

Blair Business Mirror



December 2019

Still thriving

Cover story:
Peterman's Flower Shop
continues impressive history
.....PAGES 3

Altoona chiropractors have
harmonious goals
.....PAGE 5

Ribbon Cuttings
.....PAGE 15-16

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Chamber Notes

Heading to 2020 with my hair on fire

Sometimes the hardest part of writing this column is coming-up with an appropriate title. My original title for this one was "Heading to 2020 with a sense of urgency." I was sure that I could do better. The title above indicates that I was mistaken.

For the record, my hairline could sustain an actual fire for about five seconds. You'd have better luck lighting my eyebrows.

My point in all this is that I'm looking forward to 2020 with a high degree of optimism, despite the fact that I live in a coun-

try preparing to undertake a presidential election that promises to be dreadful. It's incredibly unfortunate that our political process at the federal level has deteriorated to the degree that the only real thing that we all have in common is that we hope it ends soon.

Moving on, I have identified a few things that will impact the Chamber, its members and the Blair County business community during the months ahead.

■ At the 2020 Annual Meeting & Awards Presentation, the Chamber will present an award that is long overdue. The Educator of the Year Award will acknowledge the significant role that our local schools play in preparing our current and future workforce for careers that are essential to our economic growth. We are one of the fortunate counties where our businesses and our schools recognize the value of working together and actually do it.

■ Continuing on the workforce theme, the Chamber intends to rally the troops to put together a regional effort that will address the challenges that our counties face in a tight labor market. It's a monumental effort that will require cooperation among chambers, economic development organizations, career and technology centers and higher education providers. A heavy lift at a critical time.

■ As the Chamber embarks on updating its Strategic Business Plan, expect to see some changes. One that has already been

approved by the Chamber Board of Directors is making the Business Hall of Fame Dinner a biennial event. The dinner marked its 30th year this past October. While the prestige of the event has remained at a high level, the number of nominations over the past few years has experienced a drop-off. There is also evidence that businesspeople are beginning to limit the number of evening events they attend. Those factors are likely to spur a healthy amount of discussion.

■ With advocacy becoming a top priority of the Chamber, the "Blair County Strong Futures Initiative," created by our Public Policy Committee and approved by our Board, will be a document that will influence how we keep the business community at the table on a variety of issues that have the potential to become political battlegrounds. The Strong Futures Initiative came about as the result of some disturbing trends that emerged during last spring's primary election.

■ If there's one major obstacle for the Chamber to overcome that involves staffing during 2020, it is the announcement that Vice-President of Programming and Education Judy Juda will be retiring in June. Judy has been with the Chamber for the past twenty-seven years and has been largely responsible for the growth of the Leadership Blair County program (Adult, Youth and Alumni) and WE-LEaD as well as overseeing the planning and execution of Breakfast Club, the Annual Meeting & Awards Presentation, the Business Excellence Dinner and the Business Hall of Fame. The learning-curve for Judy's successor will be ridiculous.

Clearly, 2020 will be a year of transition for the Chamber. Member involvement in programs and events, a key ingredient in the organization's growth, will be more important than ever. We will also be in a recruiting mode to add more of our businesses to our membership. The strength of our business community will require that fewer businesses sit on the sideline, hoping that others carry the load.

On behalf of the Chamber, I wish you a happy holiday season and eagerly anticipate (with smoldering hair) a great 2020!



JOE HURD

New Members



The Blair County Chamber of Commerce welcomed its newest members at the 548th Breakfast Club in November. Pictured with Chamber Board Member Amy Mearkle (far left) are, left to right, Marcia Cumming and Vince Cumming, MARCIA'S CHOCOLATES; Jeff A. Dietzel and Jeff J. Dietzel, PREMIER CLEANING & RESTORATION, INC.

Double the Networking Business After Hours

Jaffa Shrine Center

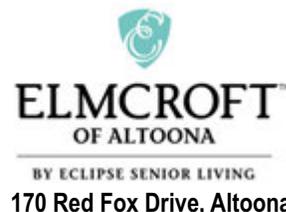


2200 Broad Avenue, Altoona

Welcome to the Jaffa Shrine Center, a full service catering facility located in Altoona, PA. The Jaffa Shrine Center has so much to offer when planning your next event. With a capacity of 3,500 in our Auditorium and 900 in our Banquet Hall, we are able to accommodate wedding receptions, rehearsal dinners, business meetings, conferences, concerts, seminars, trade shows and so much more. Our professional staff will make sure your event is unique and memorable. Please call Heather Chestney, Facility Coordinator, at (814) 949-6215 to book your next event.

Thursday, December 19 • 5 - 7 p.m.

Elmcroft of Altoona



170 Red Fox Drive, Altoona

Elmcroft of Altoona is a senior care community offering personal care and senior housing to give residents the independence they deserve as well as help when they need it. Senior residents at Elmcroft of Altoona choose their own agenda and activities and enjoy a comfortable, sociable, relaxing lifestyle among the beautiful rolling hills of Blair County.

Thursday, January 23 • 5 - 7 p.m.

On the Cover: Andrea Hammel has owned Peterman's Flower Shop for the past eight years. She has worked at the business for the past twenty-five years.

On the Cover

100 Years

Peterman's Flower Shop continues impressive history

Any business of any kind that is still thriving at the ripe old age of 100 is obviously doing something right. Andrea Hammel has a tough time not cracking a satisfying smile when confronted with that observation.

As President/Owner/Designer at Peterman's Flower Shop in the Juniata section of Altoona, Hammel has worked at the business for the past twenty-five years, prior to purchasing it eight years ago. She is philosophical as she defines her role in helping people to express their feelings through flowers.

"My job is to respond to and help people to choose a floral tribute pertaining to any matter of the heart," Hammel points out. "This could be for sympathy, love, congratulations, anniversaries – even just a 'thinking of you' bouquet for someone having a tough day. Each phone call or walk-in customer has something important happening in their life and must be handled with kindness and compassion."

Peterman's Flower Shop originally started in a small space over what is now Mauk & Yates Funeral Home. George Peterman, the original owner, and his wife Laura built the existing building that houses the flower shop in 1920. Their formula for early success, according to Hammel, was fairly simple.

"They were reputable and they were reliable," she acknowledged. "Every



Brooke Alwine (right), Workroom Manager at Peterman's Flower Shop, helps prepare a holiday arrangement.

business sees its ups and downs, but showing people that you truly care about their needs is so important. People know when you're honest and genuine. George Peterman and his family are very well known and respected, even now."

If the example of the Petermans wasn't enough to provide Hammel with a strong base of knowledge and business acumen, she also had access to a lady named Sandy Schwabenbauer who knew the floral business inside out. Sandy Schwabenbauer is Hammel's mother.

"Much of my childhood was spent playing in mounds of dirt with my brother in a greenhouse in Noblesville, Indiana where my mother owned a small flower shop," Hammel remembers. "We moved to Altoona when I was thirteen and that's when she purchased Peterman's. She brought the business back to life after a tough time for the Peterman family. She focused on more modern designs and kept the Peterman's name. I started working for her in 1994 and she and a few other incredibly talented designers taught me the

art of floral design. She also sent me to learn design basics at the Pittsburgh Floral Academy."

In the years since, Hammel has been adept at weathering the changes within an industry that keeps evolving.

"The business itself changes with popular trends much the same as fashion and decor," she points out. "There are always the classics like long-stemmed roses designed in a vase that never go out of style. However, the floral industry itself has changed drastically. A strong and beautifully presented web-

site is essential – ours gives people options for different occasions, different styles and different price ranges.

"We are members of the Society of American Florists (SAF), Teleflora and Team Floral. All of these groups provide training in new design techniques and information on everything from how weather around the world will affect growing seasons to new tariffs that might change our prices. They keep us (as small business owners) updated on new laws that might affect our employees or payroll and

they even represent us in DC when necessary."

With floral businesses aligning to help keep the industry strong, does that mean that there's no need to compete for customers?

"To begin with, there are fewer flower shops in Blair County than there were ten years ago," Hammel disclosed. "Many places like Home Depot and grocery stores carry and sell flowers and plants. I do not see this as competition. Not at all. I have a firm knowledge of what I sell, confidence in my designs, pride in my work, personal service and delivery. I'm pretty sure other flower shops feel the same way. It's not an industry that lends itself to cut-throat tactics."

One change that does irritate many florists is the all-too-common obituary notation "in lieu of flowers." Hammel is not among those willing to lose sleep if people choose alternatives to what many still regard as a standard tradition.

"It doesn't make me angry at all," she emphasizes. "I completely understand that many funeral directors have the giant task of dealing with flowers from shops all over town – the water spilling, the leaves on the floor, the transport from the funeral home to the gravesite. I get it! However, my obituary will read, 'in lieu of meatballs and rigatoni, please send flowers.'"

Peterman's Flower Shop has been a member of the Blair County Chamber since 1943.

Career Shadowing Week: Businesses make it work

With the incredible planning that takes place each year to make certain that high school juniors have an opportunity to look at careers from close-up, the other side of the equation is the willingness of businesses to host those students.

“Our committee makes the arrangements,” explains BASICS Subcommittee Co-Chair Judy Rossi. “But ultimately, it’s the hosting businesses that play a huge role in how successful this program turns out to be. And believe me, we are so fortunate to have so many businesses in our community that recognize the importance of helping young people.”

The following are the businesses that hosted students during the 2019 Career Shadowing Week:

258 Air Traffic Control Squadron
4 Seasons Farm
611 MRI
A & K Inspection Services
Albemarle Corp.
Allegheny Brain and Spine Surgeons
Allegheny Pain Management
Altoona Area School District
Altoona Curve
Altoona Family Physicians
Altoona Fire Department
Altoona Mirror
Altoona Pipe & Steel Supply Co.
Altoona Police Department
AMC Classic 12 Altoona
AMED
Ansley RV
ARL Engineering
Assembly Solutions
AT & T
Baechle Architects
Becks Property Maintenance
Bellwood-Antis School District
Bill Sell’s Bold Restaurant
Blair Companies
Blair County Acupuncture & Nutrition
Blair County Convention Center
Blair County District Attorney’s Office



Madalyn McCloskey (left), a junior at Bellwood-Antis High School learns some of the fine points of cosmetology from Lindsey Makin of Glow Salon in Altoona.

Blair Dental Associates
Blair Medical Associates
Blair Regional YMCA
Body First Chiropractic
BrandDemon
Burket Auto Repair
Cartharsis
Central PA Asthma & Allergy Care
Central PA Humane Society
Central PA Physicians Group
Children’s Community Pediatrics
City of Altoona
Coldwell Banker Town and Country Realty
Colossium Salon & Day Spa
Conemaugh Nason Hospital
Courtesy Motor Sales Inc
Creative Writers Open Mic
Cumming Motors, Inc.
Curry Fluid Power
Curwensville Area School District
Dairyside Veterinary Services
Del Grosso’s Amusement Park
District Magistrate Fred Miller
Dr. Robert Sullivan, MD
Drayer Physical Therapy
Drs. Centar, Imler, Gjurich and Caldwell
Electric Motor and Supply
Epworth Manor
Fabulous Fido
Fairfield by Marriott

Federated Auto Parts (Fisher Auto Parts)
First Church of Christ
Fox Hollow Boutique
Fry’s Construction
Fulton Financial Advisors (Forney Financial Advisors)
G&R Excavating
Galaxy Sound & Communications, Inc.
Gingrich Insurance Agency
Global Powerline Academy
Glow Salon & Spa
Grabill & Seelye PLLC
Headlines
Health First Chiropractic
Hilecrest Farm LLC
Hollidaysburg Area School District
Humble & Kind Boutique
InspectionGo
International Group
Joseph Oricko Architect Associates
Judy Coutts, Architect
Keller Engineers
Lauritsen Transport
Link Computer Corporation
Maddie Cakes
Martin Oil Company
McCloskey Builders
McLanahan Corporation
McQuaide Blasko, Inc.
MH Electric, LLC
Michael DePiro Productions
Minetech Engineers



Dr. Michael Reed of Drs. Reed and Sahlaney Orthodontics does an examination of patient Jordan McClure as part of a Career Shadowing experience for Altoona Area High School students Grazia Macharola (left) and Hannah Mashensic.

Monarch Cleaners
Mt. Laurel Daycare & Preschool
New Pig
Okonack, Dean & Lechner PC
Pa. Office of Atty General - Bureau of Narcotics Investigation
Pater Counseling
Pediatric Dental Care/Anesthesia Association of Central Pa
Pediatric Healthcare Associates
Penn State Altoona
Pennsylvania Army National Guard
Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission
Pennsylvania State Police
Pennsylvania State University
Penstan Supply
Pleasant Valley Animal Hospital
Reed & Sahlaney Orthodontics, LLP
Reliance Bank
Season Aire
Shaver’s Creek Environmental Center
Sheetz Center for Entrepreneurial Excellence
Sheetz Corporation
Sheetz Distribution Center
Shoe Fly Stores
Starlight Astromony Club
Stiffler McGraw & Associates Inc
Stultz Real Estate
Sylvan Veterinary Hospital
Tera Nelson Photography
Thaler Family Dentistry

The Iron Bridge Dinner Theatre
Top To Bottom Interiors
Tyrone Area School District
Tyrone Hospital
United States Army
University Orthopedics
UPMC Altoona
UPMC Altoona Cove
Surgical Associates
Value Drug Company
VITRO
Ward Trucking
Western PA Conservancy - Juniata and Potomac Region
Whiteford Electric & Construction Inc.
Williamsburg Community School District
Window Perfections
WTAJ TV
Yeager and Eberhardt Attorneys at Law
Young Oakes Brown & Company

It's Happening!

Chamber Recognizes "All-Stars" for November

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 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 November are: AgChoice Farm Credit, ACA, Altoona-Blair County Airport, Altoona First Savings Bank, Altoona Mirror, CBT Bank A Division of Riverview Bank, Conemaugh Nason Medical Center, ECM Service Agency, Inc., Evey Black Attorneys, LLC, Graystone Court Villas, Haberstroh, Sullivan & George, LLP, Hometown Bank of Pennsylvania, Imler's Poultry, Inc., Keller Engineers, Inc., Kunzler & Company, Inc., Martin Oil Company, McQuaide Blasko Attorneys at Law, Park Home, Reliance Bank, Ritchey's Dairy, Inc., Seltzer Financial Strategies, Senator Judy Ward, Sheetz, Inc., State Representative Jim Gregory, Stuckey Automotive and Weber Murphy Fox.

Winter Kickoff Event a Terrific Way to Make Connections

The Blair County Chamber will participate with thirty regional business organizations in the Pittsburgh Business Exchange's "2020 Winter Kickoff," set for January 10th from 5-8 p.m. at Seven Springs Mountain Resort. This multi-chamber mega mixer is the perfect way for businesses to get their networking off to a flying start in the new year. Enjoy cocktails and light fare at this annual gathering of business professionals. Discounted room rates and lift tickets are available to all participants. To register, go to: winterkickoff2020.com.

Chamber Board Approves Six New Members

The Board of Directors of the Blair County Chamber met on November 21st and approved the following new members: Appliance Station of Altoona, Central PA Digital Learning Foundation of Duncansville, Ketrow Travel of Duncansville, Packaging Services Industries of Williamsport, MD, Simply Power Yoga of Altoona, and WPSU Penn State of University Park.

Missed the Informational Meeting on the French Riviera Trip?

The recent informational meeting on the Chamber's trip to the French Riviera was well attended and included a large number of sign-ups. Since the trip is limited to just 35 people, it may be a good idea to make a decision soon, even though the trip doesn't take place until next Fall. The French Riviera Trip includes visits to Nice, St. Tropez, Monte Carlo, Cannes and Monaco. To obtain information, contact the Chamber at (814) 943-8151.

We Need Accurate Contact Information for Our Membership Directory

As the Chamber continues the process of compiling information for the 2020 Membership Directory, it's extremely important that members let us know if your contact information is up-to-date. And what to do if it's not! You can review your membership information online at blairchamber.com. Go to the Chamber Membership tab and then click on the Member Directory link to find your business listing. Members can make changes directly in the database on the website by going to the

Chamber Membership tab and clicking on the Members Only link to log into your membership account or by emailing your changes to Cindy Cessna at ccessna@blairchamber.com.

Congratulations . . .

. . . to the Chamber Members who were recently honored in Pennsylvania Business Central's 2019 "Foremost Under 40." They are: Nick Damin of Damin Printing, Lauren Dodson of Reliance Bank, Jessica Fisher of McQuaide Blasko, Inc., Christina Koren of Mount Aloysius College, Joseph Kelly of CBT Bank, Jennifer Lechner, Brandi Noye and Ryan Shellenberger of Doing Better Business, Jenna Houseknecht of NPC, Inc., Neil Hollander of Altoona Pipe and Steel and Jamie Miller of Advantage Resource Group.

. . . to Eve Campbell, who has been named general manager of Marzoni's in Greenwood. Campbell also serves as general manager at Marzoni's Duncansville location.

. . . to Pat Leamer of Hollidaysburg, who was recently named as clinic director at Drayer Physical Therapy's Altoona West at the Summit Outpatient Clinic.

. . . to Conemaugh Nason Medical Center's Cardiac Catheterization Lab for being recognized

as Rural Health Program of the Year by the Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health.

. . . to Imler's Poultry of Duncansville, which was recently named the Ernest J. Voigt Distributor of the Year at the Golbon Conference & Awards Recognition Dinner.

. . . to the 2019 lifeguard staff at DelGrosso Park's Laguna Splash, which was awarded the Platinum International Aquatic Safety Award by Jeff Ellis & Associates, international aquatic safety and risk management consultants.

. . . to Laura Rottuno, associate professor of English at Penn State Altoona, who is the 2019-20 recipient of the Schreyer Honors College Excellence in Advising Award.

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

Welcome New Members...

Appliance Station, LLC

Ms. Barbara Smith
1129 Ninth Avenue
Altoona, PA 16602
Phone: (814) 201-2113
Appliance Sales & Service

Ketrow Travel

Ms. Karen Kurtz
110 Hollidaysburg Plaza
Duncansville, PA 16635
Phone: (814) 695-1100
Travel Agencies

Simply Power Yoga

Ms. Christine Tyndall
3118 Pleasant Blvd.
Altoona, PA 16602
Phone: (814) 574-2679
Health Clubs/Organizations

Central PA Digital Learning Foundation

Dr. Malynda Maurer
580 Foot of Ten Road
Duncansville, PA 16635
Phone: (814) 682-5258
Schools/Colleges/Training

Packaging Services Industries

Mr. Taylor Litzinger
16461 Elliott Parkway
Williamsport, MD 21795
Phone: (301) 223-6200
Manufacturing

WPSU Penn State

Mr. Don Bedell
151 Outreach Building
University Park, PA 16802
Phone: (814) 865-3333
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ALTOONA**

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Holly O'Connor
934-4394

Safety Committee offering three programs

The Safety Committee of the Blair County Chamber has built a solid reputation for offering quality educational programs on a variety of relevant topics. Within the next several weeks, the committee is offering three of those programs.

On December 13th, a Lunch'n'Learn program will be held from noon to 1:30 p.m. at the Devorris Center for Business Development. Jamie Miller of Advantage Resource Group will be the speaker for "Drug & Alcohol Clearinghouse." The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration Commercial Driver's License Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse is a secure, online

database that will give employers, State Driver Licensing Agencies and State law enforcement personnel real-time information about CDL driver drug and alcohol program violations, thereby enhancing safety on our nation's roadways.

On December 16th, Tom Churbock of HSE Solutions will present Part II of "How Much Value Does Your Safety Committee Deliver," which debuted on November 22nd. Part II, set for Hoss's in Duncansville from 7:30 to 9:30 a.m., will address the roles and responsibilities of the committee and suggest ways to assess its effectiveness.

And finally, on January 24th at

Hoss's, James Brown, Employer Relations Manager for Hoss's and Marzoni's, will present "Medical Cannabis in the Workplace." The presentation will include a brief history of cannabis, a review of federal and state law and suggestions on how employers can prepare to handle the inevitable requests that they receive.

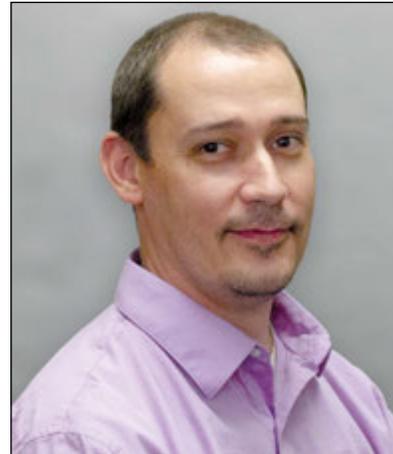
All three Safety Programs have the same cost to attend — \$20 for Chamber Members, \$30 for non-members. Lunch is included with the first one, buffet breakfasts with the other two. To register, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at www.blairchamber.com.



JAMIE MILLER



TOM CHURBOCK



JAMES BROWN



CINDY STANBRO



GENE BARR

Breakfast Clubs

Stanbro, Barr to keynote next Chamber Events

The Executive Director of a local theatre group and the President of a statewide business organization will be the keynote speakers at the Blair County Chamber's next two Breakfast Club programs.

On December 12th, Cindy Stanbro, Executive Director of Altoona Community Theatre will speak. Stanbro was hired in April to fill the position that was vacated upon the death of Steve Helsel. The Spencer Iowa native was chosen from among sixty applicants.

Stanbro will focus on the

outstanding programs that Altoona Community Theatre has planned for 2020. Altoona Mirror is the corporate sponsor of the December Breakfast Club.

On January 9th, Gene Barr, President of the Pennsylvania Chamber of Business & Industry will be the Breakfast Club speaker. Barr has been with the State Chamber since 2003 when he was hired as Vice-President of Government & Public Affairs. He became President in 2011. He oversees all operations of the state's largest broad-based business advocacy association.



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Chamber Board elects 2020 officers

The officers of the 2020 Blair County Chamber Board of Directors were elected and approved by the Board at its November 21st meeting.

The 2020 slate of officers looks strikingly familiar to the 2019 one. Darin Tornatore of Keystone Environmental Health & Safety Services will begin a second year as Board

Chair. Richard Fiore, Jr. of Leonard S. Fiore, Inc. continues as Chair-elect, Alex Seltzer of Manpower is Vice-Chair of Education, Jamie Miller of Advantage Resource Group is Vice-Chair of Promotion/Events, and Cory Gehret of Stiffler McGraw is Vice-Chair of Communications/Advocacy.

The only changes to the slate for 2020 are that Becky Crilly of Reliance Bank will replace John Beyer of PennCrest Bank as Treasurer and Matt Stuckey of Stuckey Automotive will no longer serve as Immediate Past Chair. Beyer and Stuckey's terms on the Chamber Board expire at the end of this month.



DARIN TORNATORE



RICHARD FIORE, JR.



ALEX SELTZER



JAMIE MILLER



CORY GEHRET



BECKY CRILLY

Off The Cuff



RICHARD COX



1. What is Overflow Church and how long has it been in existence?

Overflow Church is a Christian Church started by the PennYork District of the Wesleyan Church in October of 2013. Overflow was started for people in our community not

connected to a church. We wanted to provide a safe place for people to discover who Jesus is and how he can transform their lives. We believe that God blesses the church so that we can be a blessing to our community.

2. What would people in Blair County be surprised to know about Overflow Church?

We are in the process of starting new churches across Central Pennsylvania. Our goal is to start 25 new churches by 2030. We have three that will launch in the next 18 months. It's our goal to add healthy vibrant churches to the area that are serving our community with the love of Jesus.

3. As a Chamber Member, why is it important that Overflow Church has a connection to the business community?

We want to see Blair County thrive. We believe the Chamber plays an important role in the health and well-being of our community. We want to see our people active in the community and do our part in making Blair County a better place to live and raise a family.

4. What is your role as a pastor and what is the most satisfying aspect of that role?

I love introducing people to Jesus and helping grow in their relationship with God. As a pastor I am responsible for raising up and developing leaders who will raise up and develop other leaders. One of my joys as a pastor is helping people discover their purpose in life and walking with them as they learn to live the life they were created for.

All Aboard!

Everett Railroad creating a tradition with the Santa Express

Among the newer holiday traditions in Blair County is the Everett Railroad's "Santa Express." The 2019 edition of the Express made its inaugural run on November 29th and will continue each Friday, Saturday and Sunday until December 22nd. Departure times are 4:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.

"We take a lot of pride in bringing a lot of people to Hollidaysburg. We're not exactly providing a transportation function other than when we take you back in time," kidded Ken Bitten, Manager of Passenger Serv-

ices for Everett Railroad. "It's a special time of year." It's also the railroad's largest attraction in terms of participation. More than 11,000 people will ride the trains.

Everett Railroad was created in the 1950's and defunct for several years. Current owner Alan Maples brought it back to life in 1984.

"Alan was a railroad enthusiast who wanted to help other people understand and appreciate the industry," Bitten explained. "He's managed to do much more than that."

The Santa Express is a one-hour experience that runs from Hollidaysburg to Kladder and back. The atmosphere alone, according to Bitten, makes the whole thing worthwhile.

"There's nothing more mesmerizing than a steam train ride at night," he admitted. "If you haven't done it, now might be the time."

For information about the Santa Express, including how to buy tickets, visit the website at www.everetrailroad.com.



Ken Bitten, dressed as a conductor to help promote the Santa Express, is Manager of Passenger Services for Everett Railroad.

A Demise Greatly Exaggerated

By Stephen McKnight



'Tis the season for many things – shopping being one of them. As holiday shopping campaigns ramp up, we can't help but think about the retail sector – mainly its demise. In recent months we have witnessed the closings of Sears, K-Mart, and Toys R

Us. Many other big box types have shuttered throughout the mid-Atlantic – a trend likely to continue. So, retail must be dying right? Turns out, not so much.

Our friends at the Congress for the New Urbanism published data this fall that proves otherwise. First, between 2017 and 2018, the number of retail establishments actually increased nationwide by more than 2,400. Most notable gains occurred since 2011 after rather steady levels year-over-year. What else? Sales are increasing across all retail types. The fastest growth is occurring for restaurants and drinking establishments.

And what about E-Commerce? One might think that everyone is buying things online. While it's true that e-commerce is rising

rapidly, it still represents only 14 percent of all retail sales. We still like going to stores.

So, what gives? First, while some big-box stores are closing, others are opening and expanding. Chain restaurants especially are reinventing their spaces and menu to meet new consumer tastes and it's working. Second, small is big. Boutique shops on main streets are being helped along due to lower lease rates, social media, Amazon and consumers wanting to shop local. Third, multi-channel marketing is helping to blend e-commerce with brick & mortar stores. Retailers with both strong e-commerce platforms and a place where people can go are winning. This will likely help to reshape how much space is needed in the future and what the shopping experience is in those locations.

Point being, those rumors of retail's death are highly exaggerated. We are still consuming and eating lots of stuff. It's how and from whom that's changing. So, happy holidays, happy shopping and don't forget to tip your waiter. For more information on the data contained in this article visit www.cnu.org/publicsquare.

Stephen McKnight is President/CEO of Altoona-Blair County Development Corporation.

Knowing the deadline for charitable giving

By Jodi Cessna

Thanksgiving has just past and we are now in the month of December, when we will spend more time with family and friends celebrating various holidays. During this time of year, I am always reminded of the things I am grateful for and the ways in which I can help others who are less fortunate.

There are many ways to provide support to those in need. You might consider health and human services – providing funding for an organization that helps children experiencing trauma; the arts - imagine the joy of seeing a live music performance for the first time; religious groups - helping to provide food for those in our community at a "soup kitchen"; education - providing scholarships and additional learning opportunities; or community development – making Central Pennsylvania a better place to live, work, and raise a family.

It's not too late to make a gift for the 2019 tax year. However, you will want to make sure your gift is credited to the proper year. First and foremost, you will want to verify that you are giving to an eligible charity. Remember, not all non-profits are charities. The IRS



has a list where you can verify eligibility.

If you're going to transfer stock it must be done by December 31st. If you are mailing a check, the check must be received at the organization or post-marked no later than December 31st. A few options for last-minute giving are credit cards and PayPal. PayPal donations must be made by 11:59 p.m. on December 31st just as credit card payments must be. The fact that your credit card bill will not be paid until 2020 does not affect the tax year, when the donation was made does.

Your accountant, financial advisor, or the Central PA Community Foundation (CPCF) are great resources to keep you informed of the tax deductibility of your gift. It is very important to make sure that you understand the current tax laws and your professional advisors can help. At the CPCF our vision is bringing people together to enrich lives. Won't you join us?

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

Chamber offering July trip to the Canadian Rockies

The Blair County Chamber has added a trip in North America to its other two 2020 destinations. From July 26th to August 1st, the Chamber will travel to the Canadian Rockies and Glacier National Park. The Chamber is partnering with Epic Journeys on the trip, which is offered through Collette.

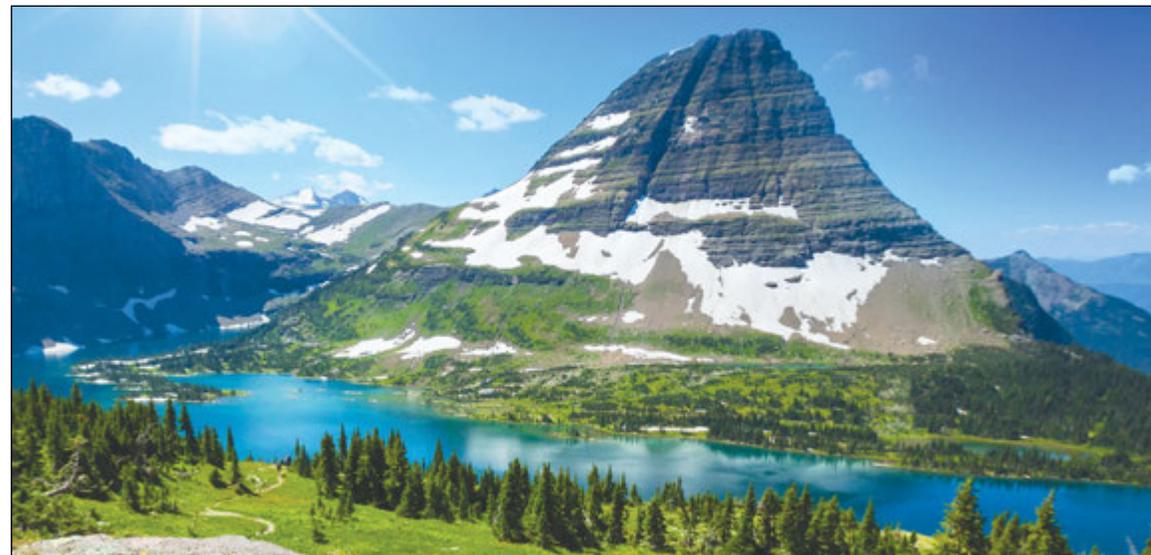
"This trip replaces the one that was previously advertised to Great Britain," explained Chamber President Joe Hurd. "That trip didn't generate the amount of interest that we had hoped. This one makes more sense and is extremely affordable."

The trip, at \$3,699, includes airfare from Dulles. Among the highlights (aside from Glacier National Park) are Calgary, Wa-

terton Lakes National Park, Banff, Athabasca Glacier, Chateau Lake Louise and the famous "Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump."

The tour features a drive along the incredible Icefields Parkway. Paralleling the Great Divide, this special roadway is home to some of the most dramatic vistas in all of North America. Tourists will have an opportunity to ride across a 1,000-foot thick glacier or walk on the Glacier Skywalk.

An informational meeting on the Canadian Rockies trip will be held on January 16th at 6:00 p.m. at the Devorris Center for Business Development. To attend, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151.



The Chamber's Trip to the Canadian Rockies and Glacier National Park will take place from July 26 to August 1, 2020.

Thanks...

For continuing to recognize the value of Chamber Membership

(Chamber Memberships renewed in the month of November.)

Celebrating 41-44 Years

Charles Caracciolo Steel & Metal Yard, Inc.
McLaughlin Oil & Propane Co.
Razor's Edge, Inc. Salon and Hair Loss Center Greenwood LLC

Celebrating 30-38 Years

Beard Legal Group
Beerbower Jewelers
Blair Insurance Services, Inc.
Jethro's, LLC
Lawruk Builders, Inc.

Celebrating 20-29 Years

Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries
Altoona Pipe & Steel Supply Company
Angelo Pacifico & Sons, Inc.
Antique Depot
Center for Independent Living of South Central PA
Claysburg-Kimmel School District
Evey Black Attorneys LLC
Independent Catholic Foundation
P. Joseph Lehman, Inc., Consulting Engineers
S.J. McCloskey Builders, Inc.
PC Works Plus, Inc.
Sam's Club
Spherion
Splish Splash Car Wash
Spring Cove School District
West Central Equipment, LLC

Celebrating 10-19 Years

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Blair County
Blair County Department of Social Services
Blair Dance Academy
Central PA Community Foundation
City Beverage of Altoona, Inc.
CLI Transport, LP
Curry Supply Co.
Dorman's Jewelry

Home Helpers
Edgar F. Linton, Jr. Private Investigator
McQuaide Blasko, Inc.
Retirement Plan Solutions
Drs. Reed & Sahlaney, Orthodontics
Shear Perfections
Sprint
UPMC Altoona Foundation
UPMC Health Plan - Johnstown Office

Celebrating 5-9 Years

Blair County Drug and Alcohol Program, Inc.
CNB Bank
Cook's Painting & Renovation Inc.
Express Employment Professionals
Fanelli Willett Law Offices
Glow Salon & Spa
Haberstroh, Sullivan & George, LLP
Miller, Kistler & Campbell
Overflow Church
Reinhardt Family Practice
The Sullivan Agency/Allstate
U.S. Hotel Tavern
United Datacom Networks, Inc.

Celebrating 1-4 Years

ARROW Land Solutions, LLC
The Garden Preschool Academy
Gloria Gates Memorial Foundation
Herbology
Making Waves Hair Salon
Mount Nittany Health
Northern Storage & Supply LLC
Phil Reigh Sound
Praxair
Rails To Trails of Central Pennsylvania, Inc.
Sprint - Kranich's Plaza
Sprint - Logan Valley Mall
Stuckey Automotive - Stuckey Buick GMC, Inc.
The Sweet Rolling Pin, LLC

Showcase

UPMC Altoona first 'newbie' to step-up as sponsor, exhibitor

When the Blair County Chamber and the Blair-Bedford Builders Association made the decision to broaden the Blair County Home & Garden Show by adding a healthy living component, the joint committee that oversees that show was hoping to attract at least a few healthcare exhibitors willing to test the waters during the inaugural campaign.

"Since it was a new concept for those businesses, we didn't know what to expect," remarked Stacy Hoover of the Chamber. "We really needed one to get the ball rolling."

In late November, they got one. And it was a big one. UPMC Altoona jumped on-board as both an exhibitor and a show sponsor.

"It made a lot of sense for us," explained Tim Balconi, President of UPMC Altoona Foundation. "We're involved in all types of public health education. This show provides a unique venue to reach people with health information. This is a family event on a weekend that allows us to see people that we don't ordinarily see."

Balconi also sees a correlation between healthy living and home and garden.

"To me, there's a strong thematic link among homemaking, gardening and being healthy enough to pursue those activities," he pointed out. "I know that (this show) is a great event. In terms of relationship-building alone, it's great for the exhibitors and for



Grace Beere of UPMC Altoona provides a heel scan to a patient. Heel scans will be just one of several health-related opportunities offered to attendees at the Home Garden and Healthy Living Showcase.

the attendees. I'm hoping that more businesses with missions like ours will step-up and be part of it."

Hoover is hoping so too. "We're getting a lot of nibbles from health providers who are considering being part of the show," she admitted. "Having UPMC involved is an incentive for others to take part. We're also vigorously recruiting exhibitors from the

home and garden side. They've been the reason the show has been successful for the past 50-years."

The 2020 Home Garden & Healthy Living Showcase will be held from February 28th to March 1st at the Jaffa Shrine Center. For exhibitor and sponsor information, contact Stacy Hoover at (814) 943-8151 or email her at shoover@blairchamber.com.



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Transition

Investment Savings Bank featuring new look, new leadership



Vic Hrescak (left), who retired last month as President and CEO of Investment Savings Bank, has passed the torch to new CEO Donnie Rhodes.

A local bank with more than 80-years of serving customers in Blair County is making some significant changes. Investment Savings Bank has updated its logo, its website and mobile app and is preparing to move its headquarters to a facility on South 16th Street in Altoona.

That's not all. With the retirement of President/CEO Vic Hrescak, ISB has hired Donnie Rhodes as its new CEO. At 42, Rhodes becomes one of the youngest CEO's of a community bank in Pennsylvania. He most recently was the area Vice-President of Business Banking for First National Bank of PA, serving predominantly Blair and Bedford counties.

"I'm extremely excited about the opportunity here," Rhodes acknowledges. "I've always had a passion for business banking. Our area business owners are proud, hardworking people who put it on the line each day to provide for their employees, their families and their community, often through multiple generations of ownership."

He's also honored to follow a person like Hrescak.

"Vic is a proud analytic," he pointed out. "He has a true passion for banking, making calculated and thoughtful deci-

sions in line with established policy and procedure. We are fortunate to retain him as a trustee of the bank."

The main vision for ISB as it embarks on some new challenges is two-fold, according to Rhodes.

"First, we will maintain focus on what sets us apart from the competition," he noted. "That is, that we truly are the little guy and the local bank who knows you and has assisted your family through generations of trust and integrity."

"Second, banking should not be an inconvenience. We are committed to making investments in the technology necessary to be your 'next generation bank' that is fully functional, relevant and accessible, that takes a customer-centered and personal approach to proactively assisting and meeting the needs of those who invest with us."

Rhodes and his wife Jayme have three young children.

"This is our home," he emphasized. "We've grown up here and we understand the importance of doing what's best for our community and its people. We're involved in a variety of important causes. It's consistent with what we're committed to do at ISB."

Pitching

Pechter Competition provides students rare opportunity

Starting a business creates both challenges and opportunities. For students at Penn State Altoona, the process of getting started is just the first step. Once the idea is on firm footing, the university provides a forum for moving it forward.

The Pechter Business Plan Competition has been in existence since 2012. It's an opportunity for any Penn State Altoona student to pitch a business idea to a panel of judges, comprised of local business leaders. The competition is held in two phases. The initial phase is a three-minute pitch, similar to what you'd see on Shark Tank. The judges select finalists who move

on to the second round of the competition. The second round requires the completion and presentation of a full business plan. The competition awards prize money of up to \$8,500.

The competition is part of the Penn State Altoona Student Showcase, held at the Devorris Downtown Center on December 13th. Opening remarks begin at 8:45 a.m., presentations begin at 9:00. In addition to the Pechter Business Plan Competition, the Student Showcase has student presentations in the areas of business, Electro-Mechanical Engineering Technology and Security and Risk Analysis. It all constitutes a big day for Penn

State Altoona.

"The competition promotes an entrepreneurial culture to all Penn State Altoona students," explained Paul Cooney, Professor of Practice and Entrepreneurship. "Each year we discover that we have students who have businesses or are in the process of starting businesses while they are enrolled. The competition provides the experience of presenting solutions to potential problems that exist in the marketplace. Past winners have used the prize money to continue the development of the business prior to launching."

The Student Showcase is open to the public.



Paul Cooney, Professor of Practice and Entrepreneurship at Penn State Altoona and Sue Stevens, Project Coordinator, discuss plans for the upcoming Pechter Business Plan Competition.

DeStadio determined to take each day as it comes

As the new President of Gardners Candies in Tyrone, Joe DeStadio is no stranger to his environment. The 61-year-old Altoona native has been at Gardners since 1991 as Controller and is excited about the challenges ahead. He holds a B.S. in Accounting from Penn State. Joe and his wife Nancy have three children and ten grandchildren.

The Chamber: When did you officially start your new position? What was your mindset as you prepared to undertake a new challenge?

Joe: I started this position on September 16, 2019. My mindset was to stay focused on improving our core business which is our retail stores and to take each business day as it comes and not look too far ahead.

The Chamber: What is it like to replace someone as dynamic as Sam Phillips? What did you learn in your time with him and in what ways are you likely to proceed differently in how you provide leadership?

Joe: If you Google Type A personality Sam Phillips should pop up first! This is meant as a genuine compliment. Sam grew up in the candy business. He was very loyal to our company and treated our employees with respect. He came to work every day energized. We worked together for over 27 years so I could only hope that some of this has rubbed off!

The Chamber: What would people in Blair County be surprised to know about Gardners Candies?

Joe: Some people still do not know that Gardners Candies was



Joe DeStadio will continue to keep peanut butter melt-aways top-of-mind as the new president of Gardners Candies.

Chamber Q&A

purchased in 1997 by the Sarris family of Canonsburg, PA. Bill Sarris, our CEO, has been instrumental in providing the leadership necessary to grow this company. We are in a very competitive industry but also one that supports one another.

The Chamber: In what ways has the candy industry changed most dramatically since you first started at Gardners?

Joe: Unfortunately a lot of the small Mom and Pop candy compa-

nies have closed. Many distributors have closed as well. Our fundraising business has to compete with many other different types of fundraisers looking for the same dollar.

The Chamber: Who are your personal and professional role models and what impresses you about them?

Joe: First and foremost it would be my father. He was a numbers guy like me but he did it the old fashioned way, with a paper and pencil! His attention to detail is what impressed me the most.

The Chamber: What's on Joe DeStadio's "bucket list?"

Joe: To shoot my age in golf. I'm 61 now so by the time I reach 80 hopefully the good Lord will give me some putts!

Setting the Pace



Patrick Schurr Hospitality Roundtable

Place of work: Courtyard by Marriott, Microtel by Wyndham, and Wingate by Wyndham.

Position: Area Director of Sales & Marketing.

Years with current position: 6 months.

Positions held in the Chamber:

Co-chair, Attractions/Hotel Roundtable.

Age: 43.

Family: Wife, Andrea; sons, Aidan (12), Colin (8), and Liam (6); and dog, Izzy (4).

Community organizations: Blair Chamber; AYSO coach; 1st grade basketball coach and volunteer at my children's elementary school; parish council member and lector at St. John the Evangelist in Lakemont.

Hobbies/Leisure: Home improvements, fixing things my kids (accidentally) break, and — on occasion — golf, skiing, and restoring antique model trains.

Education: Bachelor of Science, Journalism, from Ohio University.

First job: Television news reporter in Oak Hill, WV.

Personal pet peeve: Liars.

Words that describe your personality: Loyal, thorough, determined, honest, creative, curious, friendly, funny.

Secret ambition: Retire early and own a beachside home on a tropical island.

I would like to be known for: Being a loving and supportive father and husband.

Business role model: My father, Craig.

Your thoughts about the Chamber: I am constantly impressed by the Chamber staff's tireless efforts to promote our local businesses, and I am deeply grateful for the Chamber members' dedication to our community.

Your thoughts about Altoona and Blair County: I can't imagine living anywhere else. This is a wonderful place to raise a family: friendly people, plenty of things to see and do, and — of course — tons of great, locally-owned businesses!

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Eberharts share another common bond

One of the many selling-points of the Chamber's Leadership Blair County program is the number of referrals that result in applications. Often those referrals come from friends or co-workers. And sometimes they come from within the same family.

Enter the Eberharts. Ron Eberhart graduated from LBC in 1996. His son Rob is a graduate of the 2013 class. And in 2019, son Matt became the third family member to officially become a LBC alum. Only the Millers (Bobbi, Jason, Derek, Jamie and Dave) can boast more graduates within an immediate family.

"The whole (LBC) experience was extremely valuable," Ron remembers, even 24-years later. "It was a point in my career with The Hite Company where I was taking on a significant leadership role and I believed that the LBC program could expose me to some key training opportunities."

For Rob, the value was less about training and more about connections.

"The program was a great way to meet other members of the local business community and gain a better understanding of what drives our economy," he acknowledged. "That experience has helped me in a number of ways."



Matt is the most recent LBC graduate of the three. His recollections are more immediate and tend to be more gung-ho.

"The relationships I built with my fellow classmates were the most valuable to me," he disclosed. "LBC really is a journey and an adventure. The bond you build with your graduating class is a strong one."

So what advice would the Eberharts impart to someone interested in LBC?

"Although the programs and activities took me out of my comfort zone from time-to-time, the experiences and rewards were well worth it," Ron emphasized.

"Our time is very valuable," Rob reminded. "I have found the time spent on the LBC program to be worth the investment. I find myself sharing things I learned in LBC with friends and family more often than I would have expected."

And finally!

"Apply today," Matt advised, "LBC is fun, it is rewarding and you will have memories that last a lifetime."



The Eberharts — (from left) Rob, Matt and Ron are all graduates of the Chamber's Leadership Blair County program.

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2020 Annual Meeting

Event to now include 'Educator of the Year' Award

The Blair County Chamber's Annual Meeting & Awards Presentation will be held on January 31st beginning at 7:30 a.m. at The Casino at Lakemont Park. As in the past, the event will pay tribute to the accomplishments of 2019 and will recognize individuals who were considered particularly outstanding.

"The Annual Meeting is an event that people in the membership genuinely enjoy," acknowledged Chamber Board Chair Darin Tornatore, who will provide an overview of 2019 as part of the program. "The fact that the award recipients don't know that they're being honored adds to the suspense."

This year, the award presentations will include a new award, recommended by the BASICS Steering Committee and approved by the Chamber Board. The "Educator of the Year" Award will pay tribute to someone from the local education community who has played a role in helping young people to advance along the career path.

"The relationship between business and education in our county has been significant," explained Chamber President Joe Hurd. "Our individual awards traditionally have gone strictly to business people. It's time that we honor educators as well."

The other awards that will be presented are the ATHENA Award, the Small Business Person of the Year, the George Award, the Donna D. Gority Servant Leadership Award, the Joseph P. Rosenhamer Chamber Spirit Award and the Young Professional of the Year Award.

Anyone wanting to submit a nomination for any of the Annual Meeting Awards should visit the Chamber website at www.blairchamber.com. Deadline to nominate is January 6th. Sponsorships for the Annual Meeting are also now available. For information or to reserve a sponsorship, contact Jessie Covert at (814) 943-8151 or email her at jcovert@blairchamber.com.



The Chamber's increasing involvement with the local education community prompted the creation of the "Educator of the Year Award".

Leadership Blair County Alumni get Service to Education Award

The Leadership Blair County Alumni Committee of the Chamber is one of three recipients of the 2019 Service to Education Award, presented by the Altoona Area School District. The LBC Alumni is being honored for its assistance in providing t-shirts for the STEAM Learning Center at Penn Lincoln Elementary School as well as giving support for additional

programming needs.

"It's a really significant award for our alumni," reported Gary Drenning of National Property Inspections, who chairs the LBC Alumni Committee. "To be able to help young people prepare for their futures is one of the most important things that any of us can do."

The Service to Education Award began in 1984 to recognize citizens/or-

ganizations in the community who have positively impacted the educational process in Altoona area schools.

"We traditionally have recognized these folks during American Education Week which is celebrated each November," noted AASD representative Paula Foreman.

To date, 131 individuals/groups have been recognized with this award.



Accepting the Service to Education Award on behalf of Leadership Blair County Alumni are, left to right: Mandy Murphy of AMTRAN, Nancy McClelland of Reliance Bank, Gary Drenning of National Property Inspections, Jodi Cessna of Central Pennsylvania Community Foundation and Judy Juda of the Blair County Chamber.



Bickel's Surplus Too Altoona



The Chamber held a ribbon cutting for the grand opening of Bickel's Surplus Too-Altoona. Bickel's is located at 1973 Old 6th Avenue Road in Altoona. They also have a location at 16554 Dunnings Highway in Duncansville. Both locations are open daily 9:00 am - 7:00 pm. If you are a bargain hunter, Bickel's is the perfect place for your next shopping excursion with new merchandise being added all the time. Pictured at the ribbon, from left: Nancy McClelland, Chamber Ambassador; Deanna Della Adelsberger, General Manager; Duane Della, Owner; Jessie Covert, VP - Sales & Membership Development, Blair County Chamber of Commerce.

Village Fitness Center Village at Morrisons Cove



A Chamber ribbon cutting was held for the new Village Fitness Center at The Village at Morrisons Cove. The facility includes workout equipment, a therapeutic spa and an indoor swimming pool. It is open to residents and employees as well as members of Point of Fitness, Duncansville. The Village Fitness Center is part of an initiative to encourage healthy living. Pictured at the ribbon, from left: Jessie Covert, VP - Sales & Membership Development, Blair County Chamber of Commerce; Jim Caporuscio, Board Trustee; Ken Kangarise, Donor; Dr. Lunda Weaver, Donor; Senator Judy Ward; Corey Jones, CEO, The Village at Morrisons Cove; Dawn McCartney, VP of Marketing and Program Development, The Village at Morrisons Cove; Nancy McClelland, Chamber Ambassador.

Trade Secrets



The Chamber held a ribbon cutting to celebrate the new location of Trade Secrets. The new location offers an expanded showroom with the addition of a new salt therapy room where you can relax and breathe easy. Trade Secrets offers natural body care products made by hand with only quality ingredients. Pictured at the ribbon, from left: Sherri Stayer, Blair County Chamber Board of Directors; Joe Hurd, President/ CEO, Blair County Chamber of Commerce; Stephanie Hite, Owner; Amanda Walker, the office of Senator Judy Ward; Nancy McClelland, Chamber Ambassador.



Harry's Construction



Harry's Construction now has a Kitchen and Bath Design Center! The beautiful showroom is located at 114 Main St., Bellwood. The Chamber held a ribbon cutting to celebrate. Harry's does it all, from design to install! Harry and his team will work with you to turn your ideas and dreams into beautiful reality, consistently surpassing client's expectations. Pictured at the ribbon, from left: Terri Stuller, Chamber Ambassador; Pastor John Collins; Arlene Collins; Jason Houck, Co-Owner; Harry Houck, Owner; Sue Houck; Crystal Burley, Design and Sales; Joe Hurd, President/CEO, Blair County Chamber of Commerce; Danielle Nazaruk, Chamber Ambassador.

Home Nursing Agency Foundation Healing Patch Children's Grief Program



The Chamber held a ribbon cutting for the new location of Home Nursing Agency Foundation Healing Patch Children's Grief Program, located at 20 Sheraton Drive, Altoona. The Healing Patch Children's Grief Program is a peer support program designed specifically for children and their families who have suffered the loss of a loved one, such as a parent, sibling, grandparent, or close family member. The Healing Patch offers a safe environment where grieving children and their families can discover they are not alone in their grief by interacting with others who have encountered similar losses. Pictured at the ribbon, from left: Debbie Eckenrode, Chamber Ambassador; Nita Sanders, the office of State Representative Lou Schmitt; Mike Ward, Healing Patch Supporter; Andrea Ward, Healing Patch Supporter; Kristen Ward-Gill, Healing Patch Supporter; Paula Thomas, President, UPMC Home Healthcare and Family Hospice; Melody Ray, Healing Patch Coordinator; Shalen Steinbugl, Healing Patch Volunteer Coordinator and Grief Specialist; Bruce Erb, Blair County Commissioner; Ed Henderson, Chair, Home Nursing Agency Foundation Board and former Healing Patch volunteer; Amanda Walker, the office of Senator Judy Ward; Jessie Covert, VP – Sales and Membership Development, Blair County Chamber of Commerce; Pete Mitchell, Chamber Ambassador.