

Roaring Spring Library opens new chapter

When is a library not a library? Fortunately for the people in southern Blair County, it's when it becomes more than just a library. And that phenomenon has been making a huge difference for people in need for many months.

"People have always come to the local library for more than books," explained Michelle McIntyre, Director of the Roaring Spring Community Library. "Since the pandemic, the need for non-traditional library services has increased. In early June, we were presented with an opportunity to help give those in the community a hand-up."

The library expanded its "Fridge in the Foyer" program and added the "Pop-Up Food Giveaway."

"We saw the need in our community and did everything we could to help meet

Non-profit Focus

that need," McIntyre acknowledged. "It was also expanded to include pet food so that struggling families could keep their pets."

Since starting the Free Food Giveaway, the library has been able to help more than 200 families and individuals with supplemental food, fresh produce, pet food, personal care and hygiene supplies, feminine hygiene products and winter gear. During one week in August, the library accommodated more than seventy people in less than two hours. McIntyre was astounded by what she saw.

"The number of people in our small community who are experiencing housing and food insecurity is in-

credible," she pointed out. "So many people are falling through the cracks because they make too much money to qualify for assistance but not enough money to keep their lights on and put food on the table."

The library has made a considerable difference and it has not had to do it alone. McIntyre has worked with a number of agencies to make certain that the library shelves are well-stocked.

"The amount of support has been gratifying," she admitted. "So many people from throughout the county have stepped-up and offered their help."

Many of those supporters, like the library, are non-profit organizations.

"Non-profit organizations, by nature, are community-centered," McIntyre disclosed. "They play a vital role in building



Michelle McIntyre, Director of the Roaring Spring Community Library, helps stock the shelves at the library with food items.

healthy communities by providing critical services that are needed by people of all ages."

So how long will the program at the library

continue?

"That's hard to say," she said. "Some weeks we have a lot to give away, other weeks we have limited items. I guess it will

last as long as the need is there."

(Roaring Spring Community Library has been a Blair County Chamber member since 2012.)

WE-LEaD program enjoying great success

According to the most recent census, women make up 53.8% of the Blair County workforce.

"As a majority, we deserve to have resources to help us succeed that are tailored to our specific needs," acknowledges Sara Fiore Gunnett, who chairs the Blair County Chamber's WE-LEaD Committee. "WE-LEaD creates an environment to access those resources."

Launched in 2006, WE-LEaD is an acronym for Women Encouraging Leadership, Education and Development. Prior to that, the Chamber had a breakfast program called Women's Interest Network which offered educational opportunities that too often missed the mark and were seldom well-attended.

"We needed something that not only addressed educational topics but also focused on professional development and networking," remembers Chamber President Joe Hurd. "So I sat down with two of our more active business women and challenged them to create something valuable. And they did."

Amy Seltzer of Seltzer Financial Strategies and Andrea Cohen of Blair Companies worked with former Chamber VP Judy Juda to assemble a steering committee and begin to look



It's not just for women. At a recent WE-LEaD event, Chris Farrell of Penn Highlands Community College attended. Shown with Chris are Kristen Golia (left) and Amanda Farkus.

at ways to engage business women at all stages of their careers.

"We identified priorities, set goals and compiled a list of people who were interested in what we were doing," Seltzer pointed out. "Being a successful business woman has many components and requires significant attention to detail. We wanted to cover as much as we could with our programs and events."

Cohen agrees. "We not only wanted to focus on education, we wanted to create opportunities for women to interact, to create an atmos-

phere that encourages conversation," she noted. "Our networking programs offer women a chance to socialize, build relationships and connect with women professionals and community leaders."

While it's not easy to evaluate the impact that WE-LEaD has had on the Blair County business community, there is little doubt that business women are taking leadership roles in practically every organization.

"Ten of our twenty-one Chamber board members are women," Hurd disclosed. "When I started, there were two. For the past several

years, our Leadership Adult classes have been predominantly women. WE-LEaD has clearly had an influence by encouraging involvement."

Gunnnett would like to see that influence continue to broaden.

"I feel young women who are not yet in the workforce could benefit from some of the WE-LEaD programs," she explained. "We need to look into opportunities to mentor these young women and help set them up for success. We have a wealth of knowledge in our committee and members that should be shared."

Building a solid defense against security breaches



Preparing for the upcoming workshop are, left to right: Joe Harford, Rob Gutshall, John Duhon and Zach Beckel.

With all the challenges that businesses face, the one most often minimized is the one that is potentially most destructive. Data security issues can destroy a healthy business in a matter of seconds. And the threat is not far off in the distance.

"The bogeyman is not beyond the ridge line," warned Joe Harford of Reclamere. "The bogeyman is here. The reality is that it can bring your business to a halt. It always amazes me when people put data security on a list of things to do and then never quite get to it."

To help those procrastinators with good intentions, the Blair County Chamber's Data Security Roundtable is holding a workshop on November 17th from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. at the Devorris Center for Business Development. The title of the workshop is "Will Your Business Survive a Cyber Attack?" The event is in-person but will also have a Zoom option.

"We're doing it as a panel discussion," explained Zach Beckel of United Datacom Networks, Inc. (UDNI) who chairs the Roundtable. "The panel is comprised of people who deal with data security every day."

The program focuses on the "Five Functions of the NIST Network." NIST is the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

"It provides a working strategy for businesses, both in preparing to avoid a data breach as well as responding to one after it happens," Beckel pointed out. "The program covers a lot in a very short amount of time."

Besides Beckel, the panel consists of Tim Serbin of Link Computer Corporation, Rob Gutshall of the Greater Altoona Career & Technology Center, John Duhon of Berry Solutions Group and Angie Singer Keating of Reclamere.

The cost to attend the workshop is \$10 for Chamber members and \$20 for non-members. Those costs apply to both in-person attendance and Zoom. To register, call the Chamber at (814) 943-8151 or register online at www.blairchamber.com.

Corporate sponsor of the workshop is UDNI. There is also an opportunity for interested businesses to become members of the Data Security Roundtable. Call Joe Hurd at (814) 943-8151 or email him at jhurd@blairchamber.com if you are interested. The Roundtable meets monthly.

Wellness Committee to bring sanity to chaos

It's no longer necessary to say that the past eighteen months have been difficult to deal with. With so many obstacles to overcome, many people have looked for ways to get emotionally back on an even keel. The Blair County Chamber's Workplace Wellness Committee wants to help.

For more than a year, the committee has been offering 30-minute programs on Zoom called "Wellness Chats" which identified a topic associated with a

healthy workplace and then invited a speaker to attend the Chat to provide insight on how businesspeople could benefit from gaining additional knowledge.

"We got a lot of positive comments on the Wellness Chats, admitted Committee Chair Phyllis Baker. "We decided to take a few months off and offer something a little different." That something turned out to be "Sanity Sessions."

Similar to the Wellness Chats, Sanity Sessions will



provide an opportunity for business people to share, commiserate or vent – which makes them feel better.

"We're not encouraging hostility," Baker pointed out. "We're simply providing a forum for people to talk about what makes them happy. We want them to get

back on the horse that they might have fallen off of."

The first Sanity Session is this Friday, November 12th from 8:30 to 9:00 a.m. on Zoom. No cost for Chamber members, \$10 for others. Register at www.blairchamber.com to get the Zoom link.