

# Blair Business Mirror



February 2020

## 100 years

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## Chamber Notes

### The numbers never lie

I am not a numbers guy. Every math teacher that has ever been exposed to my mathematical wizardry has suggested that I avoid all career choices that might require me to count.

Data, however, does fascinate me enough to draw conclusions that actually seem reasonable. When you're looking for validation, there's no better feeling than to throw some big numbers at your harshest critics and have them nod approvingly. "Confuse them when you can" was something that Mark Twain would have said if he was running a chamber of commerce.



**JOE HURD**

I am fortunate enough to have a staff replete with people who can count and who have a high degree of credibility. When they provide me with data, it's the real stuff. They often go into great detail about its value, hop-

ing that I won't distort it. They understand that my biggest source of frustration, even after twenty-three years, remains the fact that not all Blair County businesses are Chamber Members. So they ply me with information that supports my point-of-view and then they cross their fingers. The perils of uncertainty are really not for the faint of heart.

What I received from our Marketing and Membership staff recently was a statistical analysis of what our Chamber accomplished during 2019. In a few cases, like Leadership Blair County, the numbers were a compilation that included previous years to show the incredible level of participation enjoyed by that program. So let me throw some hard numbers in your direction:

In 2019, between Leadership Blair County Adult and LBC Youth, 46 people reached graduate status. That brings the total number of graduates to 1,003 since the program began in 1995. What the data shows is that our county might lack a lot of things but leadership is not among them.

Also in 2019, we partnered with the six

Rotary clubs in our county to help 1,156 high school sophomores learn more about career possibilities. That runs the overall numbers for that annual event to more than 6,000 students over a five-year period. Couple that with our Career Shadowing event, which had 424 high school juniors participating (more than 3,000 over its nine year duration) and you can see the impact the Chamber makes in helping young people to prepare for what comes next. And by exposing them to our local businesses, it at least plants a critical seed for seeking employment close to home.

Among the other numbers that might not resonate quite as emphatically are the 22 trips that Chamber staff took to Harrisburg and Washington, D.C. to advocate on behalf of legislation benefitting the local business community; the 48 networking events that the Chamber hosted to provide members the opportunity to identify and pursue an additional customer base; the 37 ribbon-cuttings that we conducted to recognize the births or expansions of local businesses; and the fact that we now have five businesses that have been Chamber Members for 102-years each, a tribute to outstanding loyalty.

My favorite statistic of all is one that blows me away each time I stop to consider it. And it makes me wonder what more we have to do to get the attention of businesses that are looking for exposure but are reluctant to invest in Chamber membership. That statistic is this: In 2019, the Chamber's Online Directory of its members made 13,889,259 referrals. Thanks to modern technology, we are able to segment those referrals and we provide those numbers to each member on an annual basis.

In conclusion, while I would hope that those businesses that are not members would be impressed by what we do to the extent that they would consider joining, I am hoping even more that those who have invested in our organization would feel a sense of pride that, through their investment, good things are happening here and will continue to happen.

You can count on that.

## New Members



The Blair County Chamber of Commerce welcomed its newest members at the 549th Breakfast Club in December. Pictured seated, from left: Barbara Smith, **APPLIANCE STATION, LLC**; Karen Kurtz; **KETROW KURTZ TRAVEL**; Taylor Litzinger, **PACKAGING SERVICES INDUSTRIES**; standing, from left: Christine Tyndall and Susan Nardone, **SIMPLY POWER YOGA**; Don Bedell and Carolyn Donaldson, **WPSU PENN STATE**.



The Blair County Chamber of Commerce welcomed its newest members at the 550th Breakfast Club in January. Pictured, from left: Elizabeth and Andy Wagner, **THE BARK SIDE PET SPA**; Jim Kilmartin, **CENTER CITY CHURCH**; Dr. Malynda Maurer and Michele Snowberger, **CENTRAL PA DIGITAL LEARNING FOUNDATION**.

**On the Cover:** Dawn Barr, (right), Activities Aide at Epworth Manor, assists resident Audrey Cowher with arranging flowers at a recent activities program.

## On the Cover

# Epworth Healthcare & Rehabilitation observing 100 years in Tyrone

Tyrone, Pennsylvania is a community that has embraced a philosophy stressing the need to have all its bases covered. It has its own hospital, its own newspaper, its own radio station, its own Rotary Club and even its own chamber of commerce.

And it has its own long-term care facility. Epworth Healthcare & Rehabilitation Center has served Tyrone and the surrounding area for 100-years, an accomplishment not to be taken lightly.

“Being in the same location for 100 years is important for a number of reasons,” acknowledges Ty Lellock, Epworth’s Administrator since 2017. “Most importantly, it provides a sense of comfort in the knowledge that there is a local place that can provide care for loved ones when they are in need. That doesn’t exist everywhere.”

Like many similar facilities, Epworth has been successful at creating a continuum of care, essential to an aging population. It offers 55-plus apartments, personal care suites, a Memory Support Neighborhood, full rehabilitation options and a modern, skilled nursing center.

“It creates peace-of-mind for individuals and their families,” Lellock explained. “As people age and move to different levels of care, avoiding disruption becomes a priority. We do our best to make every transition as smooth as possible.



*The Dietary staff at Epworth Manor represents many years of service at the facility. A portion of the staff are pictured, left to right: Michael Brinkman, Wanda Sprankle, Valerie Vaughn, Bobbi Williams, Joseph Snyder and Liz Conklin (Director).*

With a hundred years of experience, I guess it’s taken hold.”

In an industry sector that is among the most regulated, long term care faces an array of challenges that has brought some providers to their knees. Epworth, according to Lellock, has maintained a reputation of

which he is proud.

“We’ve done our best to stay in compliance with the many regulations that impact all levels of our care,” he pointed out. “Our staff does an outstanding job. Our biggest challenge is remaining financially solvent in an environment where reimbursement for Medi-

caid residents has remained static while costs for providing care have continued to increase.” Currently 65% of Epworth’s resident population is Medicaid dependent.

While many employers throughout Blair County struggle to attract and retain employees, Epworth

has been fortunate.

“We have one of the best retention rates in our corporation,” Lellock disclosed. “We have many long-tenured employees who are extremely dedicated to our residents and their well-being. That being said, we have had some difficulty finding employees who are direct

caregivers for our residents.

“In order to address our employment needs, we are constantly advertising on job boards and are beginning outreach programs with educational institutions to connect with potential employees prior to their course completion. Additionally, we offer a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) class here at Epworth in order to train staff, not only for our facility but for other Guardian Elder Care facilities in the area.”

Epworth is part of Guardian Elder Care, a private healthcare organization that operates facilities in Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia. The Tyrone location is licensed as a 102-bed skilled nursing facility. Epworth has 90 employees in the skilled nursing end of the operation.

The future, Lellock believes, looks bright.

“I see us remaining a steady part of our community and continuing to provide the supportive, caring environment that our neighbors need,” he concluded. “We’re happy to be here.”

*(Epworth Healthcare & Rehabilitation Center is located at 951 Washington Avenue in Tyrone. Epworth has been a Blair County Chamber Member since 2013.)*

# Wellness Challenge out; Steps Challenge in

The Workplace Wellness program of the Blair County Chamber will be one of several entities that will partner on a Steps Challenge initiative that will take the place of the Corporate Wellness Challenge. The Wellness Challenge pitted employees of local businesses in a competition to lose weight as a means of emphasizing better overall health. The countywide competition lasted four years.

"It was a good program," acknowledged Courtney Seidel of Stiffler McGraw, who served on the planning committee. "It made people more health conscious. A number of the participants were able to come off their medications. Essentially, it just ran its course and we need to see whether, over time, it can become relevant again."

Phyllis Baker of Blair Regional YMCA, another committee member, saw more benefit than just weight loss from the Wellness Challenge.

"It was great team-building for the companies," she pointed out. "Ultimately, it required more time and resources than our volunteers were able to realistically give. We gave it our best shot."

The Steps Challenge is expected to be less labor intensive. While it will still offer opportunities for businesses to compete, the overall goal is for participants to reach 100 million steps as a community. The challenge runs from March 15th to May 16th. The top team and the individual with the most steps will be recognized. The sign-up deadline is March 13th.



*No more weigh-ins. The Corporate Wellness Challenge has been discontinued after a four-year run in favor of a Steps Challenge.*

For more information or to sign-up, go to [www.healthyblaircountycoalition.org](http://www.healthyblaircountycoalition.org).

# Chamber Foundation Board adds Plessinger, Prosser

Tracy Plessinger of the Altoona-Blair County Airport and Rachel Prosser of Altoona-Blair County Development Corporation have been approved as new members of the Blair County Chamber Foundation Board of Directors. The two replace Cortney Diehl of the James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center and Charissa Krumenacker of The Hite Company.



TRACY PLESSINGER



RACHEL PROSSER

"Tracy and Rachel bring a solid understanding of the mission of the Foundation," acknowledged Foundation President Brian Irwin. "They realize the importance of funding programs that help our county's young people to move forward in career pursuits."

The Chamber Foundation will be

adding one more board member in mid-February which will bring the board of directors to full complement.

For more information on the Blair County Chamber Foundation, contact Cindy Cessna at (814) 943-8151 or email her at [ccessna@blairchamber.com](mailto:ccessna@blairchamber.com).



## Business After Hours

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Making It Happen For You



Bishop Guilfoyle Catholic High School has more than twenty international students, creating a "win-win" situation.

## Culture Conscious

### Program at Bishop Guilfoyle helps bridge the diversity gap

As organizations like the Blair County Chamber look for new and innovative ways to prepare students for the local workforce, one area school is operating under the premise that there's more to that preparation than just skill development.

Bishop Guilfoyle Catholic High School has created and maintained a strong program geared to international students for several years. The success of that effort has been augmented by a Host Family Program which provides these students with the opportunity to learn more about American culture as well as about the local community.

Yang Liu has been Director of International Programs at BG for the past five years. She oversees all international students from recruitment to retention. She has enjoyed watching the growth of the program and the impact that it has had on students, families as well as Blair County.

"Currently, BG has more than twenty international students from different countries," Liu

pointed out. "Some of them live in our school dormitory and others live with host families. Coming from cultures that are different from ours, the Host Family Program offers international students unique experiences that they cannot get otherwise.

"Coming to a new country to study by themselves is hard enough. Living in a family setting helps them to feel more at home. It helps some students to perform better academically, get more involved in school activities as well as in the local community."

The benefits, Liu explained, have created a win-win.

"As an educational institution, BG also values what international students can offer to our domestic students and the community," she acknowledged. "It helps create global relationships and friendships. We can learn a new language, hear a traditional story or try an authentic dish from another country without traveling thousands of miles. We can learn just as much as they can learn from us."

Host families can host one or two international students for the school year and get compensated at the same time.

"BG works closely with all host families to make sure that those families get all the support they need," Liu admitted. "They play a huge role in a program that has an incredible amount of upside. They make students genuinely feel that they are part of a family."

As chief recruiter of both students and host families, Liu has a big job on her hands.

"We've been fortunate that the outstanding reputation of our school has made the recruitment part much less difficult," she disclosed. "It's also helped that students who have come here have been willing to tell their story to others. We also get a lot of host families who look forward to future involvement. All in all, we feel very good about what's happening here."

(For more information about the Host Family Program, contact Yang Liu at (814) 944-3636.)

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## It's Happening!

### Chamber Recognizes "All-Stars" for December and January

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 December and January are: Altoona Grand Hotel, Altoona Lung Specialists, Altoona Mirror, BB&T, now Truist, Blair Companies, Blair School of Martial Arts, CNB Bank, Elmcroft of Altoona, Fanelli Willett Law Office, First Energy, Herbology, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, Jaffa Shrine Center, Keller Engineers, Inc., Leonard S. Fiore, Inc., Lion Country Lodging - Courtyard By Marriott, Microtel By Wyndham and Wingate By Wyndham, M&T Bank, New Enterprise Stone & Lime Co., Inc., New Pig, Okonak, Dean & Lechner, Park Home/Park Security Systems, Penn State Altoona, PennStress, PSECU, Reliance Bank, Roberts Oxygen Company, Inc., S&T Bank, Sheetz, Inc., Southern Airways Express, Stiffler McGraw, Stuckey Automotive, UPMC Altoona, UPMC Home Healthcare of Central Pennsylvania and Young, Oakes, Brown & Company.

### Safety Program to Address Aging Workforce Concerns

As a company's workforce begins to gray, new challenges emerge for employers. Those challenges will

be the basis of the next Blair County Chamber Safety Program on Wednesday, February 19th from 7:30 to 9:30 a.m. at Hoss's Steak & Seas House in Duncansville. Colleen Medlin, Director of Clinical Operations for WorkPlace Health and Workers' Compensation at Phoenix Rehabilitation, will present, "The Aging Workforce: Reducing OSHA Recordables." Her presentation will focus on knowing the aging workforce statistics, the impact of aging on the body, identifying how specific body parts are affected by specific activities and discussing potential solutions for managing Workers' Compensation spending and reducing OSHA recordables to promote a healthy workplace. The cost to attend this program is \$20 for Chamber members and \$30 for non-members. A buffet breakfast is included. To register, contact the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at [www.blairchamber.com](http://www.blairchamber.com).

### Committee of Non-Profits to Hold "Best Practices Forum"

The Blair County Chamber's Committee of Non-Profit Businesses will hold a Best Practices Forum on March 6th from 8:15 to 9:45 a.m. at the Devorris Center for Business Development. Entitled, "The Best Ways to Do the Most Good," the Forum will focus attention on ways to create awareness, encourage discussion and avoid the often duplicative and overlapping efforts of helping those in need in our community. The panel for the Forum will be: Melanie Shildt of United Way of Blair County, Nicole Germaux of CONTACT Altoona and

Captain Larry Fulmer of the Salvation Army. The cost to attend the Best Practices Forum is \$10 for Chamber Members and \$20 for non-members. To register, contact the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at [www.blairchamber.com](http://www.blairchamber.com). Any non-profit business interested in joining the Committee of Non-Profit Businesses should contact Joe Hurd at (814) 943-8151 or email [jhurd@blairchamber.com](mailto:jhurd@blairchamber.com).

### Make Your Reservations Now for the French Riviera Trip

The Chamber and Dream Vacations are partnering on a trip to the French Riviera from October 31st to November 8th. Since the trip is limited to just 35 people, it may be a good idea to make a decision soon, since the initial sign-up was brisk. The French Riviera Trip includes visits to Nice, St. Tropez, Monte Carlo, Cannes and Monaco. This is the ideal trip for anyone who just wants to relax under the most ideal conditions. If that sounds like you, contact the Chamber at (814) 943-8151.

### Missed the Meeting on the Canadian Rockies? Let Us Catch You Up!

If you missed the recent informational meeting on the Chamber's trip to the Canadian Rockies and Glacier National Park, you missed a lot! The Chamber is partnering with Epic Journeys on the trip, which is offered through Collette from July 26 to August 1, 2020. The trip, at \$3,699, includes airfare from Pittsburgh. Among the highlights (aside from Glacier Na-

tional Park) are Calgary, Waterton 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. If you'd like information on the trip, contact the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or contact Epic Journeys at (814) 266-5070.

### Chamber Ambassadors Recruiting New Committee Members

A long-standing Chamber committee is looking to expand its ranks. The Chamber Ambassadors, which help new members to acclimate to the organization and which assist in ribbon-cuttings and other networking events has openings for any Chamber members looking for ways to help out while also making great connections for their own businesses. "We have a few retirements on the horizon so that's created some opportunities for others to step forward," explained Sherri Stayer, who chairs the Ambassadors Committee. "It's a great experience with a win-win outcome." Any Chamber member interested in becoming an Ambassador should contact Joe Hurd at (814) 943-8151 or email him at [jhurd@blairchamber.com](mailto:jhurd@blairchamber.com).

### Congratulations ...

to the following recipients of awards at the Chamber's Annual Meeting on January 31st:

ATHENA Award - State Senator Judy Ward, the Small Business Person of the Year - Bill Scully of Freedom Excursions, the George Award - Hymie Antikol, the Donna D. Gority Servant Leadership Award - Altoona Mayor Matt Pacifico, the Joseph P. Rosenhamer Chamber Spirit Award - Cory Gehret of Stiffler McGraw, the Educator of the Year Award - Judy Rossi and the Young Professional of the Year Award - Jackie Lantzy of CNB Bank.

... to Matt Fox, who has been named Director of Business Expansion at Altoona-Blair County Development Corporation. He had previously served as the organization's marketing manager.

... to Mark Spinazzola, Vice-President of HFX and Procurement for Hoss's Steak & Sea House and Marzoni's, who was recently named 2019 Spirit of Hospitality Manager of the Year by the Pennsylvania Restaurant & Lodging Association.

... to Altoona Mayor Matt Pacifico, who was recently appointed to the National League of Cities 2020 Transportation and Infrastructure Services federal advocacy committee. The committee has the lead responsibility for developing NLC's federal policy positions on issues involving transportation.



## LOOKING TO ADD TO YOUR BOOK LIST?

## Check out Sunday's Life section for current best sellers!

## Chamber 2020 Board now complete

The 2020 Blair County Chamber Board of Directors is now at the requisite twenty-one members.

The Board voted to add Matt Muccitelli of Park Home & Park Security Systems to replace Todd Lewis of Shoe Fly Stores who completed one term on the Board but declined a second term.

Also added to the Chamber Board were three one-year appointments made by Board Chair Darin Tornatore.

They are Leslie Estep of Tyrone Area School District, Leonard Fiore III of Fiore Brothers Management and Jessica Sprouse of Gwin, Dobson & Foreman.

Estep and Fiore had served as Board Chair Appointments during 2019.

"The newest additions to the Board give us the type of experience that will be beneficial as we begin to update our Strategic Business Plan," Tornatore explained.

"We look for industry sector diversity as well as expertise in key areas of organizational development. We're delighted to have these people on-board," he said.



LESLIE ESTEP



LEONARD FIORE III



MATT MUCCITELLI



JESSICA SPROUSE

## Meetings Today Magazine - January/February 2020

by Explore Altoona staff

The following narrative is but one example within Altoona's ads and online placements among several key media sources which Explore Altoona utilizes in targeting meeting and event planners to consider the Altoona/Blair County market as a potential location.

This particular magazine is *Meetings Today* which holds the industry's largest audience of any media brand in the meetings and events planning market; it currently has more than 55,000 publication subscribers.

### Pursue Your Happiness in Altoona and Blair County, Pennsylvania

by John Golden  
*Passport Communications*

Flanked by the Allegheny Mountains, both business and leisure travelers alike will find Altoona and Blair County Pennsylvania to their liking. This charming area of central Pennsylvania is easy to get to and offers both historical and recreational attractions.

Offering nearly 1,500 affordable guest rooms, meeting planners and event organizers would be hard pressed to find a more



distinctive and convenient location for any event.

One of the more unique meeting venues is Jaffa Shrine Center in Altoona, which can accommodate up to 3,000 guests and offers more than 25,000 square-feet of flexible meeting space, including a space for stage productions.

Hotel properties recently opened in Altoona include Wingate by Wyndham Downtown/Medical Center; Days Inn & Suites; Holiday Inn Express & Suites; Microtel Inn & Suites; Fairfield Inn & Suites and Towne Place Suites by Marriott, which incorporates two brands under one roof and lets the guest choose between a room designed for a quick getaway or a suite geared for a long term stay.

And the Altoona Grand Hotel recently invested \$2 million for renovations.

Visit [ExploreAltoona.com](http://ExploreAltoona.com) for more information about accommodations and a diverse selection of attractions.

# Looking for a new pad?

CHECK OUT **MUST-SEE** RENTALS

Appears Saturday, Sunday, and Monday  
in the Altoona Mirror



## It's scholarship time!

by Jodi Cessna



The holidays are over, and we are already into the second month of 2020. Like many others, January is a time when I think of goals that I want to achieve in the new year. Likewise, there are many Central Pennsylvania youth who are just a few months away from the end of their high school experience and setting goals that will shape their futures. The next chapter of their lives is about to begin. It can be a very exciting time but also an apprehensive one.

Choosing a post-secondary school to attend, a major, and a financial aid package are all tough decisions. I am proud of the Central Pennsylvania Community Foundation's ability to assist many with scholarships that help young people achieve their educational goals.

Abraham Lincoln once stated, "Upon the subject of education...I can only say that I view it as the most important subject which we as a people can be engaged in."

At the CPCF, we offer many different types of scholarships. The scholarship may be for someone attending a trade school, someone seeking a bachelor's degree, or a non-traditional student who is returning to school for a new career. We have scholarships for students

attending a specific college, students self-selecting their college, ones that reward past involvement in a certain activity or field of study, and those that are for a specific major.

At the end of January, the CPCF sent packets to the guidance counselors at every high school that has students eligible for a scholarship that we administer. We also sent information to the financial aid offices at the colleges that award scholarships under our administration. Most of our scholarships have a deadline of March 13th. Therefore, now is the time for potential scholarship winners to inquire with their guidance counselor or financial aid office.

Since inception in 1995, we have awarded over 1,400 scholarships. In 2019 alone, we awarded 131 scholarships. With statistics like this, many believe that this is all that we do. Distributing scholarships is only one part of the CPCF mission. For more information on what our community foundation does, visit our website at [www.centralpagives.org](http://www.centralpagives.org).

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

## Chamber rebranding email newsletter

### Privilege Pages are also going digital

The Blair County Chamber is taking two significant steps in helping members to gain greater access to information while also expanding the scope of their marketing base.

Beginning March 9th, the Chamber's Business Bulletin will officially become "NETworks Digital News." The Business Bulletin is the email newsletter that goes to more than 4,000 readers each Monday.

"We started it a few years ago to give members a quick-read on what was coming-up that week and maybe a little beyond," remarked Linda Stotler, the Chamber's Vice-President of Communication and Marketing. "It was a no-frills publication that clearly had additional potential.

"NETworks Digital News will hit more topics and be more aesthetically pleasing. There will be photos that will enhance the stories and generally more color throughout the pages. The stories will still be short – we recognize that few people have large blocks of time to spend, especially on Mondays."

And, to add to the experience, there will be BRANDbytes.

BRANDbytes are environmentally-friendly flyers that Chamber Members can pur-

chase to increase their marketing reach. Formerly known as Privilege Pages, these flyers were printed and inserted into the mailed copies of the Blair Business Mirror each month. Now, as BRANDbytes, they will be digitally inserted into NETworks Digital News at various intervals.

"So instead of members needing to provide 1,100 flyers for the Blair Business Mirror and incurring those printing costs, members can simply send us their flyer as a jpeg (preferred) or a pdf," explained Jessie Covert, the Chamber's Vice-President of Sales and Membership Development.

The cost to reserve a BRANDbytes flyer is just \$175. There is also a Preferred Placement option at \$225.

"Your digital flyer will now reach more than 4,000 in-boxes and will include a link to your email or website," Covert pointed out. "It's an incredible deal when you realize that you're more than tripling your marketing reach and cutting your overall production costs."

To schedule a BRANDbytes placement date, call Jessie Covert at (814) 943-8151 or email her at [jcovert@blairchamber.com](mailto:jcovert@blairchamber.com).



## It's No Sweat...



## For our Nationally Recognized Sports Writers



## To Pass On To You The Latest Play-By-Play



## 50th Home Garden & Healthy Living Showcase will be special

When people enter the Jaffa Shrine Center for the 50th edition of the Home Garden and Healthy Living Showcase, they're in for a big surprise.

Thanks to students at the Greater Altoona Career & Technology Center, the main entrance for the event will be the facade of a house that will lead into an expertly-manicured back yard.

"We wanted to do something special for the 50th show," acknowledged Dave DeBiase, Executive Officer of the Blair-Bedford Builders Association, which partners with the Blair County Chamber on the three-day event. This year's show is February 28, 29 and March 1.

"We had done something similar on the Jaffa stage several years ago and it brought additional people to the show," DeBiase added. "This not only creates an appropriate environment for the event but also shows the general public the great talents of our local GACTC students."

At the present time, materials for the project are being donated by Lowe's, Window World and Solarshield. Other items are still needed, according to Mike Selvenis, principal at the GACTC.

"Siding and some related components are necessary for us to get everything pulled together," he noted. "About a dozen carpentry/construction students are involved in the project as is a drafting and design student - Nathan Kurtz - who created the blueprint."

Selvenis is incredibly proud of what the stu-



*Above, GACTC students frame the wall of the home facade that will greet attendees at the 2020 Home Garden and Healthy Living Showcase later this month. Left to right are Cameron Passarello, Taylor Steele and Aidan Troutman.*

*At right, Malik Connor (left) and Austin Hostler, students at the GACTC, look at the blueprints of the home facade project.*

### "We wanted to do something special for the 50th show."

*Dave DeBiase, Executive Officer  
Blair-Bedford Builders Association*

dents have already done and he looks forward to seeing the reaction of people who attend the show.

"It seems that anything that anyone learns about what we do surprises them," he pointed out. "There's a significant awareness gap that plagues career and technical education. Because of that, not enough of the general public know, understand and appreciate

the value of careers in the trades. While the home facade project is simple, attendees to the show will see a professionally built, high quality display piece. Anyone who sees it will appreciate that high school students in training for the construction trades made it happen."

The Home Garden & Healthy Living Showcase has been an event with an upside for exhibitors as

well as for those looking to undertake projects both inside and outside the home. The "healthy living" component was added for the 50th show.

"A number of shows throughout the country have seen the potential to tie-in healthy living as a natural extension to what takes place in home remodeling and landscaping," remarked Stacy Hoover, the Chamber's Vice-President of Events & Technology. "We're looking forward to having exhibitors from that industry sector."

Only a few exhibitor opportunities remain for the showcase. Anyone interested in reserving a booth should contact Stacy Hoover at (814) 943-8151 or email her at shoover@blairchamber.com.



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## WE-LEaD Committee to present: "Women Mean Business-Act 2"

Back in September, the Chamber's WE-LEaD (Women Encouraging – Leadership, Education and Development) Committee hosted an informational program entitled, "Women Mean Business."

The panel discussion format featured four business owners who explained what drove them to start their own businesses, obstacles they had to overcome and ways that they've dealt with financial and environmental challenges.

On February 26th from 7:30 to 9:15 a.m. comes, "Women Mean Business – Act 2." That program, to be held at The Casino at Lakemont Park, will focus attention on a panel of women who ex-

perienced career changes and who are now flourishing in their new careers. The panel consists of Becky Stevens of Morgan Stanley, Amy Mearkle of Del-Grosso Park and Deb Scully of Freedom Excursions. Carol Gensimore of Value Drug Company will moderate the panel discussion.

The cost to attend the WE-LEaD program is \$25 for Chamber Members and \$35 for non-members. A continental breakfast is included in the cost. To register, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at [www.blairchamber.com](http://www.blairchamber.com).

Merry Maids is the corporate sponsor of Women Mean Business – Act 2.



AMY MEARKLE



DEB SCULLY



BECKY STEVENS



Gene Barr (center), President of the Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry, discusses his organization's priorities with Chamber Chair-elect Richard Fiore, Jr. (left) and Chamber Board Chair Darin Tornatore. Barr spoke at the Chamber's January "Breakfast Club."

## Public Policy Committee embracing Futures Initiative

When the Public Policy Committee of the Blair County Chamber received approval from the Chamber's Board of Directors to move forward with its "Strong Futures Initiative" back in December, the Committee set to work at putting action steps to the Initiative's goals.

"There's a healthy number of objectives to wrap our arms around," acknowledged Steve McKnight of ABCD Corporation, a member of the commit-

tee. "Many of them deal with leadership, partnerships and infrastructure. They especially make sense when you place them in context with preparing the next generation."

The Committee was particularly encouraged by remarks made at the Chamber's January Breakfast Club by speaker Gene Barr, President/CEO of the Pennsylvania Chamber of Business & Industry.

"The State Chamber has many of the same motivations

as our Committee has," remarked Richard Fiore, Jr. "They're fighting many of the same battles as communities throughout Pennsylvania that are struggling to gain momentum on issues impacting economic development and quality of life."

The Blair County Strong Futures Initiative document is posted on the Chamber's Website at [www.blairchamber.com](http://www.blairchamber.com) on the Public Policy Committee page.





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# Sharing wisdom

## Chamber, Rotary Clubs to again collaborate on Career Fair

The six-year relationship that has existed between the BASICS program of the Blair County Chamber and the six Rotary Clubs in the county is on-track for year-seven.

That relationship involves the collaboration of the organizations on a ten-school event that will give high school sophomores their first real look at the future as it pertains to work.

The BASICS/Rotary Career Fair will be held on April 29th at the Blair County Convention Center. Close to 1,200 students and speakers from 90 industry sectors are expected to attend. Half the students attend in the morning, the other half in the afternoon.

"It's been a terrific event from the start," admitted Steve Dalecki of ARC Federal Credit Union, who serves on the committee that pulls it all together. "The students really enjoy the interaction with the business leaders and what they learn re-

sults in many of them signing-up to participate in Career Shadowing the following year."

It's a tribute to the people who take time away from work to share their information and expertise, according to Nicole Zernick of the Greater Altoona Career & Technology Center. Zernick and the GACTC play a huge role in helping to organize the Career Fair.

Each student who attends the Fair indicates four career choices that they'd like to know more about. Zernick and her colleagues compile the schedule to accommodate those wishes.

"Sometimes it's like putting a puzzle together," she noted. "You're happy when all the pieces fit."

To learn more about the BASICS/Rotary Career Fair, contact Joe Hurd at the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or email him at [jhurd@blairchamber.com](mailto:jhurd@blairchamber.com).



Nicole Zernick of the GACTC and Steve Dalecki of ARC Federal Credit Union play significant roles in the planning of the BASICS/Rotary Career Fair.



Rex Kaup and his wife Bonnie, enjoy speaker remarks at the 2019 Business Excellence Dinner in which Kaup was the honoree. Nominations are now being accepted for the 2020 recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award for Business Excellence.

## Nomination Period underway for Business Excellence Award

The nomination period is underway for one of the Blair County Chamber's top individual awards.

The Lifetime Achievement Award for Business Excellence will be presented at the Annual Business Excellence Dinner in June. The date of that event will be determined by the availability of the honoree.

"This award carries incredible prestige," remarked Chamber Board Chair Darin Tornatore. "It speaks to accomplishment by a business leader over a long period of time. We always have impressive nominations despite the fact that we've honored eighteen people already. Blair County, without a doubt, has no shortage of outstanding leaders who have

**"This award carries incredible prestige."**

*Darin Tornatore,  
Chamber Board Chair*

stood the test of time."

The Lifetime Achievement Award was created by the Chamber's Government Affairs Committee in 2001 "to recognize the businessmen and businesswomen who are synonymous with putting the best interests of the Blair County community first and whose own businesses are regarded as the very best around, in large part due to the acumen and high ethical standards of

the person in charge."

Previous recipients of the Lifetime Achievement Award are: Ernie Wissinger (2002), G. William Ward (2003), Stephen Sheetz (2004), Donald Devorris (2005), Willard Campbell (2006), John Wolf (2007), Lee Hite (2008), Donald Detwiler (2009), Michael McLanahan (2010), Barry Smith (2011), Fred Imler (2012), Ben Stapelfeld (2013), William Thompson, Jr. (2014), Timothy Sissler (2015), Martin Marasco (2016), Harry Sickler (2017), Ann Benzel (2018) and Rex Kaup (2019).

To access a nomination form, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or visit the Chamber website at [www.blairchamber.com](http://www.blairchamber.com). Deadline to nominate is February 28th.

## Setting the Pace



### Natalie Depto-Vesey Committee of Non-Profit Businesses

**Place of Work:** UPMC Home Health Care of Central PA Home Nursing Agency Foundation.

**Position(s):** Community Outreach Manager.

**Years with current position:** 9.

**Position held in the Chamber:** Chair, Committee of Non-Profit Businesses.

**Age:** 52.

**Family:** 2 sons - Alex and Connor.

**Community organizations:** Centre County Council for Human Services, Association of Fundraising Professionals, Natural Ski Patrol, Team Rubicon.

**Hobbies/Leisure:** Experiencing nature in all forms - hiking, skiing, backpacking, climbing, biking, traveling, music.

**Education:** BA - The Pennsylvania State University.

**First job:** Paper girl for the Patton Courier.

**Personal Pet Peeve:** Hypocrisy; those who judge others' situations, lifestyles, choices, etc.

**Personality:** Outgoing, tenacious - won't give up without a fight.

**Secret ambition:** To be able to serve as a full-time volunteer with Team Rubicon Disaster Recovery.

**I would like to be known for:** Always being willing to help others.

**Business Role Model:** Sr. Margaretta Phillips, RSM. - She was a co-worker and mentor while I was expanding my career at Mount Aloysius College. Amazing, smart, tough, kind lady.

**Thoughts about the Chamber:** Wonderful organization. Innovative programming with goals supporting all businesses for profit and not for profit.

**Thoughts about Altoona/Blair County:** I've worked the majority of my life in Blair County. It is a beautiful and thriving county with so much growth potential. I'm very proud to serve and work in Blair County.

## McClelland will continue to serve others

On March 13th, Nancy McClelland will end a long and impressive career with Reliance Bank. She emphasizes that her retirement will change her employment history but will have no impact on her willingness to serve others. Leadership Blair County, Nancy insists, has had more than a little to do with how she approaches the next phase of her life.

"I've been fortunate to have positive influences around me throughout my life," she pointed out. "The Leadership Blair County experience helped me to make a lot of new friends and it also created awareness of the resources available to assist those people who needed it."

Much of what Nancy learned through LBC came as the result of the monthly sessions that are the heart-and-soul of the program.

"Each month, when I came out of a session, that became my favorite session," she disclosed. "I was exposed to history, government, justice, youth, human services and diversity. I guess, overall, my very favorite session was the one on human services. Our class was exposed to so many programs available in Blair County that I never knew existed and my eyes were opened to the need for volunteers to keep many of these programs up-and-running."

Nancy has been a committed volunteer for organizations like Junior Achievement, American Red Cross, Relay For Life and,



*Nancy McClelland of Reliance Bank has been a staunch advocate of Leadership Blair County since her graduation from the program in 2008.*

not surprisingly, the Blair County Chamber where she has served as a longtime Ambassador as well as on the LBC Adult Committee and the LBC Alumni group.

"I've always felt that by volunteering my time, I can expose other people to the many benefits that come from reaching out," Nancy explained. "As servant leaders, we have a responsibility to put others before ourselves. The LBC program does a great

job in reminding us of that."

Nancy is a graduate of Altoona Area High School and of Moody Bible Institute. She graduated from LBC in 2008. Nancy and her husband Stewart have two sons and four grandchildren.

*(For more information on Leadership Blair County, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or visit the Chamber website at [www.blairchamber.com](http://www.blairchamber.com).)*

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## County Commissioners to speak at Chamber “Breakfast Club”

The Blair County Commissioners will be the featured speakers at the next Chamber “Breakfast Club,” set for February 13th at The Casino at Lakemont Park. The event begins at 7:45 a.m. and includes a full buffet breakfast.

Republicans Bruce Erb and Amy Webster and Democrat Laura Burke were elected in November and were sworn-in just last month. Only Erb is an incumbent.

“We recognize that this team of commissioners hasn’t been together for very long,” acknowledged Greg White of Fulton Financial Advisors, who chairs the Chamber’s Public Policy Committee. “We do, however, have an awareness of the issues that each commissioner



*The Blair County Commissioners will be the featured speakers at the Chamber’s “Breakfast Club” on February 13th. The Commissioners will answer questions from the Chamber’s Public Policy Committee.*

campaigned-on and we’re looking forward to seeing if those issues be-

come priorities of the entire board.”  
The format for the

Breakfast Club presentation is Q&A with White asking questions put to-

gether by his committee.

“Our committee had an opportunity to pose questions to all candidates for County Commissioner prior to the general election,” he pointed out. “There were a number of hot-button topics that figured heavily in the election outcome. A number of those rate a high priority with the Chamber so I would expect that our slate of questions would include those.”

The cost to attend Breakfast Club is \$20 for Chamber Members and \$30 for non-members. To register, contact the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at [www.blairchamber.com](http://www.blairchamber.com).

Corporate sponsor of the February Breakfast Club is Keller Engineers.

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## Bloom Yoga to host next “Business Before Hours”

The next Chamber “Business Before Hours” will be held on Friday, March 13th at Bloom Yoga’s new location at 123 Union Avenue, Suite 104. The event will begin at 7:30 a.m. and will conclude with a ribbon cutting at 9:00.

Sharon Green, Director and Yoga Teacher at Bloom Yoga is looking forward to showing attendees her new space.

“It’s a terrific place for so many reasons,” she pointed out. “Blair Realty has been a dream as a landlord. The cleanliness of the facility has been exceptional. My goal is to share this space with people who want to step away from the world for a little while.”

Green’s previous location on 12th Avenue in Altoona had its share of

challenges.

“Size was a big thing,” she pointed out. “I continuously had a waiting list and really couldn’t do much about it. Parking was also a problem. It just wasn’t adequate. Neither of those are issues for me now.”

The Business Before Hours will feature an opportunity to see and hear what Bloom Yoga is all about. It will also provide a great (and healthy) breakfast of fruit, oatmeal, quiche and hash browns.

There is no cost for Chamber Members to attend Business Before Hours. Non-members can attend for \$10. Registration is essential so contact the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at [www.blairchamber.com](http://www.blairchamber.com).



*Sharon Green (far right) conducts a yoga class at Bloom Yoga in Altoona. Bloom Yoga will host a “Business Before Hours” on March 13th at its new location at 123 Union Avenue, Suite 104.*

# Grooming

## Chamber committees may collaborate on candidate recruitment

Blair County Chamber President Joe Hurd would like to see members of two of his Chamber committees discuss ways to recruit business people to run for elected offices.

“Our Public Policy Committee and our Young Professionals of Blair County are ripe for this type of discussion,” Hurd acknowledged. “Since I staff both of those committees and do their agendas, it might not be too difficult to make that happen.”

If Hurd needs poster-children to get the ball rolling, he need look no further than Altoona City Council which recently swore-in two new members – Joseph Carper and Jesse Ickes. Both are 25. Carper is the District Manager for State Representative Jim Gregory; Ickes is a financial advisor with Beck Financial and Wealth Management.

“Great examples of two young people with a passion for public service,”



*Jesse Ickes, a businessperson and a young professional, brings two important qualifications to his new role as an Altoona City Councilman.*

Hurd admitted. “I’d love to take credit for getting them to run but that would be a complete fabrication. The problem is that there are not enough people like Joe and Jesse, particularly in municipal government. So many of our municipalities end-up with open seats. Government, as we

know, can’t function effectively that way.”

While age itself isn’t the only factor that the Chamber would prioritize in creating a recruitment effort, it would certainly be a prominent consideration. Both Carper and Ickes are happy to know that.

“Our community is



*Joe Carper, one of Altoona's newly-elected City Councilman, has always had a passion for public service.*

aging and our population is declining,” Carper pointed out. “Having young people represented in government is vitally important. It brings the perspective of a new generation with fresh ideas. Both Jesse and I understand the issues being faced by young families.

We both have young children who we’re hopeful will be able to raise their own families here in the future. That doesn’t happen without a shifting focus on the need to bring and keep young people.” Ickes agreed.

“I knocked on hundreds of doors during my cam-

paign and many people mentioned that we need more young professionals on Council and in other areas of the county,” he disclosed. “They feel that they’re needed, not only in government, but in the community as well. If any young professionals are considering a run for office, I’d be happy to speak with them.” He extends that invitation to any business people as well.

“I believe that our government needs more business owners seeking to serve in elected capacities,” Ickes concluded. “Business owners are smart. They have to be lean and efficient to stay in business, especially in a quickly changing economy like today’s. These are characteristics that I feel governments should be welcoming. We need more people who want to get involved for the right reasons.”

People like Joe Carper and Jesse Ickes.

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# Ribbon-cutting

## Jaffa Shrine Center



A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held in celebration of recent renovations to the Jaffa Shrine Center. Their dedicated team of event professionals will work with you to plan and develop your event from start to finish. Their goal is to create a successful event that will exceed your expectations. A sales manager will work with you to identify the best space to host your event. For more information, go to [www.jaffashrinecenter.com](http://www.jaffashrinecenter.com). Pictured at the ribbon in the newly renovated Arabian Room are, from left, Joe Harteis, Chamber Ambassador; Rob Harkins, Chief Rabban; Dan Kindle, Recorder; Jordan Settle, Potentate; Jim Miller, Assistant Rabban; Heather Chestney, Facilities Sales Coordinator; Barry Wright, Treasurer; Joe Hurd, President/CEO, Blair County Chamber of Commerce; and Sherri Stayer, Chamber Ambassador.

## Flex and co-working spaces are changing thoughts on office space

by Matthew Fox

*Note: This is the first in a series on the changing place and space of work.*

Late last year, we were faced with a challenge. A long-term tenant in the Devorris Center for Business Development exited their office space in favor of a virtual, work from home approach – a trend that is happening nation-wide. Rather than try to market all 2,000 square feet of space, we decided to break it up, office by office and it worked. In just the past few weeks, ABCD has welcomed 5 new small tenants in need of a desk, place to convene and make connections.

Our region has a strong entrepreneurial spirit. Newer start-ups are serving a global client base from many different work environments. Co-working options like “We-Work” and “Spaces” are attracting the next generation worker and business. Images of 20 and 30 somethings lounging in bright colored bean bags, sitting at the coffee bar or playing foosball all while working come to mind. While these spaces are taking hold in larger cities, they have yet to greatly impact our First Frontier main streets. Our friends at Penn State Altoona got the ball rolling with their Launch Box presence in Downtown Altoona and we are excited for more opportunities for unique spaces.

At its heart, a co-working space is where start-up entrepreneurs can work and collaborate in an environment that moves beyond the coffee shop but well short of that corporate cubed



high rise. A study from Emergent Research and partners showed that coworking spaces are human spaces, “The key finding is while coworking spaces are definitely workspaces, they are also much more. They are places where members work, network, learn and socialize together.”

ABCD staff is researching a First Frontier co-working space concept with plenty of natural light, modern amenities, shared desk space and common lounge elements along with meeting rooms and more permanent offices. We envision membership and rental options along with a design with the right look and feel that meets current demand. Stay tuned for more on location, function and cost. For more information or to reserve your desk now, contact us at [matff@abccorp.org](mailto:matff@abccorp.org).

(Matthew Fox is the Director of Business Expansion for Altoona Blair County Development Corporation.)

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