Action Zone

Element Church of God

Grier School

Kerr Kreations Floral & Gift Shoppe

Kerr Landscaping, Inc.

Myers-Somers Funeral Home, Inc.

The Nehemiah Project

Operation Our Town, Inc.

George A. Schultz & Son, Inc.

(Schultz Company)

Celebrating 1-4 Years

Association of Fundraising

Professionals, Allegheny

Mountains Chapter

Central States Manufacturing, Inc.

Coach4Retirees, Inc.

eLeet Computer Solutions Inc

Girls Night Out Altoona, Inc.

Rodney Green

Greenbean Coffee House

Maddie Cakes

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D'Andrea proud of Saleme's 65-year history

Although Barry D'Andrea can't lay claim to all 65-years of Saleme Insurance's outstanding history, he's always been impressed with the people who have guided the company since its founding. As current President of Saleme Insurance, Barry and his wife Jennifer purchased the business in 2004. Barry has been involved in many community enterprises and he has been a board member of a number of organizations, including the Blair County Chamber and the Chamber Foundation. He and Jennifer have two sons, Dominick (23) and Vincent (20).

The Chamber: In your estimation, what circumstances have been responsible for Saleme Insurance's ability to thrive for 65 years?

Barry: It all starts with the founder, James F. Saleme. It was 1954 when Jim decided to open an independent insurance agency in the Juniata section of Altoona, PA. He founded Saleme Insurance on the principles of treating people right and exceeding their expectations. 65 years and three generations later, those same values still guide Saleme. Jerry Hymes, Jennifers' father purchased the agency from his father-in-law, Jim in 1979. Jerry continued to build the agency with expertise and cutting edge products serving both personal and commercial clients. Through Jerry's mentorship and guidance, we built the book of business through hard work and dedication to the client, believing that



Barry D'Andrea has been both a successful business leader as well as a successful community leader.

Chamber Q&A

the true measure of success was client happiness. We can't do this without the help of our staff. We know them to be the best customer centric people in the industry. To this day the company thrives on the knowledge that the most important thing we have to gain is our clients' trust.

The Chamber: What changes have you witnessed in your time in the insurance business that have made the most dramatic impact on the industry?

Barry: Technology has changed

the industry immensely. The process of rating a policy has become extremely nuanced and driven by algorithms. Each individual has a unique insurance score and the insurance companies use different data to input into the rating system. This has created large discrepancies in what companies charge. As an agent, we have a hard time explaining why a particular policy is far less or far more expensive with a particular carrier. Fortunately our agency has a very high closing ratio because of the carriers we represent, The Erie Insurance Group is extremely competitive and a perennial JD Powers and Associates award winner.

The Chamber: Your business has been downtown for a long

period of time. While others have moved out, Saleme Insurance has stayed. Why has that been a good decision?

Barry: Saleme moved to the downtown in 1982. There have been some ups and downs over the years, no doubt. The reason we have stayed here is very simple, our clients. We have been serving Altoona for 65 years and we have a significant amount of those clients in 16601. We have always kept the commitment to them to be here so they can stop by easily, make a payment, file a claim or ask questions. We are busy at the front counter and if we were out on the boulevard, we may lose that connection with them. The human connection is very important to us and our customers. We are actually about to embark on a major renovation project to make our space even more inviting to our customers.

The Chamber: As you look at the next generation of business leaders, what excites you and what makes you nervous?

Barry: What excites me is the influx of fresh ideas in commerce that come along with that. I look at this next generation as a group that doesn't work within the confines of "four walls" thinking. They were essentially raised with answers to problems just a click away. It will give them the freedom to tailor a buyer's experience to their individual taste. They will be able to accomplish this while also giving their employees the freedom to work from different environments. What

makes me nervous is that in my specific industry the workforce is aging. Many young people aren't interested in a career in the insurance business. If we don't do a better job at recruiting and keeping young people we will be faced with significant challenges over the next 15 years as people in the business retire.

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

Barry: My father played a significant role in shaping who I am today. There was 45 years between us and that was significant when I was born in 1966. He was a World War 2 vet and a no-nonsense kind of guy. We ate dinner as a family every night of the week and that has been the single most important thing I continue to do with my family. I have only had two employers since graduating college 31 years ago. I count myself as an extremely lucky person to have been mentored by Phil Sky and Jerry Hymes. Phil taught me that you need to believe in yourself and Jerry taught me that you need to believe in what you sell.

The Chamber: What's on Barry D'Andrea's "bucket list?"

Barry: My bucket list isn't that big. However, I would like to go to Italy and visit the areas where my father and his father before him fought for our Nation in World War 1 and 2.

Series to focus on value of safety committees

As safety in the workplace takes-on even greater importance, it's rare that any business attempts to address safety issues without the benefit of a safety committee. Just having a committee, however, doesn't guarantee effectiveness or compliance.

For that reason, the Safety Committee of the Blair County Chamber will hold a two-part se-

ries entitled, "How Much Value Does Your Safety Committee Deliver?" Part I will be held on November 22nd with registration and breakfast at 7:30 a.m. and the program itself from 8:00 a.m. until 9:30. The location is Hoss's in Duncansville.

Barb Smith from Teeter Group will be the presenter. Attendees will learn about: Safety Committee Structure, Certify-

ing your safety committee in Pennsylvania, Operational functions and essential activities, Communication and record-keeping best practices, and Ways to increase safety awareness.

Part II of the series will be held on December 16th – same times, same location. The presenter will be Tom Churbock of HSE Solutions. Attendees will

learn about: Roles and responsibilities of the committee, Using systems and processes to break with tradition, and Doing a pulse check on your committee.

The cost to attend each session is \$20 for Chamber Members and \$30 for non-members. To register for either or both, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at www.blairchamber.com.



BARB SMITH

YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS *Academy*

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Ben Dombrosky
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Quinn Garrity
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Josh Holsopple
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Bishop Guilfoyle

Isaac Kuntz
Hollidaysburg

Ethan Lieb
Hollidaysburg

Zachary Manna
Bishop Guilfoyle

Drew McKillop
Hollidaysburg

Hugh Newman
Hollidaysburg

Marcus Osmolinski
Altoona

Meghan Snyder
Hollidaysburg

Michael Solimando
Hollidaysburg

Walt Wedel
Hollidaysburg

Zachary Zeigler
Altoona

YEA!

Businesses step-up to help make program successful

As the 2020 Class of the Blair County Chamber's Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!) finishes its first month, it's important to acknowledge that so much of the success of the program has been the result of the willingness of the business community to step-up in support of the program.

"We've been incredibly fortunate," admitted Chamber President Joe Hurd. "From sponsors and investors to instructors, mentors and session speakers, we've had great participation from people who genuinely understand how important this program is to the future of our region. The level of expertise has been stellar."

From the sponsor standpoint, seven businesses have currently signed-on. At the gold level are Sheetz, Inc. and UPMC Altoona. At the silver level are Hoss's Steak & Sea House and Ward Transport and Logistics. At the



YEA! students (from left) Morgan Baker, Marcus Osmolinski and Zachary Zeigler discuss potential business choices during a recent class session. The 2020 YEA! class has sixteen members.

bronze level are Leonard S. Fiore, Inc., Reliance Bank and Roaring Spring Water.

"We're still looking for additional sponsors," Hurd pointed

out. "Any businesses or individuals that would like to help would be greatly appreciated." Hurd will also be recruiting businesses to serve on the In-

vestor Panel. That money is allocated by the panel to help members of the YEA! class to complete their projects.

Once again this year, Jamie Miller, Paul Cooney and Matt Stuckey will serve as YEA! instructors. And of course, Royce Boyd returns as YEA! Program Manager.

"Those people are the best," Hurd noted. "This program would not function at the level it does without them."

The mentors, he pointed out, also play a major role. Since they don't enter the process until January, they are only now being recruited.

"Ideally, we'd love to have every one of them back from a year ago," Hurd disclosed. "They made a huge difference." Anyone interested in becoming a YEA! mentor should contact Hurd at (814) 943-8151.

Non-Profit 'Best Practices' to address volunteer impact

Non-profit businesses would be lost if it wasn't for volunteers.

So it makes sense that the Blair County Chamber's Committee of Non-Profit Businesses would commit one of its quarterly Best Practices Forums to discussing ways to recruit, retain and recognize volunteers. That Forum is set for December 6th from 8:15 to 9:45 a.m. at the Devorris Center for Business Development.

"It's a topic that often comes up at our committee meeting," admits Andrea Schurr, who chairs the committee. "As non-profits, we all compete for the same pool of people. It's always good to hear new ways of expanding our reach and getting potential volunteers to look in our direction."

The Best Practices Forum will feature a panel discussion with business people who routinely deal with volunteers and consider them an essential

part of what they do and how they do it. The panel consists of: Melanie Shildt, Executive Director of the United Way of Blair County; Beverly Green, External Affairs Manager at FirstEnergy who will talk about her company's VTO program; Debbie Pierce, Volunteer Director of Homewood at Martinsburg; and Brittany Solomon, Director of Donor Relations at Joshua House.

"It's an outstanding panel," Schurr pointed out. "They represent volunteerism from a variety of perspectives. I would encourage anyone who uses volunteers or who plans to, to attend this Forum."

The cost to attend the Best Practices Forum is just \$10 for Chamber Members and \$20 for non-members. To register, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at blairchamber.com. Seating is limited. Register today!



BEVERLY GREEN



DEBBIE PIERCE



MELANIE SHILDT



BRITTANY SOLOMAN

Setting the Pace

Jenn Hatch-Miller

Workplace Wellness Committee

Place of Work: The Summit Tennis & Athletic Club.

Position(s): Fitness Director, Program Director, Sales Director, Personal Trainer.

Years with current position: 5.

Position held in the Chamber: Workplace Wellness Committee.



Age: 35.

Family: Chris (husband & high school sweetheart), daughters Calie, Jaelee & Josie. Mack & Marty (dogs), Mr. Dinkles (cat).

Community organizations: Bellwood community, school & church event volunteer, passion to help raise donations for Mending Hearts Animal Rescue, Central PA Humane Society, St. Jude Children's Hospital & Relay for Life. Anywhere I can help make a difference — I want to be there!

Hobbies/Leisure: Penn State athletics, the beach is my happy place, traveling & exploring new places with my family, Italian food, helping animals, dancing, cheerleading, softball, baton twirling, working out, Pittsburgh Pirates.

Education: Lock Haven University, Bachelor's of Science, 2006 & Bellwood-Antis alumni 2002, Penn State University intern training 23 athletic teams.

First job: The Casino at Lakemont Park.

Personal Pet Peeve: Animals & children being neglected and/or feeling unloved, pollution/littering on our beautiful planet.

Personality: Dedicated, compassionate, sincere, silly (says my daughters), determined, team player, ambitious, orderly & organized, loveable. Live every day like it is your last!

Secret ambition: To raise our daughters to see the beauty in everyone, work hard to be successful and love life to the fullest. I also wish to find a way for kids and animals around the world to not get sick, not go hungry, but only be happy and loved!

I would like to be known for: Being the best mom and wife that my family deserves, and for being a positive role model in the community. I have a big heart and want to help everyone in any way I can.

Business Role Model: Walt Disney — He was a family man who believed in making dreams come true. Walt never gave up when things got tough even when others didn't care. He was an exceptional leader and made children's (and even adults) dreams come true.

Thoughts about the Chamber: I love how it brings people and businesses together. The Chamber works within the community and finds new ways to make Blair County special. As a business standpoint — networking is key to promote yourself and your business.

Thoughts about Altoona/Blair County: I am proud to call Blair County my home! It is beautiful and full of some wonderful people. Unfortunately our county is one of the unhealthiest counties in the state. I believe it is important to educate others, starting with the kids who are the future, and make Blair County one of the healthiest and happiest!

Stern happy to make a difference



Carol Stern regards her involvement with the Chamber's Leadership Blair County program as one of the best opportunities she's ever experienced.

"The program helps you with both individual and professional growth," the Williamsburg native acknowledged. "I met people from different backgrounds and occupations which helped expand my professional network. It also created some lifelong friendships."

Carol's professional growth was made more challenging by a dramatic change in career direction. She earned her teacher's license in cosmetology from Altoona Beauty School in 1978 and owned and operated her own beauty salon for ten years. During that time she started with Mid State Bank (now M&T) and now serves as Vice-President/Senior Branch Manager. She recently celebrated her 35th anniversary with the bank.

"I was fortunate that my bank has supported LBC throughout the years," Carol pointed out. "Previous graduates always spoke so highly about their experiences. I graduated from the program in 2001. It was everything I hoped it would be."

The aspect of servant leader-



Carol Stern of M&T Bank is a strong supporter of the Leadership Blair County program and a 2001 graduate of that program as well.

ship upon which the LBC program is based was incredibly important to Carol. It was a concept that brought back fond memories.

"My parents taught my siblings and me always to be caring and kind," she noted. "I think this is the core of a true servant leader. It's getting involved with your community, an organization or an individual cause. A true servant leader brings people together and combines their strengths and ideas to make a positive difference in their mutual goals."

Since graduating from LBC,

Carol has volunteered and/or participated in events for the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, Ronald McDonald House Charities and Saint Joseph Catholic Church in Williamsburg. She was also on the board of the Respiratory Disease Society and is a longtime Chamber Ambassador.

"I always hope that whatever time I can offer brings a sense of community and is received with heartfelt sincerity," Carol admitted. "It's a wonderful feeling knowing that you've made a difference."



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Ribbon-cutting



events

Escape Altoona Co.



Escape Altoona Co. celebrated the opening of their second escape room with a Chamber ribbon cutting. The new location, 820 12th Street, Altoona, includes two themed escape rooms filled with puzzles and brain-teasers. The objective is to find your way out of the room before the clock runs out. To learn more about Escape Altoona, visit their website at www.escapealtoona.com. Pictured at the ribbon, from left: Nancy McClelland, Chamber Ambassador; Nita Sanders, the office of State Representative Lou Schmitt; Sherri Stayer, Blair County Chamber Board of Directors; Amanda and Rob Eberhart, owners; Mayor Matt Pacifico, City of Altoona; Vicki Karns, Chamber Ambassador.

John Hill Real Estate



John Hill Real Estate has moved into a brand new building and the Chamber held a ribbon cutting to celebrate. They are now located in the Snare Plaza, 110 Jefferson St., Suite 105, Hollidaysburg. They are still offering the same great real estate services they have offered the area since 1942, just with a new look. Pictured at the ribbon, from left: Debbie Eckenrode, Chamber Ambassador; Jody Marks, Agent; Bruce Erb, Blair County Commissioner; Jamie Weakland, Receptionist; Terri Evey, Office Manager; Scott Weyer, Agent; Matt Evey, Broker/Owner; Missy Sullivan, Agent; Pete Lorelli, Agent; Jessie Covert, VP - Sales & Membership Development, Blair County Chamber of Commerce; Stacey Zimmerman, The Office of Senator Judy Ward; Evelyn Shields, Chamber Ambassador.

Kunzler & Company, Inc.



The Chamber held a ribbon cutting to celebrate Kunzler & Company, Inc.'s new bacon expansion. The 22,000 square foot addition includes a large warehouse, bacon tempering freezer, pressing room, wash room, cart storage room, utility area and a fresh pork belly storage area. Pictured at the ribbon, from left: Joe Hurd, President/CEO, Blair County Chamber of Commerce; Amanda Walker, the office of State Senator Judy Ward; Rose Black, Executive Director, Tyrone Area Chamber of Commerce; Craig Dutrow, Operations Manager, Kunzler & Company, Inc.; Chris Kunzler, President, Kunzler & Company, Inc.; Dave Grazier, Vice President/General Manager, Kunzler & Company, Inc.; Richard Fiore, Vice President, Leonard S. Fiore, Inc.; Brandon Court, Supervisor, Leonard S. Fiore, Inc.; Sherri Stayer, Chamber Ambassador.

Chamber Trip

French Riviera a 2020 destination

One of the universally accepted statements in the travel industry is that no one has ever had a bad time during a trip to the French Riviera. The Blair County Chamber is banking on that axiom and one of three Chamber trips during 2020 will head to that incredible part of the world.

The Chamber's nine-day trip to the French Riviera, with travel arrangements through Dream Vacations and Collette, will take place October 31st to November 8th. The itinerary includes visits to Nice, St. Tropez, Monte Carlo, Cannes and Monaco.

"It's a trip that we've always had an interest in offering," explained Chamber President Joe Hurd.

"We've talked to other chambers that have offered it and several are offering it a second time since it went so well the first time. The price is incredibly reasonable and the accommodations and amenities are terrific."

The Chamber is holding an informational meeting about the trip on November 13th at 6:00 p.m. at the Devorris Center for Business Development. The meeting will last no more than an hour. There is no cost to attend or obligation to sign up for the trip. The Chamber does ask that people who plan to attend, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 to let us know that you'll be there.



Monte Carlo is just one of the exotic destinations that are part of the Chamber's trip to the French Riviera.

Ribbon-cutting



events

Sport Clips Haircuts



Sport Clips Haircuts celebrated the grand opening of their Altoona location with a Chamber ribbon cutting. Sport Clips Haircuts specializes in mens and boys haircuts, offering a signature service titled the MVP Haircut Experience. The MVP includes a haircut, hot towel face massage, scalp shampoo and massage, and a neck and shoulder massage. Joined by the Sport Clips team are, from left: Joe Hurd, President/CEO, Blair County Chamber of Commerce; AJ Rodriguez, owner; Kayla Droust, Director of Operations; Al Rodriguez, owner; Nancy McClelland, Chamber Ambassador

Weber Murphy Fox, Inc.



The Chamber held a ribbon cutting to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Weber Murphy Fox State College location. At Weber Murphy Fox, project teams include professionals skilled in all aspects of design and construction. Weber Murphy Fox offers an integrated project delivery approach that offers clients the best value as they invest in their facilities and people. Pictured at the ribbon, from left: Joe Hurd, President/CEO, Blair County Chamber of Commerce; Robert Lingenfelter, Senior Associate; Anna Childe, Principal; Theodore Thwing, LEED Green Associate, Landscape Architect; Anthony Grace, CM Project Manager.