



# OUR TOWN TIMES

2022 ANNUAL REPORT | VOL. XI

DRUG USE ▲ NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH ▼ COMMUNITY SUPPORT ▲ EDUCATION ▲ LAW ENFORCEMENT ▼ VOLUNTEERISM ▲

## Opioid Addiction Crisis

By Senator Judy Ward (R-30)

Pennsylvania continues to struggle in the fight against opioids, despite efforts of the legislature and our communities. In 2020, there were over 5,000 reported drug overdoses in Pennsylvania. While final numbers are not yet in for 2021, projections look to have this year be on par with last.

The opioid epidemic has impacted communities throughout Pennsylvania particularly hard. Thousands of Pennsylvanians including mothers, fathers, children, neighbors, and friends are struggling to overcome addiction. Sadly, the Covid-19 pandemic has only made this situation worse. This pandemic has exacerbated many of the social conditions, including unemployment, low incomes, and isolation that contributed to the rise of the opioid epidemic. This has led to increased levels of stress, anxiety, grief, financial worries, and uncertainty about the future. Quarantining and social distancing have resulted in disruptions of treatment and recovery services for those battling addiction, as well as limiting access to mental health services and support during this stressful time.

According to preliminary data from the Centers



for Disease Control and Prevention, the number of drug overdose deaths continues to climb, both in total and as a result of opioids. In 2020, drug overdose deaths reached record highs. Over 93,000 people passed away, with almost 70,000 being the result of opioids.

With this knowledge, the state must develop more strategies to help those impacted by abuse. Two important pieces of legislation that have been enacted into law are Senate Bill 147 and House Bill 944.

Senate Bill 147 – This bill was enacted into law in June and encourages employers to provide employees with information about the risks associated with opioid use. It amends the Workers’ Compensation Act to require employers with a certified safety committee to include information about the risks associated with opioid use. Currently, employers receive a 5 percent discount on their workers’ compensation insurance premium if they establish a certified safety committee within their workplace.

See Judy Ward/Page A5

## BREAKING THE CYCLE

### IT STARTS WITH PREVENTION

By Shawna Hoover, OOT Executive Coordinator

It was a dramatic increase in violent crime and drug use that brought about the formation of Operation Our Town in 2006. Criminal activity became the subject of daily news headlines; burglaries, violent crime, shootings, gang activity, and drug overdoses all escalated. A group of concerned citizens, determined to find a way to fight back, formed an exploratory group. What they discovered was that most organizations, including law enforcement, did not have the resources needed to deter and reduce the criminal stronghold on our neighborhoods. It became clear that unless the community pulled together, we would lose our community to those profiting from drug and related criminal activities. Within a few short months, dozens of local businesses committed financial and other support to “take back our neighborhoods.” Partnerships were forged between Operation Our Town and existing organizations with proven law enforcement techniques, treatment efforts, and prevention programs. Operation Our Town was modeled after the U.S. Department of Justice “Weed and Seed” program, which is a community-based strategy that aims to prevent, control, and reduce violent crime, drug abuse, and gang activity in designated high crime neighborhoods across the nation. Weed and Seed has a two-pronged approach in See **Breaking**/Page A22



## BREAKING THE GENERATIONAL CYCLES

By Toni Bilik, Gloria Gates Memorial Foundation, Executive Director

To start, I’d like to clarify that I’m not writing this article as an expert summarizing years of research on human behavior. There are thousands of documents written on the subject of generational poverty, addiction, and incarceration. My only source of credibility is working sixteen years in the midst of low income families and observing their struggle, resilience, successes, and unfortunately sometimes, relinquishment to the cycles.

The cycle of generational poverty is so complicated. It’s a labyrinth with more dead ends than we can comprehend, and the cycle of generational incarceration is closely related. Both circumstances are perpetuated by insufficient educational accomplishment such as high school graduation and job training. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reported in 2003 (C. Harlow) that 68 percent of state prison inmates did not graduate from high school. The National Education Association (C. Long) lists common reason for school drop out and then reports that the majority of drop outs are from low income families. Are you sensing a cycle here? Other factors that filter into in both cycles are teenage pregnancy, domestic abuse, mental illness, and addiction, which can also be a generational cycle.

I think that the biggest challenges in the poverty cycle are things that are deeply embedded, deeply human, and deeply unfair. These challenges are the results of growing up in a much less than ideal world. For the most part, I see it from the children’s point of view since I work with youth.

To explain this point of view, I’d like to walk you through the life of a young woman that I know. Let’s call her ‘Beth’. I met her when she was in kindergarten. Her mother and grandmother were each teenagers when they had their first child, and they were all living in subsidized housing and relying on government assistance for food and healthcare. Beth was a funny, See **Breaking**/Page A7

## BLAIR COUNTY – COMMISSIONER’S OFFICE

By Commissioners Laura Burke, Bruce Erb, Amy Webster

With 2021 behind us, it is apparent the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are still affecting all of us. Issues like mental health, complex family relationships, and low self-esteem have heightened feelings of isolation and uncertainty for the future. Although these issues were around 15 years ago, we could not have imagined that in 2022 they would be coupled with a national opioid crisis and other factors that intensify them, such as the pressure of social media. Adults and children alike have been affected by these crises and need help now more than ever. That is why it is vital to continue working closely with partners like Operation Our Town to ensure that those struggling with mental health issues and addiction continue to have opportunities to recover. During the 1990’s, Blair County began attracting the attention of illegal drug distribution organizations, which led to an explosion of drug use and abuse, as well as the crime that follows with that, and the resulting mental and physical health issues. Opioid addiction, frequently triggered by the initial use of a legal prescription, compounded this problem and disproportionately affects the rural areas of our Commonwealth. At the same time, our community has struggled to attract and retain jobs that pay a living wage.

*Continued on A11*




### Pick up your new window clings, magnets, & yard signs

Available at

#### The OOT Office

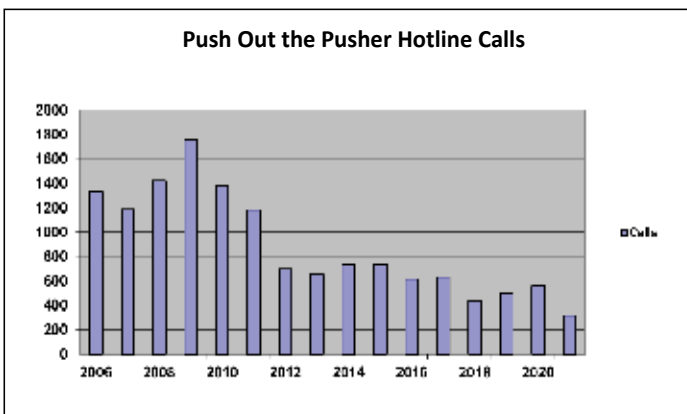
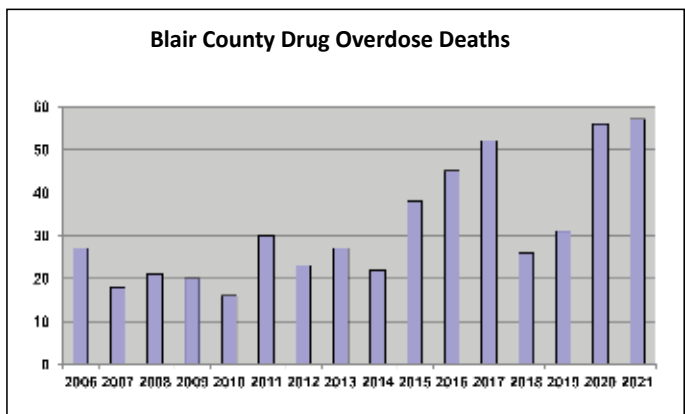
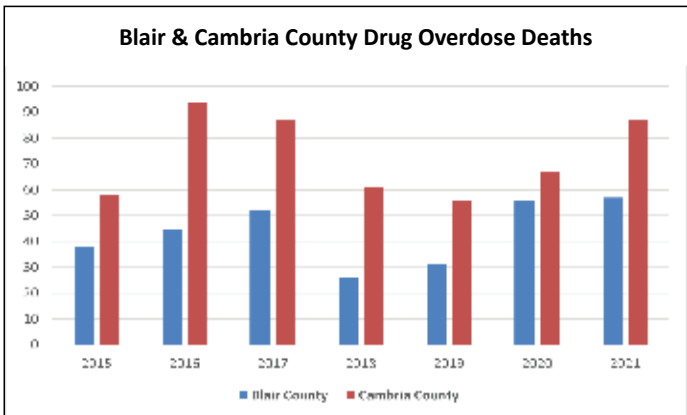
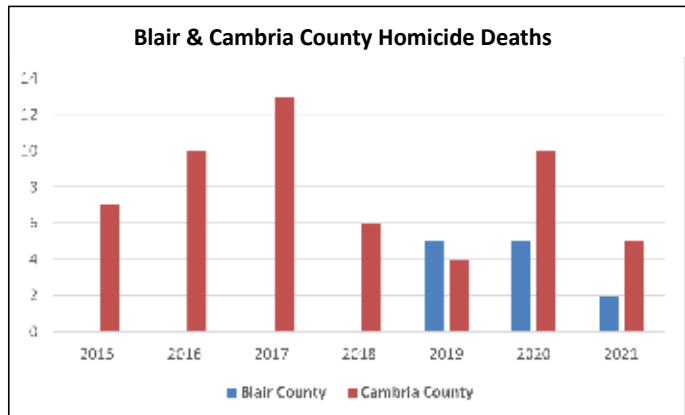
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Business	A9
Local	A10



# POLICE REPORT



Source: Blair and Cambria County Coroner's Office

**FRATERNAL  
ORDER  
OF POLICE**



**BALD EAGLE  
LODGE #51**

**1979 REESE  
HOLLOW ROAD  
P.O. BOX 99,  
PORT MATILDA, PA.  
16870**

**SERVING OFFICERS  
OF BLAIR, CENTRE,  
AND CLEARFIELD  
COUNTIES**

## Blair County K-9 Units Receive Funding

By Shawna Hoover, OOT Executive Coordinator



Pictured: Corporal Justin Bennett & K-9 Rik, Blair County Sheriff's Office

Three law enforcement entities in Blair County received funding for four law enforcement K-9 units in 2021. The Blair County Sheriff's Office, Logan Township Police Department, and Tyrone Borough Police Department all received the funding through the Willard Family Foundation, in consultation with Operation Our Town and the late Rex Kaup, a former Board Member of the Willard Family Foundation. The Willard Family Foundation is a donor-advised fund through the Central Pennsylvania Community Foundation that funds causes that support dogs and cats.

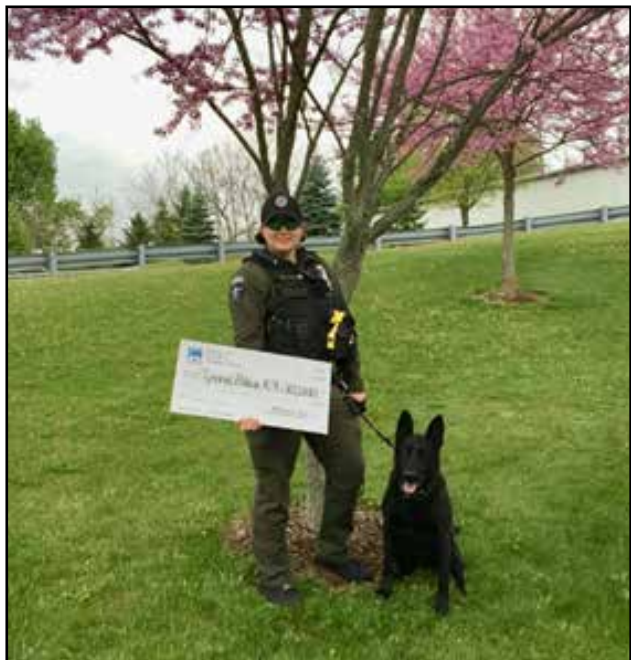
The Blair County Sheriff's Office received \$10,000 for their K-9 Program. The funding will support the K-9 unit at the Blair County Sheriff's

Office, comprised of Corporal Justin Bennett and K-9 Rik, who are used for patrol and explosive detection for schools, businesses, religious venues, and all police agencies. The funds will support the K-9 unit to update and/or replace training gear and equipment. Sheriff James Ott of the Blair County Sheriff's Office said, "We are humbled and honored to have the support of the Willard Family Foundation and Operation Our Town for our K-9 program. Each and every dollar secures the existence for the County's only explosive detection K-9, which is a huge safety asset to both citizens and businesses of Blair County."

The Logan Township Police Department received \$20,000 for their K-9 Program. The funding will support the

two K-9 units at the Logan Township Police Department, comprised of Patrolman Alex Vazquez and K-9 Freddy, and Patrolman George Swander and K-9 Ciro, who are used for drug detection and interdiction, community outreach, and

kennel/boardings, memberships, and food. Chief David Reese of Logan Township Police Department said, "This type of collaboration between law enforcement and community partners, such as Operation Our Town, is critical in stemming



Pictured: Officer Traci Winters & K-9 Getro, Tyrone Borough P.D.



Pictured from left to right: Patrolman Alex Vazquez & K-9 Freddy and Patrolman George Swander & K-9 Ciro, Logan Township Police Department

tracking. The funds will support the two K-9 units with training of the K-9's and K-9 officers, equipment, veterinary care,

the tide of illegal narcotics in our community. Without K-9 resources to assist our officers in drug detection, the overall

goal of deterrence and detection of illegal substances would be limited. We are grateful for the Willard Family Foundation and OOT for the generous donation, which will allow the Logan Township Police K-9 Unit to continue to provide high quality K-9 services to all Blair County communities."

The Tyrone Borough Police Department received \$10,000 for their K-9 Program. The funding will support the K-9 unit at the Tyrone Borough Police Department, comprised of Officer Traci Winters and K-9 Getro, who are used for narcotics detection, patrol, and community outreach. The funds will support the K-9 unit with the purchase of further equipment. Chief Jessica Walk of the Tyrone Borough Police Department said, "We are honored to receive this grant from the Willard Family Foundation and Operation Our Town. It will assist us in purchasing further equipment for K-9 Getro that will improve the department's K-9 Unit. K-9 Getro has been an asset to the Tyrone Borough Police Department, and we look forward to the future growth of the K-9 Unit."

Law enforcement work is hard to protect our communities every day, which is why they need the best tools and resources to help them do their job. Operation Our Town is grateful to the Willard Family Foundation for the funding to support Blair County's K-9 units. Because of the generous donation from the Willard Family Foundation, Blair County will continue to be well-protected by K-9's for years to come!

**The Best ME  
Is Drug FREE!**



# Law Enforcement Year in Review

By Jarod Quist, Supervisory Narcotics Agent, PA Office of Attorney General

## A NATIONAL LOOK

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that there were approximately 100,306 overdose deaths in the 12 months leading up to April 2021. By comparison to the previous 12-month period, there was a 28.5% increase in deaths. Opioid related overdose deaths during the twelve months leading up to April 2021 increased to 75,673 compared to 56,064 the previous year. Overdose deaths related to cocaine, methamphetamine, and fentanyl were also on the rise.

## PENNSYLVANIA

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Health, preliminary numbers show there have been 5,063 drug overdose deaths reported for 2020 through July 21, 2021 in Pennsylvania, marking a substantial increase from recent years. It is an increase of more

than 600 drug overdose deaths reported in 2019 and ranks second only to 2017, in which there were 5,403 overdose deaths.

## BLAIR COUNTY

In 2021, there were 64 controlled purchases of controlled substances in Blair County and the majority were either for heroin (fentanyl) or methamphetamine. The Blair County Drug Task Force continued to utilize saturation and interdiction details, executing approximately 45 search warrants on residences or vehicles. 94 defendants were arrested, many of them with multiple criminal complaints. Notably in 2021, OAG BNI and the Blair County Drug Task Force made several large seizures. In early April 2021, agents/officers seized 336 grams of methamphetamine, 60 bricks of heroin, and 8 grams of fentanyl from a residence in Altoona. In mid-April, agents/officers conducted a multi-day operation that resulted in

the seizure of 175 bricks of heroin/fentanyl that was being trafficked between Pittsburgh and Altoona. In late August, agents/officers intercepted 6 pounds of methamphetamine, 4.6 ounces of cocaine, and 21 grams of fentanyl that was being brought from Allentown to Blair County for distribution.

## PARTNERSHIPS

As the epidemic continues, new partnerships develop which result in new strategies to combat it. Partnerships have been created between law enforcement, education, treatment, and medical professionals, to name a few. These partnerships are combining agencies at the federal, state, and local levels, and crossing municipal, county, and state lines. Pennsylvania is taking an active role in building these partnerships to develop new and innovative strategies to combat this epidemic.

Law enforcement will also actively participate in



Photo Courtesy of Altoona Police Department

partnerships with education, treatment, and medical professionals with new and innovative ways to combat this epidemic to make Blair County a better, safer place to live.

The Blair County Drug Task Force, in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office, Bureau of Narcotics Investigation, is dedicated to their mandate of investigating drug trafficking in Blair County.



## HONOR THE BADGE

OperationOurTown.org

## Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB) Report

By Honorable Elizabeth A. Doyle, Blair County President Judge

The impact of Covid continued on CJAB in 2021. In February, we recognized the service of retiring Altoona Police Chief Janice Freehling. Other presentations were canceled. CJAB continues to meet and will hold a strategic planning session in 2022.

We continue to work on the issues of the criminal caseload, with the good news being that we ended December with 1,539 criminal

cases pending at year end 2021. This is 93 cases less than year end 2020 (1,632). The December 2021 figure is the smallest number of cases pending since December 2019. Our most recent high count was 1,817 cases in April 2021.

Other successes are that our costs, fines, and restitutions office collected \$63,900 from defendants in December 2021 alone.

CJAB members continue

to participate in the reentry effort, helping to ensure that individuals released from the jail are released under conditions of supervision, and arranged continued medication and housing so that they can succeed in not reoffending.

The group also participates in the statewide Stepping Up Initiative, focusing on mental health and striving to achieve mental health services rather than incarceration

for appropriate individuals accused of crimes.

CJAB continues to be the conduit whereby state and federal funds through the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) are passed to our Blair County DUI treatment court and our drug court. These very successful programs treat substance abuse while ensuring public safety. Judge Milliron and Judge Sullivan deserve recognition for

running excellent programs.

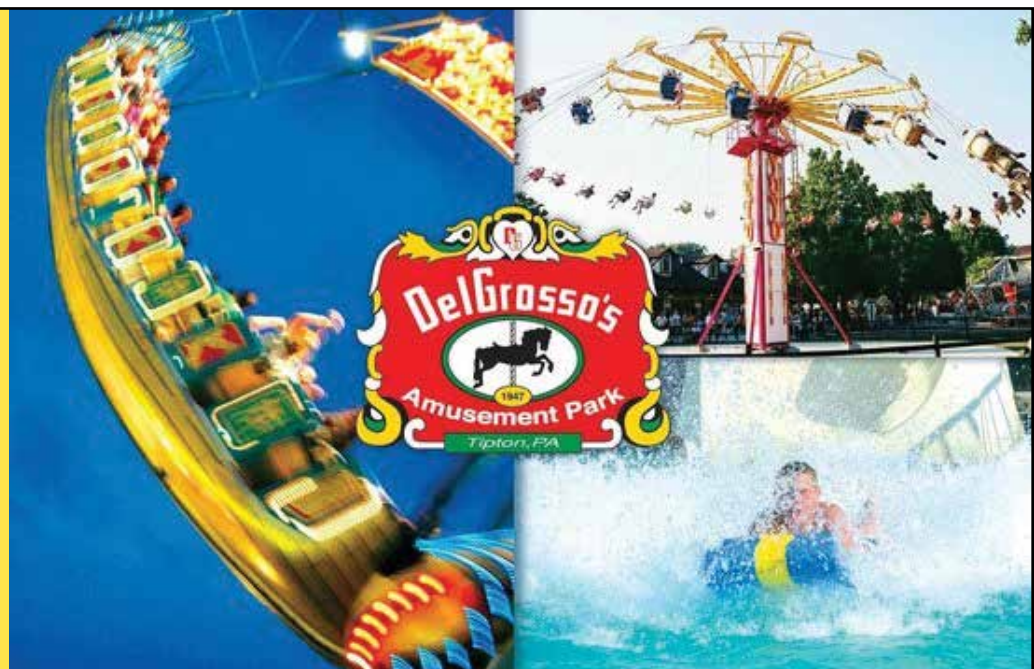
A housing initiative is also part of the CJAB mission, and the group spreads the word about important events such as the landlord tenant workshops, which have been extremely successful lately.

CJAB intends to regroup, rewind, and refresh at strategic planning in 2022, and looks forward to another great year as a standalone group and as an Operation Our Town roundtable.

## Operation Our Town Day at DelGrosso's Park & Laguna Splash

Save the Date!  
August 4, 2022

Go to DelGrosso's website  
"Explore" for more information:  
[www.mydelgrossopark.com](http://www.mydelgrossopark.com)



## DRUG PROSECUTOR: POSITION SUMMARY

By Peter Weeks, District Attorney & Katelyn Hoover, Assistant District Attorney

The OOT Drug Prosecutor grant position was created in 2007 upon the Blair County community's recognition that a need existed within the Blair County District Attorney's Office to handle the rising influx of cases due to drug crimes and drug related crimes. In 2021, Assistant District Attorney Katelyn Hoover continued to prosecute numerous felony drug cases in her role as the Drug Prosecutor in the Blair

County District Attorney's Office. Since she stepped into this role in mid-2019, Attorney Hoover has gained significant experience in litigating a variety of cases through each stage of the criminal justice system, including preliminary hearings, pre-trial motions, and jury trials. She also carried a full caseload which included assisting in the death penalty first degree murder trial for Paul Aaron Ross in April 2021 and is currently

prosecuting another first degree murder case.

Attorney Hoover reported directly to First Assistant District Attorney Nichole Smith and District Attorney Peter Weeks. She acted as the county-wide coordinator for drug investigations, prosecutions, and related training. Attorney Hoover handled a full caseload consisting of drug trafficking felony cases, drug manufacturing felony cases, firearms felony cases, aggravated assault, robbery, burglary, and endangering the welfare of children that correlate back to drug

use, drug trafficking, and misdemeanor drug violations. In addition to her own caseload, Attorney Hoover assisted District Attorney Peter Weeks in the various stages of investigation and prosecution for drug delivery resulting in death cases, historical drug investigations, as well as drug cases filed in Blair County by the Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General.

In addition to these responsibilities, Attorney Hoover filed and litigated civil asset forfeiture action and continued in her role of approving search warrants, criminal complaints,

consensual interceptions relating to the Pennsylvania Wiretap Act, and collaborating with law enforcement during the investigatory stage of cases prior to the filing of charges.

The District Attorney's Office continues to file asset forfeiture petitions where property is utilized by drug dealers to facilitate drug dealing, or drug dealers acquire property because of their drug trafficking. Proceeds from asset forfeiture are utilized to purchase equipment and provide training and assistance that would otherwise not be possible.

See Drug/Page A6



# DEPARTMENT UPDATES

## 2021 Year in Review : Dept. Highlights

### ALLEGHENY TOWNSHIP

#### Police Department – Assistant Chief Michael Robison

- The Allegheny Township Police Department received a generous donation of \$10,094.82 from Fiore Toyota for the purchase of ballistic vests.
- The Department handled 4,605 incidents in 2021, slightly down from the 4,869 incidents we handled in 2020.
- The Department continued to participate in the statewide Aggressive Driving and Buckle Up PA Programs that focus on traffic safety.
- As part of the impaired driving enforcement, the Department also participated in DUI roving patrols and DUI checkpoints that focus on detecting/arresting impaired drivers. As a result of making several impaired driver arrests, Officer Paul Mummert Jr

#### Police Department – Chief Joseph Merrill

- In 2021, the Altoona Police Department handled 22,843 calls for service (an average of 63 calls per day), made 2,052 arrests (119 of those arrests being possession with intent to deliver narcotics), and responded to approx. 250 drug overdoses.
- 27 APD Officers & Attorney General Agents ran 6.7 miles through the City of Altoona, raising \$2,100 for the PA Special Olympics in the Law Enforcement Torch Run.
- 12 APD Officers participated in the Polar-Pop (taking place of the Polar Plunge due to COVID-19), raising over \$3,200 for the PA Special Olympics. Officers were drenched by fire hoses to raise money and promote the Special Olympics.
- APD started its very first “No Shave November” program, donating \$2,250 to the Amelia Sharer Foundation, which



Photo Courtesy of Altoona Police Department



Photo Courtesy of Blair Township Police Department

received an honorable mention for the Blair County Drug and Alcohol Top Gun Award.

- The Department investigated 288 Motor Vehicle Accidents in 2021, slightly down from 316 Motor Vehicle Accidents in 2020.
- The Allegheny Township Police thanks our community and programs like Operation Our Town, Blair County Crime Solvers, and Because We Care for your support and efforts to make Allegheny Township a great place to live and work. We look forward to serving our community in the years ahead!

### ALTOONA

assists families in need of emergency medical transports of children with serious illnesses.

- Community events were back this year, with the Altoona Police Department hosting the National Night Out Against Crime in Downtown Heritage Plaza. Officers also assisted with numerous concerts, parades, and charity events.
- Chief Janice Freehling retired after 44 years of service at the Altoona Police Department, 20 of those years as Chief of Police, ending a historical era as she was one of the very first female Chiefs of Police in the state of Pennsylvania.
- Chief Joseph Merrill was



Pictured: Cocoa with the Po-Po at Greenbean Coffee House!

appointed as the new Chief of Police following the retirement of Chief Freehling. Chief Merrill previously held the position of Deputy Chief and has served with APD for over 15 years.

- The department implemented a new Community Outreach program in which officers specifically visit city parks, pools, housing complexes, and various neighborhoods to personally interact with the community. The program proved to be a success and is expected to be carried on for years to come.
- Present donations were collected in the APD front lobby as the department teamed up with Professional’s Auto Body to provide Christmas morning for 24 local families (69 children) in need this year.
- APD welcomed 9 new officers in 2021 with ongoing recruitment and hiring efforts.

### BLAIR TOWNSHIP

#### Police Department – Chief Roger White

- 2021 was a busy but safe year for the officers of the Blair Township Police Department.
- COVID-19 remained a threat, which necessitated continued adjustments to how we operated and interacted with our public. The adjustments were successful in ensuring the safety and health of our public and our officers.
- BTPD handled over 2,100 incidents in 2021, which is a slight increase from 2020.
- The Department continued to focus on traffic safety via enhanced enforcement of the motor vehicle laws and actively participating in the statewide Aggressive Driving and Buckle Up PA Programs.
- Our focus also continued on detecting/arresting impaired drivers. Ptlm. Matthew Fleck was recognized for his efforts in this area and was awarded

the Top Gun award for departments in our category in Blair County.

- The prevalence of alcohol and drugs continues to be a factor in a large percentage of incidents handled by the Department. Incidents involving individuals with mental health issues remained steady.
- The Blair Township Police Department thanks its citizens and Operation Our Town for the continuing cooperation and support in our efforts to keep Blair Township the great community it is, and we look forward to serving in 2022!

### DUNCANSVILLE

#### Police Department – Chief Jeffrey Ketner

- 2021 was an interesting year. We have been dealing with COVID-19 inside and outside the department.
- We purchased body cams but don’t have them online yet because of an outdated and old computer system. We are in the process of upgrading to a new system that can handle everything we need.
- We’ve seen a rise in mental health issues and also domestic violence in the borough.

### FREEDOM TOWNSHIP

#### Police Department – Chief Terry Dellinger

- 2021 was again a busy year for Freedom Township Police, while battling COVID-19 issues.
- Freedom Township Police calls for service increased slightly from 2,009 calls in 2020 to 2,031 calls in 2021 while employing 3 full-time officers, who are assisted at times with part-time officers.
- Drug arrests, mostly of “METH,” continue and are ever more increasing. The use of “METH” is seen to be

### HOLLIDAYSBURG

#### Police Department – OIC/SGT Richard Oldham

Hollidaysburg Police Department is comprised of nine full-time officers, four clerks, and a secretary to the Chief of Police employed to protect the community twenty-four/seven. The makeup of Hollidaysburg Police Department allows for a dynamic department able to implement change and receiving optimum training for the betterment of the community.

Below you will find statistics from 2021:

- 4,252 Calls for Service
- 267 Criminal Arrests
- 42 Juvenile Arrests
- 638 Traffic Citations
- 1,114 Vehicle Stops
- 27 DUI Arrests
- 68 Non-traffic Citations

In 2022, Hollidaysburg Police Department is excited to continue the service to the community and is praying for a return to more normal ground. Should you have any questions regarding the Hollidaysburg Police Department, please do not hesitate to call.

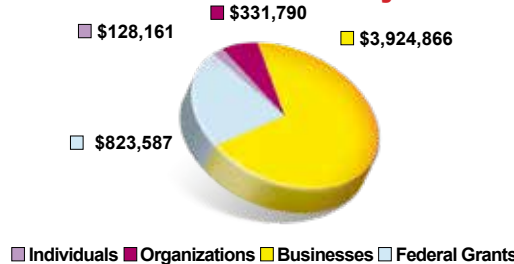
See Dept. Updates/Page A19

# BLUE LIVES MATTER

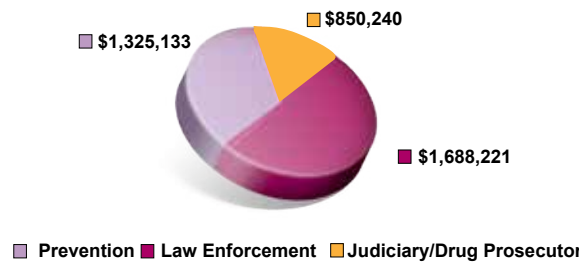


# COMMUNITY

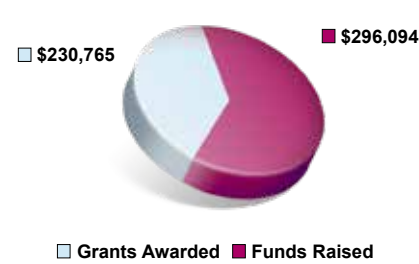
## 2007 - 2021 OOT Money Raised



## 2007 - 2021 OOT Grants Awarded



## 2021 Results



## OUR COMMUNITY IS COUNTING ON US

By John Joyce, M.D., Member of Congress

Over 90,000 Americans – and 48 of our neighbors here in Blair County – died from opioid overdoses in 2021. As we start a new year, these troubling statistics only scratch the surface of a worsening epidemic. Sadly, there is no single cause for these deaths, and there is no single solution for ending this crisis.



In the face of this staggering rise in deaths, we must renew our commitment as a community to work together to end the opioid epidemic. As Blair County's Congressman, I am committed to working with community leaders, like Operation Our Town, to fight this epidemic. In fact, one of my top priorities in Congress is to ensure that fentanyl, and its deadly analogs, remain a Schedule I narcotic. In the past year, these deadly drugs became the number one killer of Americans

ages 18 to 45 – and we must be doing all we can to get this deadly poison off our streets and out of our communities. That's why I cosponsored the HALT Fentanyl Act, to ensure this drug remains illegal to possess while still allowing researchers to study its effects.

In addition, as a Co-Chair of the GOP Doctors Caucus, a Member of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health, and a Member of the House Republican Healthy Futures Task Force, I am committed to finding solutions that are tailored and personalized to meet the unique needs of each individual.

That is why I am grateful for the work that Operation Our Town is doing to provide focused, individual solutions to help our neighbors struggling with addiction. The COVID-19 pandemic has created new challenges – including limiting access to essential in-person care – and in Congress, I'm working to ease access to telemedicine, which can be instrumental in helping patients to heal from home.

We're in this fight together – and I urge all of you to contact my office at (814) 656-6081 or visit my website at [johnjoyce.house.gov](http://johnjoyce.house.gov) to share your ideas on how we can work to achieve our common goal.

I look forward to joining you to curb this crisis and working to make our community and neighborhoods safer.



**Blair County  
CRIME SOLVERS**  
**814-695-7555**

## Operation Our Town Roundtable Descriptions

### Community Revitalization Roundtable:

A community partnership to develop and implement strategies to improve neighborhoods.

### Criminal Justice Advisory

the work of the Operation Our Town partnerships. Promote, facilitate, and encourage faith-based community partnerships in using God's gracious gifts to bring about positive change, hope, and spiritual health in

### Roundtable:

Elimination of drug abuse in K-12 students in Blair County through education, programming, and awareness of the dangers of drug abuse.

### Law Enforcement Roundtable:

To facilitate partnerships between the community and business to fight both drug abuse and crime through proven law enforcement techniques.

### Marketing Roundtable:

To communicate and promote the objectives of the organization to effectively engage the citizenry of our community to become involved in taking back our neighborhoods.

### Northern Blair Roundtable:

To facilitate partnerships between community and business in Northern Blair County to fight drug abuse and crime through proven law enforcement, treatment, and prevention techniques.

### Pharmacy Roundtable:

To minimize the likelihood of prescription drug diversion through education to pharmacists, pharmacy staff, and prescribers, as well as striving to ensure the safety of pharmacy personnel and enhance relationships with law enforcement for collaborative synergistic partnerships. Drug disposal and opioid overdose treatment advocacy will be communicated throughout our efforts.



Pictured: 2021 Landlord Workshop, Housing Roundtable Event

### Board (CJAB):

To provide an ongoing forum for communication and collaboration among key decision makers for the purposes of evaluating, analyzing, planning, information sharing, and integrating and recommending action to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the criminal justice system.

### Early Childhood Education Roundtable:

To prevent involvement in drug abuse and criminal activities by providing pre-k age children with enriched early childhood learning experiences.

### Faith-based Roundtable:

From a faith perspective, respond to and contribute to

the community.

### Gang Roundtable:

To gather, coordinate and disseminate gang related activities for the purpose of communicating information directly to the steering committee in order to assist in the development of strategic plans to deal with gang, drug, and crime prevention as a result of gang related activities. (currently inactive & will meet as needed)

### Housing Roundtable:

Identify solutions to address the problems created by transient tenants. To discuss and implement educational techniques for renting properties to responsible tenants.

### K-12 Education

## JUDY WARD

*Continued from A1*

House Bill 944 – This bill was enacted into law in June and protects the safety of people who decide to leave addiction treatment against medical advice. The bill codified an existing best practice for people who have given their consent to share information with a specific individual when that consent has not been revoked.

If a person leaves treatment against medical advice, we believe their designated loved one should be notified.

There are a few other bills that I would like to highlight that are still in the legislative process. They are Senate Bill 69, Senate Bill 195, and Senate Bill 641:

Senate Bill 69 – This bill establishes a pilot program to connect individuals in recovery with occupations through local workforce development boards. These local workforce development boards will be able to create strategies that best benefit individuals in the local treatment and recovery community to meet the needs of local employers. Additionally, the legislation will provide

incentives for businesses and training providers to participate in the program. An important, yet often overlooked side effect of this epidemic is the vicious cycle that many individuals fall into when trying to find and maintain steady employment with a history of a substance use disorder.

Senate Bill 195 – This bill, which I sponsored, removes the Caregiver Support Program monthly care plan cost cap that has not been increased since 1993. The financial impacts to caregivers, esp. grandparents raising grandchildren due to the opioid crisis, have steadily risen. We need to be resourceful about how to create new methods of assistance and continue existing support services for those struggling with addiction.

Senate Bill 641 – This bill eliminates the disparity in access standard for substance abuse center services between urban and rural areas. Currently, the access standard for out-patient and residential services must be within 30 minutes of travel time in urban areas, while it must

be within 60 minutes of travel time in rural areas. Statistics from around the country show that the farther a person needs to travel to obtain treatment, the less likely he or she is to maintain that treatment regimen. This proposed legislation would standardize the travel time standard to 30 minutes for out-patient treatment for both urban and rural areas.

Despite the progress that has been achieved, the scourge of opioids continues to plague our local communities. The efforts of law enforcement and state legislators must remain concentrated on the problem to ensure that opioid addiction and the criminal activity associated with the drug's use do not proliferate. The welfare of society and the safety of our citizens depend upon it.

I am grateful for the enduring commitment of Operation Our Town and the dedication to its mission by all individuals associated with the organization. Their involvement demonstrates that they truly care about the safety of our community.



Photo Courtesy of Logan Township Police Department

**KEEP IT SAFE.  
KEEP IT GOING.**



# Booker T. Washington Revitalization Corporation

By David Cunningham, President

Like nearly all aspects of life, the work of the Booker T. Washington Revitalization Corporation has been significantly disrupted over the past two years. Fundraisers and events were canceled. Construction materials were delayed. Projects were put on hold. However, with 2022 here, we are ready to move forward and make up for lost time!

Hopefully you’ve already heard of our group, or better yet, you’ve enjoyed some of the parks we’ve helped to improve over the years. If not, please allow us to introduce ourselves. The BTW Corp is an entirely volunteer group here in Blair County with the mission to create exceptional recreational spaces for residents of all ages and abilities. You can see the results of our efforts at the Booker T. Washington Outdoor Facility at 19th Street and 13th Avenue; at Prospect Park along 15th Street; at Hamilton Park on East Cherry Avenue; and now at Iuzzolino Park on Maple Avenue. Since our founding in 2008, we’ve been fortunate enough to complete over \$1.2 million worth of public park projects across Altoona. From those earliest days, Operation Our Town has been a stalwart partner in this revitalization work, and we’ve been thankful for their assistance time and again.

That revitalization work will continue apace in 2022, as we make even more improvements to both Hamilton and Iuzzolino Parks. Major work at Hamilton Park was completed in 2017. That

project included a new rope climber, pickleball courts, and a refurbishing of the existing baseball field. As a final bow on the project, we will be adding a paved walking path and additional site improvements this year.

The facilities at Iuzzolino Park have been growing since 2019, when a beautiful new playground was installed by the Central Blair Recreation Commission. In 2020, our group and members of the

in some of our community events. 2022 will see the reintroduction of our 3-on-3 basketball tournament. Our twelfth year of the event will be held Saturday, June 11th at the fantastic new courts at Lakemont Park. The tournament is open to children and teens entering 4th through 12th grade, and the entire community is invited to come out and enjoy the event. Later in the summer, we’ll also be introducing a series of block



Pictured: Hamilton Park

Iuzzolino Park Restoration Project were able to keep that momentum going with the installation of a new Merry Go All, a more inclusive version of the traditional merry go round. This year will see additional accessibility improvements through the installation of sidewalks. This is all part of our larger effort to mindfully improve facilities so that children of all abilities can join in the fun.

How can you help in these efforts? I’m glad you asked. The simplest (and most fun) way is by participating

party days across the city at the parks mentioned above. Watch the Central Blair Recreation Commission page at CBRCparks.org for more information on these events or to join in their scholarship and capital fund drives.

With the continuing support of groups like Operation Our Town, our network of volunteers, and citizens like you, we at the Booker T. Washington Revitalization Corporation intend to continue transforming public spaces here in Blair County for a very long time. See you outside!

# Drug Prosecutor

Continued from A3

These training opportunities allow our local law enforcement to stay up-to-date on the latest trends in drug trafficking.

The cases investigated and prosecuted in 2021 continued the trend where individuals involved in drug trafficking are not only committing other types of crimes, but were often released on bail to the streets where they continued to engage in criminal activity. These crimes include criminal homicide, sexual assault, domestic violence, gun crimes, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, and theft cases. Blair County also continued to see individuals who reside in Blair County ordering controlled substances to be delivered from bigger cities, which were then brought in to our neighborhoods. The valiant investigative efforts of law enforcement within the county led to the interception of six pounds of methamphetamine during a traffic stop that was transported by two Blair County residents from the Allentown area. Additionally, officers were able to successfully cease a heroin trafficking enterprise that was travelling to Blair County from Pittsburgh.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020 and continued throughout 2021, the criminal justice system experienced the effects of a backlog of the resolution of cases. The District Attorney’s Office worked diligently to ensure that despite the large number of cases it was faced with prosecuting, offers were being made that still accounted

for the need to protect the community and quell the distribution of controlled substances throughout the county. In some of these cases, the individuals’ sentence was determined by the judge rather than an agreement between the District Attorney’s Office and the Defendant. After electing to exercise the right to have a trial by jury, one individual was sentenced to eighteen to thirty-nine years in a State Correctional Facility for controlled purchases while another individual received a six and a half to forty year sentence in a State Correctional Facility for engaging in the sale of controlled substances in two separate instances.



Assistant D.A. Katelyn Hoover

Moving forward in 2022, the Blair County District Attorney’s Office will continue to join forces with local law enforcement to aggressively pursue drug investigations and those who engage in the distribution of controlled substances in its effort to protect the citizens of Blair County and discourage individuals from coming to Blair County to engage in the distribution of controlled substances.

# GRANTS: 2021 RECIPIENTS

By Shawna Hoover, OOT Executive Coordinator

Operation Our Town holds a grant cycle once a year to support programs aimed at preventing and/or reducing drug abuse and/or crime in Blair County. All nonprofit organizations, schools, and government agencies are eligible for grant consideration.

The 2022 Grant Cycle will

and click on the Grants tab on the homepage.

A total of over \$55,000 in grants were awarded by Operation Our Town during the 2021 Grant Cycle to the following prevention programs:

**AASD Adult Education Program: “HSE: Pathway to a Bright Future”**

**(Education Leading to Employment & Career Training)**

1415 6th Avenue, Altoona (814) 946-8365

Funding awarded will be used to provide nutritious meals and snacks for pregnant and parenting teens at educational events and out of school visits, and provide engagement

financial assistance to pursue a post-secondary education, given that they meet program guidelines and participate fully in the program.

**ArtsAltoona: ArtsAltoona Music Programming**

2212 Sixth Avenue, Altoona (814) 201-7004

Funding awarded will be used to support the provision of music lessons to children starting in third grade interested in things like piano, vocal lessons, percussion, and guitar, targeting Altoona’s 6th Ward and underserved population living within an 8-block radius.

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of Blair County: S.M.A.R.T. School-based Mentoring Program**

891 23rd Street, Altoona (814) 944-6129

Funding awarded will be used to help create and support matches between mentors and mentees in all of the SMART Mentoring Site-based Programs throughout Blair County; thus providing children with meaningful relationships to help reduce the likelihood of substance abuse, criminal mischief, and school absenteeism.

**Blair Regional YMCA: Family Y-Nite**

1111 Hewit Street, Hollidaysburg (814) 695-3204 Funding awarded will be used to help low-income families attend these family-based

activities that bring families together in a fun, safe, affordable, and drug-free environment which provide food, resources, art, music, and crafts for all.

**Center for Independent Living of South Central PA: TEAM Builders**

3013 Beale Avenue, Altoona (814) 949-1905

Funding awarded will be used to engage Blair County youth in healthy activities that promote self-confidence, self-esteem, respect of self and others as part of a bullying prevention program.

**Central Blair Recreation & Park Commission: Happy Hoops Program Supplies**

2101 5th Avenue, Altoona (814) 949-2231

Funding awarded will be used to assist with start-up costs for new program supplies and equipment for their new youth basketball program for children 4-6 years old.

**Child Advocates of Blair County: CHOICES Summer Program**

319 Sycamore Street, Altoona (814) 946-8336

Funding awarded will be used to purchase supplies and incentives for a youth summer program at Evergreen Manors that will include educational topics & agency speakers, crafts, games, movies, and community outings.

See Grants/Page A20



Pictured: 2021 Grant Recipients

open on May 2, 2022 with a deadline for grant applications on June 3, 2022. Applicants have the option of using the “\$2,999 & Under” or “\$3,000 & Above” grant applications to apply for funding. Please note that both grant applications have been revised and updated, so the updated versions (with revised date of 4/27/2021) must be used to apply for funding. To access the updated grant applications, please visit [www.operationourtown.org](http://www.operationourtown.org)

2212 Sixth Avenue, Altoona (814) 329-0253

Funding awarded will be used to invest in the future of Blair County adults who lack a high school diploma by awarding HSE (High School Equivalency) scholarships to cover the cost of GED subtest exams necessary to earning their High School Equivalency Credential.

**Altoona Area School District ELECT Program: ELECT**

support to paternal figures that are ineligible for the program but involved in the students children’s lives.

**Altoona Area School District Foundation: Project SOAR (Study, Overcome, Achieve, Reward)**

1415 6th Avenue, Altoona (814) 243-0235

Funding awarded will be used for supplies and program materials for students that have been identified to receive

See Something? Say Something! 693-3020



# BREAKING THE GENERATIONAL CYCLES *Continued from A1*

bright, and compassionate child. If she was born to middle class parents, she would have been surrounded by a network of family, parents' friends and parents' coworkers who would all dote on her. As she went through school, they would cheer her on while she excelled at sports, music, and academics. Finally, they would serve as role models, provide references, and lead her into a successful career.

But Beth wasn't born into a middle class family. She didn't have money or transportation for gymnastics or music lessons. Beth received little emotional support at home because her mother had three other children and both of their fathers were in jail. Beth's mother tended to smoke pot often to handle her stress. When Beth's classroom teacher regularly announced that 'you can grow up to be anything

that you want,' Beth always figured that she didn't mean her. Beth had fallen into the pattern where people who have less think that THEY are less. Imagine that feeling that Beth got when more affluent kids talked about their upcoming family vacation or dance recital. By the time Beth was in high school, all of her disappointments, alienation, and heartache led her to search for comfort and she became a teenage mom herself. Since her boyfriend never had anyone to model responsibility and fatherhood, he walked away from Beth and her infant daughter. Like her own mother and grandmother, Beth is now a single parent living in low income housing. She would like to work, but childcare is expensive and she can't afford a car. Maybe, she thinks, she will meet someone who will save her

and they will raise a happy family together. But then again, that's what her mother thought when she reached out for comfort and security and was left with yet



another child to care for alone. Youth can be so deprived of basic human needs like guidance and praise. It's rarely intentional, it's just what happens when life gets hard. I remember a young boy who lived with his alcoholic mother and three siblings. He

was only eight years old, but he already led a gang-like group of kids who ruled the neighborhood. One day he was getting into trouble and I extended my hand to him to guide him out of the situation. He took my hand and he didn't let go as we walked. It was striking to me to feel his small hand in mine knowing

that he normally showed only anger and disconnect. In reality, he was just a little boy coping with his own world. He held my hand until we were within sight of his peers, and then he let go and regained his aggressive posture. I wondered

how long it had been since someone held that little boy's hand.

The cycle of generational poverty can make a lifelong impression on a person. In my work, I have seen battered mothers and abused children. There are families that move so often that children can go to three different schools in one year, and some children talk about their siblings who they haven't seen in two years. People come in and out of children's lives, and one promise after another is broken as families struggle. No amount of donated food, clothes, or toys can fix poverty. How can we stop the cycle of poverty so that children can get off of this foretelling ride? The only hope is that the cycle gets broken by a change in

*Continued on A11*



Photo Courtesy of Altoona Police Department



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## Fighting the Good Fight in Harrisburg

By State Representative Lou Schmitt

It may be a new year, but for me, fighting the good fight in Harrisburg to make our streets and families safer and to aid law enforcement is nothing new. My support for the rule of law – and for those who enforce it – doesn't waver. Ever. So at the beginning of this new year, I thought it would be a good idea to take a look back at some of the legislation I sponsored in the old year in order to make Pennsylvania safer and better for us all:

I am the prime sponsor of HB 103, which would, for the first time in Pennsylvania history, make it a separate crime to assault law enforcement officers with bodily fluids. It passed through the PA House of Representatives on March 16, 2021 with solid bipartisan support by a vote of 146-56. It currently is in the PA Senate Judiciary Committee.

I co-sponsored HB 753, which reclassifies the human trafficking of infants from a first-degree misdemeanor to a first-degree felony. Under current law, an individual who engages in human trafficking by recruiting, harboring, transporting, or providing persons to engage in “forced labor or services” may be charged with a

felony of the second degree. If the victim is under 18, the charge is a felony of the first degree. Because infants are incapable of being forced to engage in labor or services, those who traffic infants would not be subjected to the enhanced felony of the first degree grading. HB 753 changes that.



Our loyal, brave, and dedicated K-9 officers deserve enhanced protection under the law. That's why I was a co-sponsor of HB 940, also known as Titan's Law. Current Pennsylvania law provides for serious criminal penalties only when a bad actor intentionally or knowingly kills or injures an animal officer. Titan's Law would extend legal protection to our animal officers when injured or killed during the perpetration

of a felony or as the result of criminal recklessness. The law is named after Titan, a beloved Johnstown Police Department K-9 officer who perished in the line of duty after sustaining injuries while responding to a burglary.

HB 545, also known as Jessica's Law, which I co-sponsored, would include the desecration or mutilation of a corpse as an aggravating circumstance that may qualify a defendant for the death penalty in Pennsylvania. In 2014, Jessica Padgett was brutally shot in the back of the head by her stepfather, Gregory Graf, who then proceeded to videotape himself sexually abusing her corpse. A jury returned a murder conviction against him in six minutes. The judge sentenced him to the maximum penalty of life in prison without the possibility of parole. Mr. Graf and those who carry out similarly heinous acts against the corpses of their victims deserve to be considered for the death penalty.

On February 16, 2019, the life of Deana Eckman, a resident of Brookhaven Borough in Delaware County, was tragically cut

See Lou Schmitt/Page A20

## Faith-Based Roundtable PANDEMICS DON'T STOP PASSION

By Lisa Hann, Executive Director, Family Services, Inc.

Another year of living through a pandemic is behind us. We struggle with defining this current time as “post-pandemic” since new variants have affected our community and we are still experiencing many losses.

The Faith-based Roundtable started 2021 on Zoom meetings only. We shared our thoughts and concerns on the trauma that our community was and is experiencing. In addition to the many who have lost their loved ones to Covid, the faith community has felt the impact of isolation. Online church does not meet the needs of being in a relationship that in-person worship provides. People in need of connectedness, particularly those in the recovery community, were being lost to anxiety and loneliness that led them back to using.

The roundtable continued to share resources and knowledge while encouraging each other to do what we could where we were. Faith groups continued to find ways to get meals and clothing to families in need. Community contacts were made and information about which agencies could offer needed services was discussed. Often, we would spend the meeting

“turning over rocks” only to find that the resource we needed didn't exist in our community.

At one of our first in-person meetings of the year, we began to feel energized again. A young man who was in recovery and had been homeless, joined us to tell us about Ben Blessed, a project that he had initiated to reach out to people who are living on the streets and make sure that they have what they need to get them through the night and to help them get connected with community resources. This meeting then opened the door to begin talking about where homeless individuals can stay when there is no room at the shelter. Other communities have tackled this issue by making churches available for overnight stays, staffed by volunteers. Is this something Blair County could do? This is just one of the questions we will be addressing over the next few months.

The Faith-based Roundtable is not a group that just talks about the needs. They are a group of doers who put faith into action. If you are hungry to see change in our community and have a heart for those who are struggling, there is room at our table.





# SHEETZ RUN & DONE

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The image features the Altoona Community Theatre logo on the left, which includes the stylized text 'aCt' above 'ALTOONA community THEATRE'. To the right, there are two promotional banners. The top banner is for 'F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S "THE GREAT GATSBY"' running from February 10-13, 2022, with the title in a large serif font and the dates in a smaller script font. The bottom banner is for 'The Addams Family' A New Musical Comedy running from May 5-8, 2022, with the title in a large gothic font and the dates in a script font. Both banners include the website 'Tickets at AltoonaCommunityTheatre.com' at the bottom.



LOCAL

2007–2021OOT Prevention Grant Recipients

18th Street Community Church AASD Adult Education Program Altoona Area Public Library Altoona Area School District Altoona Area School District Foundation Altoona Boxing Club Altoona Housing Authority Altoona Parochial Catholic Youth Organization ArtsAltoona Bellwood-Antis School District Big Brothers Big Sisters of Blair County Bishop Guilfoyle Catholic High School Blair Countians for Drug-Free Communities Blair County Adult Parole & Probation Blair County Chamber of Commerce Blair County Human Services Office Blair County Juvenile Probation Office Blair County Library System Blair County Prison Blair County Respiratory Disease Society Blair County Truancy Task Force Blair Drug & Alcohol Partnerships, Inc. Blair Regional YMCA	Booker T. Washington Revitalization Corporation Calvary United Methodist Church Catalyst Church Center for Independent Living of South Central PA Central Blair Recreation & Park Commission Child Advocates of Blair County City of Altoona Claysburg-Kimmel Cares Community Worship Center CONTACT Altoona Cops & Boxing Crossroads of the Altoona Area Duncansville National Night Out Against Crime Every Life Matters Pregnancy Support Service Evolution Expressions Family Intervention Crisis Services Family Resource Center of Blair County Family Services, Inc. Garver Memorial YMCA Gloria Gates Memorial Foundation Hollidaysburg Area School District Home Nursing Agency Foundation IDA Community Development Corporation Joshua House, Inc.	L.O.T. (Leaders of Tomorrow) Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church N.E.W.S. Worthy Network, Inc. Northern Blair County Recreation Commission Penn State Altoona Refuge Youth Network Roaring Spring Community Library Salvation Army Ski Gap Community Action Council Stepping Stones for Life Student Assistance Program Teen Link Connection The Beacon of Blair County Foundation-CPCF The Door Student Services, Inc. The Nehemiah Project The R.O.C.K. Tyrone Area High School Tyrone Area School District Tyrone Elementary School Williamsburg Borough Williamsburg Public Library Young Life of Central Pennsylvania Young Readers Council of Blair County-CPCF
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Altoona Housing Authority

By Cheryl A. Johns, Executive Director

The Altoona Housing Authority is a Municipal Authority that was formed in 1949 to administer and develop safe, affordable housing for low and moderate income families within the City limits of Altoona. The first development created was Pleasant Village to address the housing shortage following WWII. The housing inventory for the Authority consists of 532 public housing units, 937 Section 8 voucher units, and 126 non-subsidized units at Pleasant Village, with a staff of 34 employees.

As Co-Chairperson of the Operation Our Town Housing Roundtable, it is extremely important for agencies and landlords to get involved in their community. In collaboration with Operation Our Town and the Central Pennsylvania

Landlord’s Association, the Authority hosts an annual Landlord Education Workshop to educate agencies and landlords on the importance of lease enforcement, the proper process for evictions, knowing the warning signs for illegal activity in rental units, fair housing regulations, etc. The workshop helps agencies and landlords implement strategies to tackle those issues.

We were able to get back to normal and hold our Annual Landlord Educational Workshop on 10/28/21. There were over 75 individuals in attendance. These individuals consisted of landlords, agency members, and community leaders. A major topic that the Operation Our Town Housing Roundtable wanted to discuss this year was the Emergency Rental Assistance

Program. Many landlords have not utilized this tool and a lot of residents are unaware that it exists. A copy of the updated Landlord Resource Guide was also provided to everyone in attendance.

The Operation Our Town Housing Roundtable has been meeting since 2007 and was created to identify solutions to drug activity and crime created by transient tenants. Throughout the years, the Roundtable progressed to serve an educational purpose. The Roundtable began to

hold Landlord Education Workshops in 2010 and started meeting more regularly to discuss common issues that landlords face from beginning to end. Since education has become the main priority, additional organizations, such as human service agencies that provide housing assistance, have partnered with the OOT Housing Roundtable to discuss and address current issues that they are seeing in our city and county. During the year, members of agencies are welcome to discuss with the Roundtable programs or services available to the community. This helps landlords and agencies partnered with the OOT Housing Roundtable to get the word out about the services available. Our city takes pride in

taking a “pro-active” approach in housing. This means that landlords need to inspect their properties, fix deficiencies to meet regulations, and enforce their lease. The goal of the OOT Housing Roundtable is to find the issues that landlords need to know more about. We must find workable solutions to these issues and the best way to do it. That is why we are continuously trying to educate landlords so that they have the knowledge, resources, and tools they need to succeed and rent to responsible tenants.

If you are interested in serving on the OOT Housing Roundtable, please contact Mrs. Cheryl A. Johns, Executive Director of the Altoona Housing Authority, at (814) 949-2000, or Brad Kanuch, Administrative Office, at (814) 949-2016.



Community Revitalization Roundtable - Continuing the Fight on Blight

By Mayor Matt Pacifico, City of Altoona and Rebecca Brown, Director of Codes and Inspections

The year 2021 proved to be challenging, as our community once again endured hardships brought about by the ongoing presence of the pandemic. The difficulties experienced are far-reaching, and the City of Altoona has had to develop and utilize unique approaches in our fight against blight during a pandemic.

Statistics show that blighted, abandoned properties constitute a danger to the public and can also lead to an increase in crime. Not only does blight create a negative effect in our neighborhoods, it also impacts both adjacent property owners and the community as a whole with the resulting loss in real estate tax revenue. The City dedicates significant resources on enforcement actions against the owners of these properties.

With the establishment of the City’s Assistant Solicitor sworn in as Assistant District Attorney, the City was able to successfully bring misdemeanor charges against repeat code offenders. This tool, which carries a much stronger penalty, was highly effective in achieving compliance with many properties experiencing serious violations. In 2021, over 500 summary citations were filed at our Magisterial District Justices for noncompliance. Using these strategies with the associated legal framework

a condemnation order. When a property, dwelling, or structure is declared condemned, the City will file an order with the County, and the order will be considered a legal notice to

has been effective in achieving compliance.

Also in 2021, the City began utilizing Senate Bill 940. Senate Bill 940 allows municipalities to file and record properties under

all purchasers or prospective buyers of the property. The recorded condemnation order will be a lien on the property and will not be affected by a County Upset Sale, a Judicial

Sale, or Repository Sale; the condemnation order will remain with the property until such time it is vacated by the City. Although most properties are condemned for violations that can be corrected rather quickly, the condemned dangerous structures are included in the recorded order. This Act is a significant step in the fight against blight, and one that will be a great benefit to the City in terms of responsibility for condemned properties.

New legislation adopted in 2021 included House Bill 264, which provides amendments to the Real Estate Tax Sale Law. The amendment requires bidder registration prior to County Upset or Judicial Sales. Bidders must submit an affidavit stating real estate taxes and municipal utility bills are current and not outstanding, and must attest to any uncorrected property maintenance code violations. This tool is extremely valuable relative to blight control, as it limits the ability of repeat code offenders to purchase additional properties with violations.

The City was able to hold our annual Altoona Community Clean Up Day in 2021 along with our partners: United Way of Blair County, ABCD Corporation, Operation Our Town, Overflow Church, and Blair Companies Real Estate. Several dozen volunteer

groups came together to assist neighborhoods by collecting litter, weeding sidewalks, and providing other basic maintenance and upkeep of properties. This year, our focus was a large area in Center City, and dumpsters were generously donated by Burgmeier’s Hauling to enable debris and garbage collection for residents in this area. Residents are encouraged to participate by becoming involved in the cleanup and assisting others in their neighborhood. The Clean Up Day is an event we both personally look forward to, as it

is an important step in making a difference in our neighborhoods. Keep an eye out for 2022 Altoona Community Clean Up Day information.

We all should be proud of our community, and we remain committed to working with you to continue to move our city forward!





# Be a Crime Fighter!

**Let's get dangerous and potentially addictive drugs out of homes and off the street!**

Free Medication Drop Boxes are available for you to discard unused medications! The best way to combat drug diversion and abuse is to get drugs away from folks who may be tempted to use or sell them. Drugs discarded into the dropboxes are safely destroyed by law enforcement.



## Blair County Medication Drop Off Locations:

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <p>▶ <b>Allegheny Township Police Department</b><br/>(814) 695-9563<br/>3131 Colonial Dr. Duncansville, PA 16635<br/>Monday – Friday, 8:00am – 4:00pm</p> | <p>▶ <b>Freedom Township Police Department</b><br/>(814) 695-8545<br/>131 Municipal Street East Freedom, PA 16637<br/>Monday – Friday, 8:00am – 4:00pm</p> | <p>▶ <b>State Police-Troop G - Hollidaysburg</b><br/>(814) 696-6100<br/>1510 N Juniata St. Hollidaysburg, PA 16648<br/>24 hours per day / 7 days per week</p>                   |
| <p>▶ <b>Altoona Police Department</b><br/>(814) 949-2489<br/>1106 16th St. Altoona, PA 16601<br/>24 hours per day / 7 days per week</p>                   | <p>▶ <b>Giant Eagle Pharmacy - Altoona</b><br/>(814) 946-4267<br/>181 Sophira Ln. Altoona, PA 16602<br/>Available During Store Hours</p>                   | <p>▶ <b>Tyrone Borough Police Department</b><br/>(814) 684-1364<br/>1100 Logan Avenue Tyrone, PA 16686<br/>Monday – Friday, 8:00am – 5:00pm</p>                                 |
| <p>▶ <b>Blair County Courthouse</b><br/>(814) 693-3000<br/>423 Allegheny Street Hollidaysburg, PA 16648<br/>Monday – Friday, 8:00am – 4:00pm</p>          | <p>▶ <b>Greenfield Township Police Department</b><br/>(814) 239-5313<br/>477 Ski Gap Road Claysburg, PA 16625<br/>Monday – Friday, 8:00am – 4:00pm</p>     | <p>▶ <b>VA Medical Center</b><br/>(814) 943-8164<br/>2907 Pleasant Valley Blvd Altoona, PA 16602<br/>Monday – Friday, 8:00am – 4:30pm</p>                                       |
| <p>▶ <b>Blair Township Police Department</b><br/>(814) 696-3846<br/>375 Cedarcrest Drive Duncansville, PA 16635<br/>Monday – Friday, 8:00am – 4:00pm</p>  | <p>▶ <b>Hollidaysburg Police Department</b><br/>(814) 695-3711<br/>401 Blair St. Hollidaysburg, PA 16648<br/>Monday – Friday, 7:00am – 11:00pm</p>         | <p>▶ <b>Walgreens Pharmacy</b><br/>(814) 944-3236<br/>508 E. Plank Rd. Altoona, PA 16602<br/>Available During Store Hours</p>   |
| <p>▶ <b>CVS</b><br/>(814) 944-9224<br/>200 E. Plank Rd. Altoona, PA 16602<br/>Available During Store Hours</p>  | <p>▶ <b>Logan Township Police Department</b><br/>(814) 949-3364<br/>100 Chief Logan Circle Altoona, PA 16602<br/>Monday – Friday, 8:00am – 4:00pm</p>      | <p>▶ <b>Williamsburg Police Department</b><br/>(814) 832-2022<br/>305 E. 2nd St. Williamsburg, PA 16693<br/>Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri, 9:00am – 3:00pm<br/>Wed, 8:00am – 4:00pm</p> |

## Project Supported by:



## Blair County District Attorney's Office

By Peter J. Weeks, District Attorney

The Blair County District Attorney's Office and Operation Our Town share a common mission of ensuring public safety. Serious and violent crimes continue to threaten this safety. Operation Our Town is a proven partner in "Taking Back Our Neighborhoods." From the beginning, Operation Our Town partnered with us in law enforcement to improve equipment; support special operations; and assist in securing a drug prosecutor. As a result, offenders committing drug and drug-related crimes or other violent offenses are afforded thorough investigations and fair prosecutions. Ensuring public safety is not only accomplished by enforcing the law, as prevention is equally important. Operation Our Town and the District Attorney's Office joined forces with the police departments in Hollidaysburg, Tyrone, Logan Township, and Altoona to protect our community with the installation and promotion of Medication Collection Boxes. The Medication Collection Boxes are an effective way to prevent legally obtained opiates from being diverted for illicit abuse by others.

The District Attorney's Office works diligently to investigate cases in which an individual has died as a result of a drug overdose. Law enforcement

See District Att./Page A21

## BLAIR COUNTY – COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE *Continued from A1*

These combined issues have intensified into an increase in blighted properties (escalating the tax burden on our county taxpayers) and demands for prevention services.

The Gloria Gates Memorial Foundation is one of those organizations that funds educational supplies and field trips at after school programs for youth since 1999. Their effort to "break the cycle" of drug and alcohol abuse stems from its founder, Dr. Zane Gates, who, inspired by his mother Gloria, took interest in creating a place for youth from low-income families a chance to grow and contribute to their community. Because non-profits such as The Gloria Gates Foundation rely heavily on grants and donations to sustain these support services, it is crucial that Operation Our Town continues to work alongside local organizations to ensure recovery programs

and prevention services will be available in the years ahead. Other youth organizations like the Healing Patch Children's Grief Program play a critical role in providing free services to youth and families of our community that have



experienced loss. The Healing Patch is experiencing a great increase in demand for its services as a result of local children losing relatives to the COVID-19 pandemic. Too often without support, grieving children and teens can turn to substance use as a coping mechanism. With grant support from Operation

Our Town, the Healing Patch reaches these children and provides them with healthy ways to work through their grief. It is important that the children in our community know their needs are being met and have the chance to truly grow into productive members of their community.

Since 2006, Operation Our Town has provided assistance to those seeking recovery and healing. Aid in the form of grant funding is vital to sustaining programs like Leaders of Tomorrow, which focuses on prevention activities and awareness. One very important partnership is with Blair Drug and Alcohol Partnerships. BDAP has been a vital partner and advocate in the Blair County community, working tirelessly to create outreach programs with service organizations like Evolution Counseling, LLC. For over 26 years, Evolution Counseling Services has

helped Blair County youth and families through its many programs, including SOS (Substance Outpatient Services) which started in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic in December 2020. This program focuses on treatment for individuals with methamphetamine use, opioid use, and/or alcohol use as early as 12 years of age.

Operation Our Town actively participates in the Blair County Criminal Justice Advisory Board and the Community Revitalization Roundtable that focuses on improving the quality of the criminal justice system and neighborhoods for Blair County citizens. These opportunities, coupled with invaluable partnerships, are what help create a foundation for organizations like OOT. Blair County thanks OOT for its many years of service to this community and looks forward to many more.

## BREAKING THE GENERATIONAL CYCLES *Continued from A7*

behavior such as completing school, avoiding substance abuse/related crime, and securing sustainable employment. Prevention programs are the crucial factor. Good prevention programs don't just tell kids to stay in school, don't use drugs, and stay out of trouble. Prevention has to reach the heart and soul of children so that it can repair, comfort, and strengthen them. Prevention programs have to build self-worth so that children know that they are important, they

can succeed in school, and that they can have a bright future. Prevention programs have to equip girls with the confidence to shield their own emotional and physical safety while setting goals that advance their own independent future. All of the generational cycles that negatively impact lives (poverty, addiction, teenage pregnancy, incarceration) are so complicated because they intertwine, knot, and seem inescapable. Prevention programs are the spark of hope. Prevention youth programs

can offer academic support to kids struggling in school, they can provide role models, a safe harbor, and parent resources. Most importantly, prevention programs can let children know that they are valued, smart, and capable. They can make major strides in some lives, and a spark in others. As long as there's a spark, there's a chance that youth will continue to look for other people and other avenues to escape the cycles of poverty, incarceration, and substance abuse. Where one agency

leaves off, another one picks up. When we collectively change one life, we change the future of those to come. Some of the former students from our afterschool programs are now in college or have graduated. Others have good jobs. In most cases, these youth were supported by more than one prevention program. If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a brigade to break the cycles. I'm so grateful to OOT and the area businesses that show their financial support.



# OOT: ON THE AIR

By Silke Morrison, OOT Marketing Roundtable Member

Greetings all! My name is Silke Morrison and I've been fortunate enough to be the spokesperson for the Operation Our Town Marketing Roundtable on the Forever Broadcasting local radio stations for over four years.

In the past, we were given air time each quarter on the morning "radio circuit" on each of the local radio stations via a

live interview. In 2019, Forever Broadcasting began using a new format, which allowed me to record an interview that was aired periodically on Sunday mornings throughout the year. The spot is called Forever Media Sunday Morning Community Spotlight. We are certainly grateful to have this opportunity to get the message out to the community regarding

all the good things Operation Our Town and its supporters accomplish together!

We will still be providing information on Operation Our Town and the valuable services it provides to the community by helping residents fight the never ending drug issues in our area. Some of the 2022 event highlights include the Operation Our Town Grant Cycle, Operation Our Town Day at DelGrosso's Park, and the Operation Our Town Mini-Golf Tournament!

Operation Our Town is thankful for its partnership with Forever, which has provided us with an excellent resource to get information out to the communities in our area!



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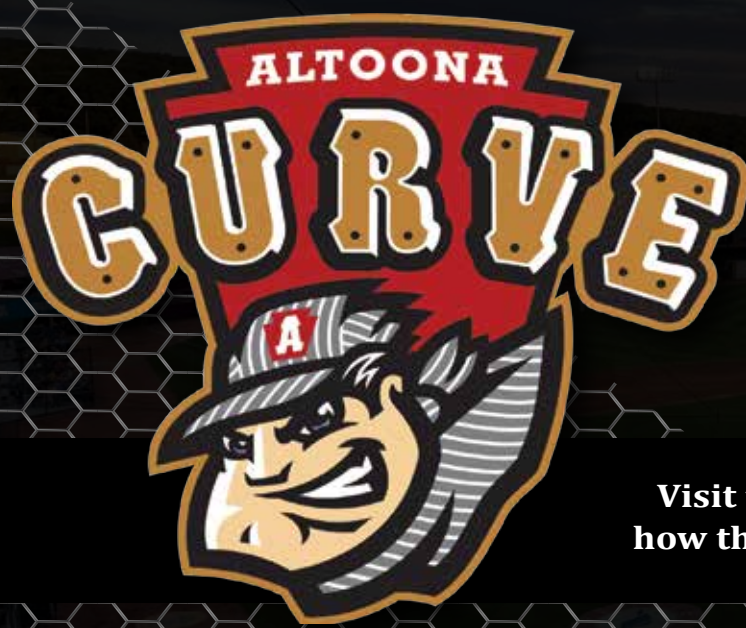
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**OOT Night at the Curve!**  
Thursday, June 30, 2022  
6:00pm

**Police K-9 Demo during Pre-game!**

Visit the Operation Our Town table to learn more about OOT and how the funds they raise help fight drugs and crime in Blair County!

## Operation Our Town K - 12 Education Roundtable Report

By Robert Gildea,  
Superintendent of Schools, Hollidaysburg Area School District

The Operation Our Town K-12 Education Roundtable, consisting of superintendents from the seven Blair County school districts, continues to confront the ongoing challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Great efforts have been made in all districts to address learning loss and the mental wellness needs of our students, knowing the well documented correlation of future drug use by students who are exposed to childhood trauma and whose mental wellness needs are not addressed at a young age.

In a continuing effort to ensure school safety and student wellness needs are being met, all Blair County Schools continued the utilization of the Safe2Say hotline. Safe2Say Something is a youth violence prevention program run by the Pennsylvania Office of the Attorney General. The program teaches youth and adults how to recognize warning signs and signals, especially within social media, from individuals who may be a threat to themselves or others and to "say something." This anonymous 24-hour hotline enables anyone to call in a concern regarding school safety or the personal safety of a student who may

be considering self-harm. Depending on the severity of the concern, the report is forwarded to a school representative, local law enforcement, or both. Some Blair County districts have initiated additional resources to monitor student activity on school issued devices in an effort to identify activity that may cause a risk to students.

In addition, numerous initiatives have been implemented in all Blair County schools to address the wellness needs of our students. Mental health counselors, screeners, and trauma-informed education to better equip adults to identify students at risk, as well as other intervention measures, have been implemented in all Blair County School Districts in an attempt to meet student needs regardless of the school setting.

Districts continue to implement the Student Assistance Program (SAP) by administering frequent triage meetings with school psychologists and building principals. SAP teams have continued to meet weekly (virtually) to address the mental health and drug and alcohol treatment needs of our students. Students continue

to be referred for services, which include individual and group counseling with our outside agency partners (UPMC Behavioral Health of the Alleghenies, Blair Family Solutions, Blair Drug and Alcohol Partnerships, and Impact Counseling Services).

Information about these services were sent to parents and families, and also added to district websites. The information included Emergency Crisis contact information (Suicide Prevention Lifeline, Crisis Text Line, and the UPMC Crisis Line).

In addition to these efforts, the AASD Adult Education Program's 2021 Operation Our Town grant "HSE: Pathway to a Bright Future" invests in the future of Blair County adults who are preparing to earn their High School Equivalency (HSE) Credential. As of December 2021, eight adult learners have been the grateful recipients of 10 GED subtest exam scholarships. All eight have passed their subtest exams and are very close to finishing their HSE. One learner, Troy, finished his High School Equivalency credential! When Troy passed his final GED subtest exam, he said, "I could have never done this without

the help of the AASD Adult Education teachers and staff. I can't thank you enough for the Operation Our Town Scholarships. Thank you for believing in me."

The AASD ELECT Program has already begun utilizing the funds that they requested from Operation Our Town, which have been very helpful. They were granted \$2,000 and had a budget set for those monies. They had budgeted to use \$300 towards their Senior Night celebration and \$200 towards their summer trip to DelGrosso's. It is their intention to still utilize the funds for those two things in May and June 2022, respectively. They have a great amount of students who will be moving independently soon, or already have, and need help with startup for their new apartment. They can utilize these extra funds to assist with small things for their new apartment, such as cleaning products, personal hygiene products, lamps, toasters, etc. Thus far, the AASD ELECT Program has already utilized the \$200 they had requested for community visits with students. They had requested Wendy's gift cards, and their students look forward to being able to meet

somewhere that they can provide them lunch, as well as their child, if appropriate. They have already utilized \$300 in their food pantry funds by purchasing things such as formula, personal hygiene products, and food staples for four students and their families. Lastly, they have utilized \$300 in incentives for partners of participants, who earn a \$10 Walmart gift card if they attend the monthly workshops with the participant or participate in individual education that is provided. They feel this is assisting to keep these family members, or partners, engaged in parenting education and enforcing the family to act as a unit. As always, the AASD ELECT Program is very appreciative of the funds they are granted, and it is so beneficial to their students.

The Operation Our Town K-12 Education Roundtable continues to meet on a monthly basis in a collaborative effort to ensure the health and wellness of our children and to increase the likelihood that they lead a drug-free life and become productive members of our community.

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# OPIOID SETTLEMENT DOLLARS SHOULD BENEFIT RECOVERY

By State Representative Jim Gregory, 80th House District

**The money is out there.** Lawsuit settlements with three major pharmaceutical distributors and opioid manufacturer Johnson & Johnson will provide Pennsylvania with approximately \$1 billion to address the opioid crisis in coming years.

The best way to spend that money, in my opinion, is to allocate more resources to in-patient treatment programs. Medicaid today pays for only 15 days of residential care; the state chips in to bring the stay to 30 days.

Think about the greater rates of success we could have in Pennsylvania if the treatment lasted longer than 30 days. I believe the first 30 days are so overwhelming that a full 60 days (even better if it's 90!) would help people develop lifelong habits that support sober living.

A study published in the European Journal of Social Psychology in 2009 found it takes an average 66 days to form a good and lasting habit.

I've recently talked to Attorney General Josh

Shapiro about why the opioid settlement dollars would be best spent by investing in in-patient treatment programs, and I will continue advocating for that outcome. Helping people to form a healthy foundation for the future will decrease the long-term costs of incarceration and repeated treatment – and all while protecting the Commonwealth's most valuable resource, which is its citizens.

***“Rep. Gregory is totally right. We have insurance rules in this state that prohibit people from getting access to the level of treatment that they need or the number of days, if you will, of treatment they need. We’ve both got to adjust the rules in the terms of how insurance works... (and) having the dollars available for more treatment beds,”***

Shapiro, a Democratic gubernatorial candidate, told The KDKA Radio Morning Show.



Ending both the stigma and cycle of addiction are bipartisan goals. Addiction

crosses every gender, socioeconomic, political, and religious divide. The people struggling with substance

abuse disorder are our parents, siblings, neighbors, friends, coworkers, and children.

As you likely heard, a federal judge in December 2021 rejected a settlement with Purdue Pharma, the maker of OxyContin. There was \$750 million involved in that settlement to support people with addiction to opioids almost immediately. While the judge's action put that payout on hold, it is my hope that a renegotiated settlement may ultimately be more beneficial to Pennsylvania.

One thing that is always at front of mind for me is that people in in-patient treatment need supports in their day-to-day lives so that they can focus on the process to become and remain sober. This includes ensuring they have access to reliable childcare and time off work. I would hope that the state could find the financial resources to lift up those who are aspiring to reduce dependency on drugs and alcohol.

I always welcome questions and feedback related to the state's role in combatting addiction and overdose deaths. Please call my Hollidaysburg office at 814-695-2398.

Thanks to Operation Our Town for their assistance in the fight against drugs.

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# HEALTHY BLAIR COUNTY COALITION: WORK GROUP HIGHLIGHTS

By Coleen Heim, Director

There are ten work groups implementing programs and activities identified as needs within Blair County. Although the pandemic impacted some of our programs, our work groups continued to meet remotely and share resources.

The Let's Move Blair County Committee is



implementing activities to address obesity, encourage physical activity, and impact the incidence of diabetes. There were two Steps Challenges with 755 participants walking a total of 293,718,734 steps. Let's Move Blair County Day at Lakemont Park was held in August 2021. Copies of our Active Living Brochure are available at no cost. It includes resources and

activities in Blair County. In collaboration with HBCC, the Chamber of Commerce's **Workplace Wellness Committee** hosted a series of "Chamber Chats" with topics and presenters focusing on making Blair County healthier.

The **Substance Use & Physical Health Coalition** meets to enhance communication and coordination between drug/alcohol and healthcare providers. Under the leadership of Blair Drug and Alcohol Partnerships, the implementation of SBIRT, which includes substance abuse as an area screened during routine healthcare, showed remarkable results. The three healthcare facilities involved conducted 60,843 screenings resulting in 486 referrals to drug/alcohol treatment. The project was expanded to pharmacies and training for emergency responders.

The **Mental Health Work Group** is focusing on the increase of mental health issues. They developed the Columbia Protocol app and training. The Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS) supports suicide risk assessment through a series of simple, plain-language questions that anyone can ask to help identify whether someone is at risk for suicide. The training is offered at no cost to schools, law enforcement, faith-based organizations, community groups, and service providers. Blair County had an opportunity to participate in a state initiative which resulted in a comprehensive Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan. We are asking for representatives from all systems to join the Committee to enhance screening methods, create awareness of suicide prevention efforts, and improve reentry/post-care.



AN INITIATIVE OF HEALTHY BLAIR COUNTY COALITION

The **Youth Connection Task Force** held a Summit in November 2021 to better understand issues impacting youth and discuss how we work together as a community, including how the pandemic impacted our youth and created new challenges.

The **Alliance for Nicotine Free Communities** supports programs to reduce nicotine use. In collaboration with the Lung Disease Foundation of Central Pennsylvania, smoking cessation classes are conducted. We are addressing the use of vaping/e-cigarettes by providing training to

interested individuals and resources to those individuals interested in quitting.

In November 2021, HBCC was honored to receive the Ray Shaw Community Advocate Award at BDAP's Annual Recognition Dinner.

For more information on the Healthy Blair County Coalition and the activities of our work groups/committees, visit our website listed below and like our Facebook pages.

Contact Coleen Heim, Director for more information at 814-317-5108 ext. 305. Website: [healthyblaircountycoalition.org](http://healthyblaircountycoalition.org)

## Operation Our Town Day at DelGrosso's Amusement Park

By Shawna Hoover, OOT Executive Coordinator

The fifth annual Operation Our Town Day at DelGrosso's Amusement Park and Laguna Splash was held on August 5, 2021. For each coupon that was redeemed that day, \$3.00 was donated to Operation Our Town. A total of 774 coupons were redeemed that day, resulting in a donation of \$2,322 to Operation Our Town, which is the largest amount raised from Operation Our Town Day!

Operation Our Town had a booth at the main entrance to the park and distributed "Choose Life, Not Drugs" wristbands, drug prevention information, and provided a drug-free pledge banner to sign to get a free OOT t-shirt. Child fingerprinting was also provided by PA State Police Trooper Chris Fox. Officer Alex Vazquez and his K9 Freddy from the Logan Township Police Department conducted two drug sniffing

demonstrations outside the main entrance for park guests to watch.

The owners and management team at DelGrosso's Park value the opportunity to work with community groups. Operation Our Town Day at the park allows families to come together and enjoy time while experiencing the Operation Our Town presentations. "If we have just one of our park guests make a drug-free decision after hearing what they learned during the day, then it was worth it," says Amy Mearkle – Director of Marketing for DelGrosso's Park & Laguna Splash.

Mark your calendars for August 4, 2022 for the sixth annual Operation Our Town Day at DelGrosso's Park! We thank DelGrosso's Amusement Park for their continued support and look forward to another fun-filled day!



## OOT Grant Recipients Map

By Nick Gordon, PMSC AmeriCorps Member with Operation Our Town



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## Early Childhood Education Roundtable Report

By Rodney Green, OOT Early Childhood Roundtable Chair

The COVID-19 virus continues to evolve and play havoc with all sectors of our society. We have learned that quality and affordable childcare is a foundational need that cannot be disrupted without devastating effects. Without the safety net of a predictable childcare system, families and businesses are left in a quandary.

Over the past twelve months, the Early Childhood Education Roundtable has been stuck in a "Groundhog Day" world. In many ways, the same COVID-19 challenges kept presenting themselves over and over

again. School closings, shortages of employees in childcare centers, and constant disruptions to family routines were the norm in a not-so-normal world.

The Early Childhood Education Roundtable members responded by taking a laser focus to better understand what was happening at the grassroots level. Throughout the year, our meetings were used to interview a number of providers and agency representatives. What did we learn? Plenty.

For example, although most of our providers were able to reopen, the providers found that many families were still

not sure if it was safe to return. Many centers were fortunate if they were able to have 75% of their children return on a regular basis. However, despite the overall decline in returning enrollment, there is a very real shortage of childcare spots for infant care. There just aren't enough infant care providers in our region to meet the demand.

Even though centers were open for business, they struggled with adequate staffing levels. The shortage of infant care spots is just one indicator of how difficult it has become to attract qualified staff. Local centers have had to close at times because it

was necessary to quarantine due to children and staff being exposed to COVID. Likewise, the local providers are experiencing a very real shortage of applicants and their centers have been forced to turn away children because of staffing shortages.

Based upon the feedback gathered from a small sampling of providers, the Early Childhood Education Roundtable is currently in the process of organizing an Early Childhood Symposium. The symposium approach has been used successfully with other regional problems such as healthcare staffing. The purpose of the symposium

will be to bring together several local providers, K-12 educators, and representative childcare agencies and use them as a focus group. This group will be charged with the task of clearly defining the local issues and then to brainstorm on possible solutions.

In closing, we continue to hope and pray that the pandemic will come to an end or at the very least, enter a manageable mode much like other contagious diseases. We also wish to express our sincere gratitude to the many dedicated workers who take care of our children. It makes a world of difference. Thank you to all!





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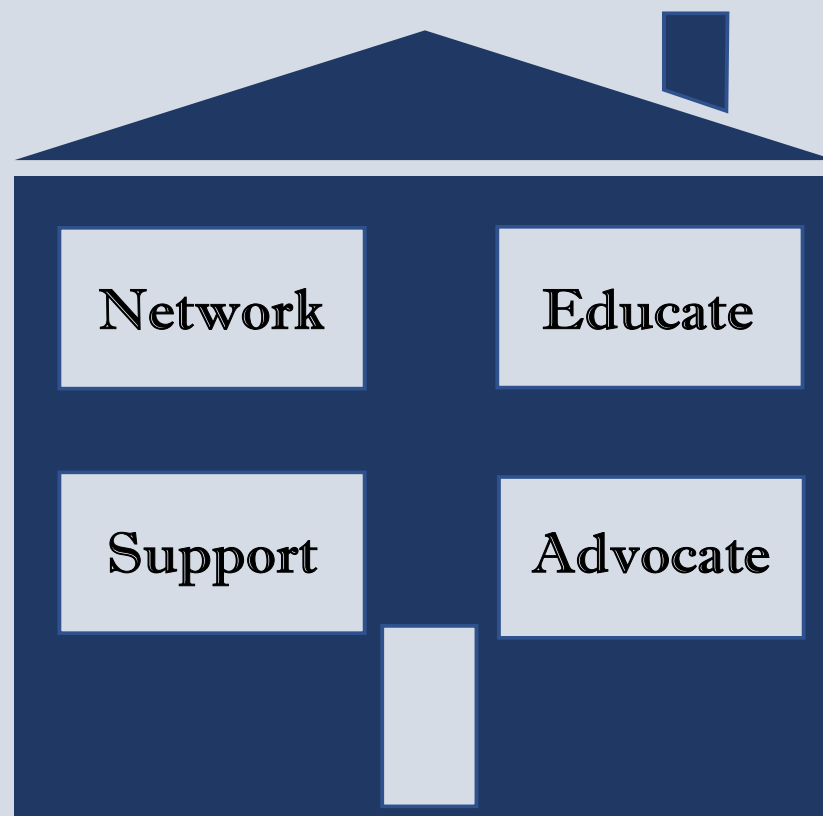
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# LOCAL STUDENT WINS ESSAY CONTEST

By Shawna Hoover, OOT Executive Coordinator

Congratulations to Deidre “Charles” Dantos, an 8th grader at Altoona Area Junior High School, whose essay was chosen out of 69 entries as the winner of the Altoona Mirror and Operation Our Town Essay Contest! The winner received \$250 in gift cards to The Meadows Original Frozen Custard in Hollidaysburg. Co-sponsors of the Essay Contest were the Altoona Mirror, Imler’s Poultry, and The Meadows Original Frozen Custard in Hollidaysburg. Below is the winning essay on why people give in to peer pressure from those who use drugs and some of the best ways to avoid giving in to peer pressure:

## Peer pressure into drug use:

Sometimes, while you are a rebellious teenager, you get together with a group of friends. These friends are usually people you are not one hundred percent familiar with or your own friends informed you that they think they are good people, but you’re still going to be uneasy about the fact you’re hanging out with strangers. Some people feel as if because they are in a group, they have to seem cool and disconnected from authority. Most of the time in a peer pressure scenario, they see their “friends” smoking. Your heart would start racing, asking yourself if you are actually going to do this, but the pressure of the people around you gets to you, and you do it.

This one experience now led you to years of substance abuse. This one experience leads you to depression and withdrawal from reality. Teenagers and even young adults are desperate to be above anyone else, it’s an inevitable thing to want to be different and stand out from the crowd, people think smoking makes you tough, while all it

makes you is an addict. People may even think they are entitled to join in on these acts, for example, a student who just got into a fraternity in college. They would feel entitled to go to parties and indulge in bad behavior that will soon lead to bad habits. These students are also at a window of vulnerability, they want to experience the robust social complexion of college life. They feel as if they are missing out if they don’t contribute to the stereotype of a rambunctious college student. This mindset leads people to terrible things, many say they know they wouldn’t do it on their own as a rational decision, but the pressure and heat of the moment overcharges them, causing them to break. Another example of peer pressure would be jealousy. You could read what I just said and say, “Jealousy, how?” The answer to this sums up in a quick statement. Your own friends and sometimes family, could be against you and you

wouldn’t even know it, they could be supportive of the drug use and make it seem exciting and a good thing to indulge in, just so you fail and become somebody who is under them. Many don’t realize this is what is taking place and see drugs and alcohol as a safe escape based off other people’s views of the substance. We could take all this information and be morbid and say society is to blame for the increase of substance abuse in younger generations, yet this isn’t true. People, expectations, shows, movies, all of this is what is pressuring children into drugs.

However, there are specific methods we can perform so we can avoid being pressured into drugs. One thing that could take place would be schools having assemblies, counseling, and recovery programs for all grade levels for people above age thirteen. If this issue was more mainstream showing all the negative aspects from what drugs would do to your brain, more people would consider

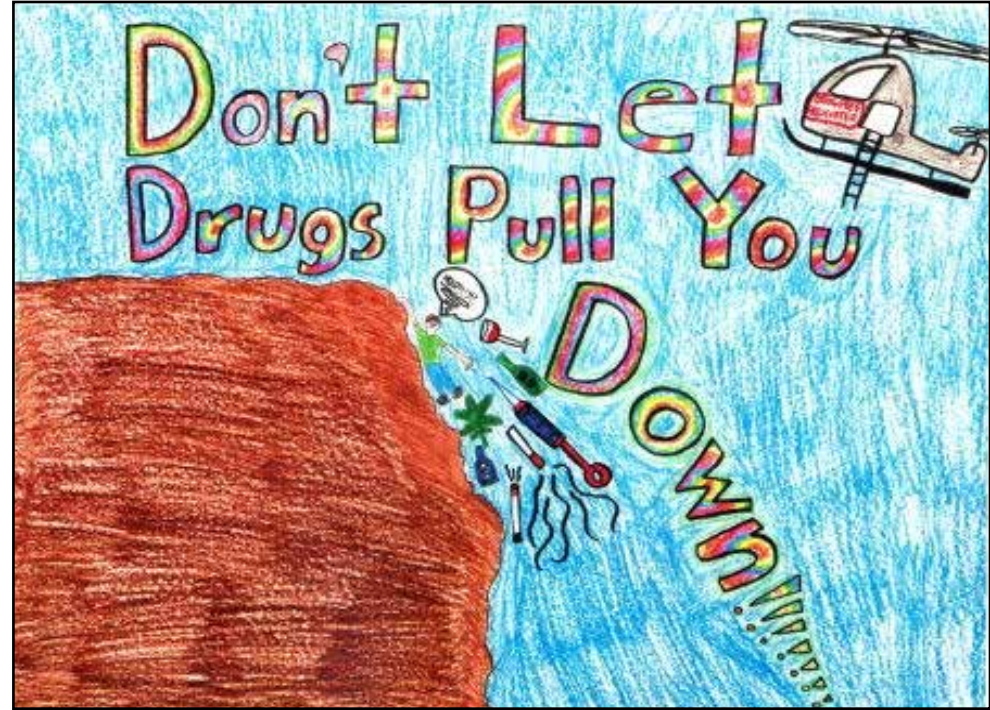
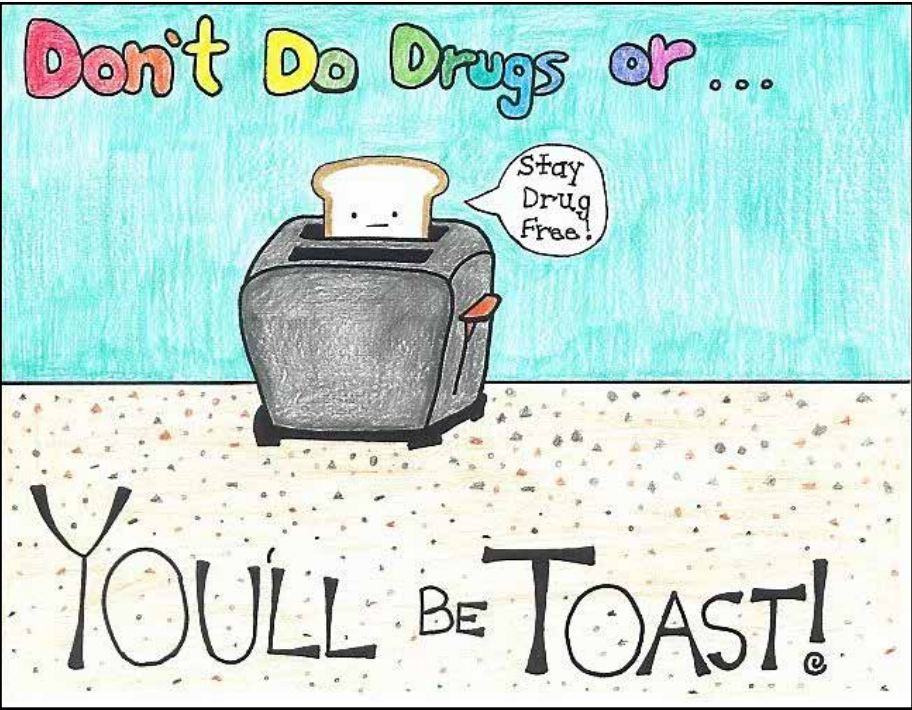
all the cons before doing them. Another method for whenever you would be in a group setting would be to make eye contact with the user, and use a polite yet firm voice to tell them you will not engage in it, a true friend would understand this and back off. You could also suggest another activity for the group to do, and try to steer the conversation away from the action being performed. You also could make up an excuse, saying you cannot partake because of responsibilities you have to tend to the next day, babysitting, dog walking, work, etc. The final method and the way I would do it, would be to leave the situation. Walking out the door and calling an actual trusted loved one to come help you is the smartest thing, for you will be safe. Sometimes people put their safety as a second priority but if you are someone who is disagreeing with drug use, you have an actual piece of mind that you are using to make decisions, therefore in my educated opinion, you

would be conscious of what you are doing, and you would want to help yourself, so leaving would be the best option. If the situation turns violent, please be rational and make yourself the top priority, not being the coolest, not being the best, only your health and safety should be your main concern.

In conclusion, anybody can be peer pressured into substance abuse, but there are always ways you can help yourself in the time needed. Many teenagers and young adults drive to be different and this overcomes their rational mind, yet using your educated mind can make a world of difference. You should never be pressured into doing something you don’t want to do or wouldn’t do alone. These people who try to force this onto you are not real friends and only care about themselves. Blair County cares about you, I care about you, and I don’t want to see you go down the wrong path. Thank you.



Pictured from left to right: Barb Harpster (Media Consultant, Altoona Mirror), Joe Meadows (Partner, The Meadows Original Frozen Custard of Hollidaysburg), Deidre “Charles” Dantos (Essay Contest Winner), Fred Imler Jr. (President, Imler’s Poultry)





# Blair County Agencies Who are Partnered with OOT

**Allegheny Township Police - 814-695-3333**  
**Contact Person: Chief Leo Berg**

**Altoona Police - 814-949-2489**  
**Contact Person: Chief Joseph Merrill**

**Altoona Area School District PD - 814-941-6137**  
**Contact Person: William Pfeffer**

**Bellwood Borough Police - 814-742-7800**  
**Contact Person: Chief Joseph Schlecht**

**Blair Township Police - 814-696-3846**  
**Contact Person: Chief Roger White**

**Duncansville Police - 814-695-1930**  
**Contact Person: Chief Jeff Ketner**

**Freedom Township Police - 814-695-8545**  
**Contact Person: Chief Terry Dellinger**

**Greenfield Township Police - 814-239-5313**  
**Contact Person: Chief Ronald Sharkey, Sr.**

**Hollidaysburg Borough Police - 814-695-3711**  
**Contact Person: OIC Sgt. Richard Oldham**

**Hollidaysburg Area School District - 814-695-4416**  
**Contact Person: Resource Officer Wayne Bush**

**Logan Township Police - 814-949-3364**  
**Contact Person: Chief David Reese**

**Martinsburg Borough Police - 814-793-2838**  
**Contact Person: Chief Kerry Hoover**

**N. Woodbury Township Police - 814-793-4897**  
**Contact Person: Chief David Rosamilia**

**Roaring Spring Borough Police - 814-224-5382**  
**Contact Person: Chief Gregory Wyandt**

**Tyrone Borough Police - 814-684-1364**  
**Contact Person: Chief Jessica Walk**

**Williamsburg Borough Police - 814-832-2022**  
**Contact Person: Chief Rowdy Kagarise**

**UPMC Police - 814-889-2453**  
**Contact Person: Chief Greg Servello**

**Pa State Police - 814-696-6100**  
**Contact Person: Sergeant Brad Codd**

**Central PA Humane Society - 814-942-5402**  
**Contact Person: Officer Paul Gottshall**

**Penn State Altoona Police - 814-949-5222**  
**Contact Person: Lt. Jason Salm**

**Altoona VA Medical Center Police - 814-943-8164 ext 7059**  
**Contact Person: Chief David McCallay**

**PA Game Commission- 814-643-1831**  
**Contact Person: WCO Pfister, WCO Zaffuto, and WCO College**

**Blair County Sheriff - 814-693-3100**  
**Contact Person: Sheriff James Ott**

**Blair County Prison - 814-693-3155**  
**Contact Person: Warden Abby Tate**

**Spring Cove School District PD - 814-473-5344**  
**Contact Person: Chief Rick Brozenich**

**Blair County DA's Office - 814-693-3010**  
**Contact Person: District Attorney Pete Weeks**

**Blair County Coroner Office - 814-940-5938**  
**Contact Person: Coroner Patricia Ross**



## Operation Our Town – 15 Years of Making a Real Difference

By Ron McConnell, Founding Board Member

I can remember it like it was yesterday. The Altoona Mirror was filled weekly with stories about drugs taking over our city, our county. Burglaries, auto theft, domestic abuse, and many other crimes. Worse were the hidden crimes – particularly, the overdose victims and long-lasting effects on families. People were scared. Business leaders were uneasy. Something had to be done. The year was 2006.

I was in my office one day that year when the phone rang asking if I would attend a meeting to discuss what was happening. As a native Altoona resident, I said yes immediately – but

was skeptical as to what we could do. After all, this was a national issue.

Our first meeting was an emotional therapy session – talking about how things used to be when we all grew up (our homes and cars were always unlocked, and our kids played freely in the streets, coming home after dark)...and how we wanted it to be now. The community leaders had only one thing in mind – stopping what was infecting our county and making it safe again for our children to grow up.

That community focus and passion led to the formation of Operation Our Town, as well as our founding tag line – Taking Back Our

Neighborhoods. Make no mistake, the tough sounding tagline was purposeful.

From that point forward, the community support and outpouring of voluntary involvement in Operation Our Town was like nothing anyone expected. It turned out that most everyone felt the same way – let's do something (anything) now! We are all good people – and we need to tackle this together before it is too late!

We have learned a lot since our founding. Operation Our Town was initially organized to provide funding and support around a three-legged stool – supporting proven law enforcement

techniques, treatment efforts, and prevention programs. Today, each leg of that stool remains vitally important and still relevant.

In 2022, we will kick off our latest effort highlighting the importance of prevention efforts in our community. Soon you will see our new tagline “Breaking the Cycle: It Starts with Prevention” – recognizing the importance of these community efforts and providing support. Over the past 15 years, from 2007 to 2021, Operation Our Town has served over 104,000 youth and families through our prevention grants.

Shortly after the founding of Operation Our Town, we

were fortunate to obtain a few federal grants to enhance our law enforcement efforts. Those funding sources have since expired; however, we continue to raise money for all three legs of our stool (recognizing they all continue to have relevance in keeping our communities safe).

A true measure of worth of any organization is to ponder what the community would look like without it. Would we be better off, worse off, or the same? I can't begin to tell you how many residents in this community frequently tell us to keep up the fight and don't stop! It's that kind of encouragement we all need!

See OOT/Page A22

## It Pays to Pass: voluntary student drug testing program

Shawna Hoover, OOT Executive Coordinator

The Operation Our Town Marketing Roundtable created the It Pays to Pass Program six years ago to encourage students in 7th through 12th grade to develop good habits and reward them for continuing to make the right choices. The It Pays to Pass Program rewards students that participate in the Hollidaysburg Area School District's voluntary student drug testing program. The purpose of the program is to help students remain drug-free and to give students an excuse to not give in to peer pressure if they are asked to try drugs or alcohol.

Each year, the Hollidaysburg School District provides a packet to all Junior and Senior High students and families to sign up for the district's voluntary drug & alcohol testing program. Students and parents must complete the consent packet. Upon turning in the consent

packet, the students are given a “Choose Life, Not Drugs” wristband provided by Operation Our Town. Student names are put in a lottery system and each week students are randomly picked from the lottery to be tested. If a student passes the 5-panel drug screen or the alcohol screen, they are given a \$25 Sheetz gift card provided by Operation Our Town through the sponsorship of local businesses. Parents are notified of the test and the results. If a student does not pass the test, a non-punitive system is used. They are not punished at school, however, they must sign up for drug counseling or a rehab program. They are also referred to the school SAP (Student Assistance Program) team.

In the Junior High, 72 students have chosen to participate in the program in the 2021-2022 school year. The Junior High randomly tests one student each week.

Wendy Lieb, Hollidaysburg Junior High School Nurse who administers the drug testing for the Junior High said, “The program is a great way to promote healthy lifestyle choices, especially at the Junior High age where our young

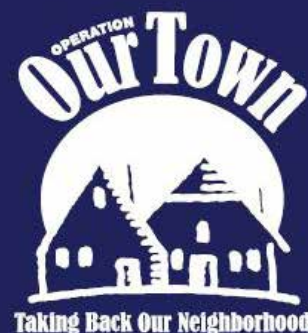
adults are very impressionable. The program gives the students a way “out” of experimenting with drugs or alcohol when with their peers. Although the Junior High kids don't drive, they do get excited to use the gift cards for food when hanging out with their friends in town.”

In the Senior High, over 70 students have chosen to participate in the program in the 2021-2022 school year. The Senior High randomly tests 2-4 students each week. Mary Haenig, Hollidaysburg Senior High School Nurse

them say they will use the gift card for gas.”

We are truly grateful for the support of the following local businesses and organizations that have contributed monetary donations to sponsor the purchase of the Sheetz gift

# "PAYS\$ TO PASS"



Taking Back Our Neighborhoods

who administers the drug testing for the Senior High said, “The program has been a positive healthy behavior promotion aspect for the school environment. The students are enthusiastic about being called for testing and are thrilled with the Sheetz gift cards! Most of our students drive, so many of

cards for the 2021-2022 school year: Allegheny Township Police Association, P. Joseph Lehman, Inc., Stiffler McGraw, and Ventura Construction Services. We also offer a huge thank you to Sheetz for partnering with us to support this very important program! We are happy to keep it going!



# PARTNERSHIPS KEY TO NORTHERN BLAIR ROUNDTABLE

By Sue Griep, Chairperson, Northern Blair Roundtable

Partnering with other organizations and working as a team to meet the needs of the northern end of the county to keep it safe and a healthy area is a goal of the Northern Blair Roundtable of Operation Our Town.

The Northern Blair Roundtable is a strong network of business, media, legal, education, social, church, and civic organizations who come together on a monthly basis in an effort to better the community. The group, chaired by Sue Griep, has been working on learning about the community, programs and services available, and identifying priority needs.

Meetings have been held at various locations throughout the community, but in the last year, meetings were held virtually. Speakers this past year have included: Tiffany Hoy, Ag teacher from Tyrone High School; Nathan Verilla of Tyrone Armory; Jennifer Powell of the Tyrone-Snyder

Public Library; and Ann Osborne of Tyrone Improvement Group. The group has been working on poverty, homelessness, transportation, and employment/educational needs. COVID has stymied many of the opportunities to work on these vital needs in our community. Some of the actions the Roundtable has been able to accomplish



is to develop an online Resource Guide for agencies to refer clients to appropriate resources. The group has also

traditionally held a yearly spring workshop in Tyrone. In the past, the group has held a morning session for professionals, and an evening session for community leaders and residents. Topics have included Bullying/Suicide Prevention; Landlord Tenant Regulations; and Stop the Bleed/Active Shooter. A spring workshop has been postponed since 2020 due to

COVID, but we are looking at the workshop being offered in May 2022. The workshop, held in conjunction with Blair Drug and Alcohol Partnerships

and Peerstar Support Services, will focus on Mental Health and Co-occurring Issues. The group also started authoring a monthly column in the Tyrone Daily Herald that highlights pertinent topics of interest for the area or new services. Committee members rotate to pen the column about a program or topic significant to their agency or organization.

One of the most exciting projects is our partnership with the Tyrone Area High School's Ag Program led by teacher Tiffany Hoy, in conjunction with Epworth Manor of Tyrone, to restart the greenhouse which sits on the nursing home property. The goal is to provide educational opportunities to the students to learn and utilize an unused greenhouse for food growth, and ultimately reap the benefits of both by donating the proceeds of fruits and vegetables to the Tyrone Food Bank. COVID has slowed

down much of the progress, but small steps have been made in the process with high hopes of a spring plant. The Roundtable also remains supportive of the Tyrone Borough Cleanup Day, as well as other initiatives. This year, the Roundtable has set its goal on connecting the Roundtable more closely with the other OOT Roundtables to gain more information on what they are accomplishing and enacting. We will be inviting members of such roundtables as Housing, Faith-based, Pharmacy, Marketing, K-12, etc., to speak at our meetings. In addition, we will be working on projects that will help our youth feel comfortable with daily living tasks such as money management, food preparation/shopping, car maintenance, etc. For more information about the Northern Blair Roundtable, contact Shawna Hoover at [shawna@operationourtown.org](mailto:shawna@operationourtown.org).

## CHOOSE LIFE! NOT DRUGS.

# 2021 OOT Golf Tournament Results

By Shawna Hoover, OOT Executive Coordinator

Operation Our Town held its 9th Annual Golf Tournament on September 20 & 21, 2021. The two-day event included the Tee Off Against Drugs Student Golf Tournament, Mini-Golf Tournament at Lakemont Park, and the US Foods Neighborhood BBQ at Park Hills Golf Club on Monday and the main Golf Tournament on Tuesday at Park Hills Golf Club. All funds raised benefit local drug enforcement and prevention programs in Blair County thanks to the 42 teams and 125 sponsors! Many thanks, once again, goes to the OOT Golf Committee, Park Hills Golf Club, and all volunteers who helped to make the event a success.

The Tee Off Against Drugs Student Golf Tournament was held on Monday, September 20th at Park Hills Golf Club for high school golf teams from Blair and surrounding counties. A total of 39 teams (156 students) from 27 school districts participated! A \$2,500 grant was awarded to the winning boys and girls teams to be used for a school program or designated to a charity of the school's choice that is aimed at the education and prevention of drug use. The winning boys team was The Kiski School and the winning girls team was Penn

Cambria High School! We look forward to continuing the Tee Off Against Drugs Student Golf Tournament to educate students on the mission of Operation Our Town.

The Operation Our Town Mini-Golf Tournament was held on Monday at Lakemont Park's Keystone Falls 18-Hole Mini-Golf Course. Participants were invited to the US Foods Neighborhood BBQ afterwards for great food and networking. A total of 12 teams participated, and the winning mini-golf team was Evolution Expressions, which received a special gift! The mini-golf tournament is a fun team-building event for businesses and employees of all ages, and a great alternative for those who are not regular golfers.

US Foods sponsored the Neighborhood BBQ on Monday evening in conjunction with the golf tournament. The dinner was provided by US Foods and their chefs, and Travis Seymore of Alto Markets cooked several different flavors of wings provided by Imler's Poultry. Beverages were provided by Furrer Beverage. Dana Thompson and Thompson Pharmacy provided the BBQ theme décor for the event. Chef Leigh Holland of US Foods was presented with a plaque in

recognition and appreciation of sponsoring the Neighborhood BBQ for seven years. District Attorney Peter Weeks provided an update from the District Attorney's Office. The late Rex Kaup was honored for his support of Blair County Law Enforcement K-9 Units, and a plaque was presented to his family. Patrolman George Swander and his K-9 Ciro from Logan Township Police Department conducted a K-9 demonstration for those in attendance. The evening ended with a 50/50 drawing, and golfers, sponsors, and OOT grant recipients enjoyed networking on the outdoor patio.

The main Golf Tournament was held on Tuesday, September 21st and golfers had the opportunity to choose from an 8:00am or 1:00pm tee time. Sheetz was the main food sponsor on Tuesday and provided a delicious breakfast, lunch, and snacks on the golf course. The golf tournament included the "Golden Ticket" contest in which ten golfers in the morning session and ten golfers in the afternoon session had the opportunity to putt for a \$5,000 cash prize donation from Park Hills Golf Club. The winner of each session was the golfer that got their putt in

the hole or closest to the hole. After golf, the evening ended with dinner on the outdoor patio provided by Park Hills Golf Club and beverages provided by City Beverage.

The winning golf teams were: 1st Place: Mike Harris, Brian Hmel, Andy May, Steven Dull. 2nd Place: Matt Neumeyer, Darryl Owens, Harry Benjamin, John Ventura.



3rd Place: Jim Foreman, Jason Gervinski, Bob Bilger, Doug Irvin. The Closest to the Pin 2nd Shot winner was Von Villano. The winning teams all received special golf gifts.

Save-the-Date for Operation

Our Town's 10th Annual Golf Tournament that will be held on Tuesday, September 20, 2022 at Park Hills Golf Club! Please consider supporting Operation Our Town through our annual golf tournament, as it has become one of our major fundraisers. The money raised from this tournament goes towards funding drug enforcement and prevention

programs aimed at reducing drugs and crime in Blair County. Please contact Shawna Hoover at (814) 296-8730 or [shawna@operationourtown.org](mailto:shawna@operationourtown.org) for more details on how you can support this year's tournament!



## SEE SOMETHING? SAY SOMETHING!

REPORT DRUG ACTIVITY

# PUSH OUT THE PUSHER™

## 693-3020





# Department Updates: Year in Review

Continued from A4

## LOGAN TOWNSHIP

### Police Department – Chief David Reese

- LTPD was recognized by Blair County Drug and Alcohol for their continued work in the community as part of the Blair County Opioid Prevention Task Force and Strategies for Coordinating Overdose Prevention Efforts (SCOPE) First Responders grant. LTPD was presented with the “Jo Anne Dugan” Visionary Award as LTPD officers now actively help individuals with “warm handoffs” to BDAP to access substance use disorder and/or mental health evaluation and treatment.

- Patrolman Tyler McClellan along with Patrolman Shea Stayer and Patrolman George Swander conducted a vehicle stop on 05/21/21, which resulted in a search of the vehicle yielding over 5 pounds of cocaine (Approximate street value \$75,000). The three occupants of the vehicle were subsequently arrested on Drug Distribution related charges and are awaiting trial.

- K-9 Officers Vazquez and Swander continue to provide excellent service to Blair County law enforcement. During 2021, both “Freddy” and “Ciro” assisted Blair County law enforcement partners in 48 separate K-9 related incidents.

- Det. Sgt. David Hoover investigated the sexual assault of an eight-year-old male by Brian Cinko 47, a Megan’s Law Offender. Cinko was charged with several counts of rape and related crimes. A jury trial was held, and Cinko was found guilty of the following crimes:

- 20 Counts of CC3121C Rape of a Child
- 2 Counts of CC3123B Involuntary Deviate Sexual Intercourse with a Child
- 2 Counts of CC6125B Aggravated Indecent Assault of a Child

- 1 Count of CC6318A1 Unlawful Contact with a Minor
- 1 Count of CC6301Aii Corruption of Minors
- 8 Counts of CC3126A7 Indecent Assault

Cinko is awaiting sentencing of these charges. He is facing over 120 years of incarceration.

## TYRONE BOROUGH

### Police Department – Chief Jessica A. Walk

- The Tyrone Borough Police Department, along with members of the Blair County Drug Task Force, conducted drug investigations into several homes that were believed to be involved in drug activity. Search Warrants were served on 6 different houses and 11 targets were arrested and charged with drug related offenses.

- Officer Winters and her K-9 Getro conducted 19 K-9 sniffs throughout Blair County, leading to numerous drug related arrests.

- The police department had 80 other drug related arrests for the year.

- The police department handled 3,724 calls for service.

- The police department made 286 criminal arrests.

- The police department issued 238 traffic citations.



Photo Courtesy of Logan Township Police Department

# Blair County Sheriff’s Office

By Sheriff James E. Ott

## Name of your Sheriff:

Sheriff James E. Ott

## Names and titles of command and supervisor staff:

Chief Deputy  
Christopher Tatar,  
Lieutenant Kermit  
Alwine, Sergeant R.J.  
Peo;  
Corporals Timothy  
Mearkle, Justin Bennett

The following reflect what full complement would be if fully staffed. Sadly, the majority of law enforcement nationwide face this same crisis. We struggle to retain staff and attract qualified interested applicants when there are many other opportunities available that present better, more sustainable wages in today’s climate.

**Full-time deputies: 29**

**Part-time deputies: 2**

**K-9 deputies: 1**

## Ways Our Office Serves The community:

We continue to be blessed with great partnerships throughout the community, which allows our office to participate/organize a variety of community events, here are a few examples of our involvements: Annual Kids, Cops, and Cones at Meadows Family Center; DEA National Drug Take Back Days; countywide National Night Out Against Crime; educational events with many of the senior centers; provide threat assessment and training for various business and church groups, including first aid, CPR, and Stop the Bleed training. Additionally, we have been able to restructure the process for securing weapons prior to screening at the entrance of the courthouse for more convenient and safer handling. We have also added

## By the numbers

Our office is proud to provide the following statistics for 2021:

	Opened/New	Closed/Old
Civil and Criminal process received/served:	1,688	2,650
Personal property eviction-writs, Garnishment:	200	199
Real estate executions:	134	102
Processed-issued license to carry firearms:	4,754	
Warrants served/processed:	2,152	2,233
License to sell firearms:	12	
License to sell precious metals issued:	8	
Protection from Abuse (PFA) opened/processed:	1,693	2,019

**Our office provides additional safety steps by providing screening and security at the main entrance of the courthouse campus.**

**Here are the results of those actions:**

Number of citizens screened at entrance: **123,903**

Number of items X-rayed: **72,569**

Number of prohibited items declared: **179**

Number of items intercepted by our deputies (drugs, weapons, etc.): **647**

Number of firearms declared: **3**

a prescription medication drop off box inside the front entrance of the courthouse so that citizens and employees can have a safe and proper way of disposing unwanted or unused prescription medications.

We constantly encourage residents, groups, or organizations to contact our office to schedule presentations on a variety of topics IE: drugs and drug addiction, home safety, situational awareness, gun safety and LTC topics, and changes in the law, to name a few.

## Special Accomplishments:

The office continues to participate in many of the countywide targeted impairment and drug activities, as well as traffic safety programs, these all promote safer communities and roadways for the public.

## Services the Sheriff’s Office provides:

Our office is responsible for prisoner transports for common pleas level scheduled court appearances, safety and security of the courthouse campus, process

and service PFA’s, real estate sales, conduct on view arrests for criminal violations, conduct traffic enforcement efforts, serve warrants, and assist all other enforcement agencies upon request. By the implementation of online LTC application process through Permittum LLC, this office has lead the way for 23 additional Pennsylvania Sheriff’s Offices to join the ability to offer this process, which better serves our citizens and remains in compliance with legal rights. The link for this process can be found within the Sheriff category of the county website, under license to carry information, online application process, or using your smart device, you can scan this QR code:



# Operation Our Town Mini Golf Tournament



**Great Prizes,  
Food, & Fun!**



# Save the Date!

**Monday, September 19, 2022  
@ Lakemont Park**

**Keystone Falls – 18 hole Mini-Golf Course**



## Schedule of Activities:

**4:00pm – Tee time for OOT Mini-Golf Tournament at Lakemont Park**

**5:00pm – Neighborhood BBQ at Park Hills Golf Club**

## Mini-Golf Sponsorships:

Individual Mini-Golfer – \$50

Mini-Golf Foursome – \$200

Non-profit Rate for OOT Grant Recipients – \$100

Mini-Golf Tee Sign – \$100

**All funds raised benefit local drug enforcement and prevention programs through grants from Operation Our Town.**



# 2021 Blair County Police Dept. Drug Collection Boxes Data

LOCATION	1ST QUARTER	2ND QUARTER	3RD QUARTER	4TH QUARTER	TOTAL
ALTOONA POLICE DEPT.	122.4 lbs.	54 lbs.	28.1 lbs.	90 lbs.	294.5 lbs
HOLLIDAYSBURG POLICE DEPT.	29 lbs.	57 lbs.	40 lbs.	38 lbs.	164 lbs.
LOGAN TOWNSHIP POLICE DEPT.	3.5 lbs.	15 lbs.	-	13.5 lbs.	32 lbs.
TYRONE POLICE DEPT.	74.8 lbs.	60.1 lbs.	60.12 lbs.	62.2 lbs.	257.22 lbs.
TOTAL	229.7 lbs.	186.1 lbs.	128.22 lbs.	203.7 lbs.	747.72 lbs.

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS - STUDENT EXCERPTS

By Nick Gordon, PMSC AmeriCorps Member with Operation Our Town

Prevention of drug abuse and crime in Blair County starts with our youth. We can impact a generation by listening to their

suggested that youth consider the consequences of their actions in a unique way, urging, “To stop the spread of peer

persistence is key. Here’s what she had to say about saying “No” to illegal drugs and peer pressure:

“There are many ways to avoid peer pressure. It may be hard to avoid, but avoiding peer pressure can be beneficial towards your physical and emotional health.”

Excerpt from essay submitted by AAJHS 6th grader, Darby

Darby continues, that “One thing you could do is to simply say ‘No’. If your friends and peers aren’t willing to accept ‘No’ for an answer, then feel free to repeat it over and over and over again until it becomes an answer.” Serenity, an 8th grader at Altoona Area Junior High School, leaves us and the rest of her peers with some very important questions, impressing us with her own individuality by saying, “When you already know the risks, yet you want to impress your friends, do you run the light or slow down and stop? Do you accept a drink or turn it down? Do you go with the crowd or be your own person and impress others with your individuality?”



thoughts on the matter, which is exactly why we want to share some of the highlights from our 2021 Essay Contest finalists. Kailynn, a 6th grade student at Altoona Area Junior High School, did a great job of explaining the differences in some drugs, in order to educate her peers, stating, “Illicit drugs are substances that either stimulate (such as cocaine or amphetamines) or inhibit (such as heroin or sedative-hypnotics) the central nervous system or cause hallucinogenic effects (such as marijuana or LSD) to the effect that their use has been prohibited globally.” Grace, a 12th grade student at Altoona Area High School,

pressure, one simple thing must be done. We must teach the youth of today about consequences. Not in the lens of punishment, but in the lens of cause and effect. Every action has its equal and opposite reaction, not just in physics but in life, the choices made in a split second cause a ripple effect through everything. One choice now can affect someone years down the line and for years to come. So, children must know about consequences so they can know how to avoid them and have the courage to stand up to those who don’t.” Darby, a 6th grade student at Altoona Area Junior High School, took the approach that

## Lou Schmitt

continued from A7

short while she and her husband Chris were driving home from a family event. On that evening, Deana and Chris were struck by a highly intoxicated driver in a violent crash. The driver who killed Deana and caused injuries to Chris had previously been convicted of five DUI offenses. After this horrific accident and death, this individual was charged with his sixth DUI. In order to prevent future tragedies such as Deana’s, HB 773 will substantially increase penalties for those who have multiple DUI convictions and target offenders who repeatedly drive drunk with high Blood Alcohol Content levels in their systems. It will also require consecutive sentences for a fourth or

subsequent DUI conviction. We cannot allow the worst of the worst repeat DUI offenders to endanger Pennsylvania motorists. I was happy to co-sponsor this legislation in memory of Deana. I bring things to a close on a note of great solemnity -- HR 98. This resolution of the PA House of Representatives honored those peace officers who surrendered their precious lives while serving their fellow citizens in the line of duty, and extended condolences to their families and friends. I co-sponsored this resolution in memory of the twelve Pennsylvania peace officers who made the ultimate sacrifice in the year 2020. I was privileged to do so.



## GRANTS: 2021 RECIPIENTS

Continued from A6

**Community Worship Center: Community Kids! Weekly Program**  
1300 Bald Eagle Avenue, Tyrone (814) 684-2221  
Funding awarded will be used to support the purchase of food, clothing, school supplies, and curriculum materials for their weekly program that serves youth ages preschool to 5th grade.

**Evolution Expressions: Arts for Healing Program**  
1331 12th Avenue, Suite 300, Altoona (814) 934-2781  
Funding awarded will be used to provide quality, strength-based, preventative, therapeutic programming for youth with the purchase of art supplies for trauma-focused

arts related activities to help at-risk youth combat the effects of trauma through the use of art techniques.

**Gloria Gates Memorial Foundation: After School Program**  
118 E. Spruce Court, Altoona (814) 949-8838  
Funding awarded will be used to fund educational materials, field trips, snacks, and individual assistance to youth at-risk enrolled in three after-school programs held within the low-income housing developments of Evergreen Manors, Fairview Hills, and Logan Hills.

**Home Nursing Agency Foundation: Healing Patch**

**Children’s Grief Program**  
20 Sheraton Drive, Altoona (814) 947-7027  
Funding awarded will be used to assist with the supplies associated with peer support groups held twice monthly during the school year for Blair County children and their families who have suffered the death of a loved one, as well as grief related books and brochures for their Lending Library.

**L.O.T. (Leaders of Tomorrow): Leaders of Tomorrow**  
2900 Beale Avenue, Altoona (814) 660-4928  
Funding awarded will be used to mentor youth ages 11-17 in Blair County through

physical fitness, educational opportunities, life skills, and community involvement.

**The R.O.C.K. at 2nd Avenue: The R.O.C.K. (Reaching Out to Community Kids)**  
130 2nd Avenue, Altoona (814) 943-2072  
Funding awarded will be used to purchase food and program supplies for youth in Pre-K to 12th grade and provide a home-cooked meal, gym/physical activities, the arts, and age-appropriate small groups that encourage healthy living.

**United Way of Blair County’s Family Resource Center: Parent Education Programs: Parents as Teachers &**

**Parent Education Classes**  
208 Hollidaysburg Plaza, Duncansville (814) 317-5567 ext: 405  
Funding awarded will be used for program supplies and educational materials for the parent education programs, Parents as Teachers and Parent Education Classes.

**18th Street Community Church: Sanctuary Recovery House**  
1416 18th Street, Altoona (814) 330-8197  
Funding awarded will be used for program supplies and resources for a men’s transitional recovery house that is based on a spiritual recovery and the 12-step program.



# District Attorney

*Continued from A11*

and members of the District Attorney's Office work closely together from the time that emergency personnel arrive on the scene to ensure thorough investigations are being conducted and charges can be filed when appropriate. In 2022, the District Attorney's Office has several individuals who are charged with drug delivery resulting in death who will likely go to trial.

Many claim that drug trafficking and drug use are victimless and nonviolent crimes that unnecessarily burden our prison systems. This is simply not true. Drug use impacts society, communities, and families. Those who sell and use drugs will commit crimes of violence to protect their trade and obtain their high. These crimes range from domestic abuse stemming from drug use, burglaries and thefts to obtain money and drugs, the illegal use and possession of firearms to facilitate drug offenses, and even shootings, stabbings, and

other acts of violence by those involved in drug trafficking. Unfortunately, in 2021, several investigations involved violent drug traffickers from various parts of the Commonwealth, as well as surrounding states, who filtered into Blair County in anticipation of increasing their clientele.

Not only has the trafficking of controlled substances impacted the lives of many adults, in 2021 we also saw an increase in the number of juveniles charged as adults with Attempted Homicide which stemmed from the use and/or trafficking of controlled substances. The District Attorney's Office was able to secure convictions and lengthy sentences of incarceration for three juveniles charged with Homicide after a confrontation over marijuana.

2021 again saw a significant increase in the trafficking of fentanyl that was often combined with heroin or methamphetamine, which poses a significant and often deadly

threat to law enforcement and the general public. The District Attorney's Office, along with law enforcement throughout Blair County, will continue to bring these offenders to justice. While we believe in providing treatment options for criminals who have drug and alcohol addictions, we remain committed to holding the safety of the community and the quest for victims above accommodations for those who commit crimes.

We, in law enforcement, continue to adapt to the changes in the laws and tactics of the drug dealers to stay ten steps ahead of the offenders. The collaboration that we have between the business community, drug and alcohol treatment agencies, and prevention and social service groups is directly related to Operation Our Town and unmatched in other communities. It is this collaboration that strengthens and unifies us in our shared mission for a safer Blair County.

## PHOTOS



*Photo Courtesy of Altoona Police Department*



*Photo Courtesy of Blair Township Police Department*

### 2021-2022 Drug Testing Program



**Thank you to our 2021-2022 Program Sponsors:**

Allegheny Township  
Police Association



## 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL Operation Our Town GOLF TOURNAMENT

# Save The Date!

September 19, 20 & 21, 2022

PARK HILLS GOLF  
CLUB, ALTOONA

### Schedule of Activities:

#### Monday, September 19th:

4:00pm – Mini-Golf Tournament at Lakemont Park  
5:00pm – Neighborhood BBQ

#### Tuesday, September 20th:

7:00am – Breakfast provided by Sheetz & registration for morning tee time  
8:00am – AM Shotgun start  
11:00am – Lunch provided by Sheetz & registration for afternoon tee time  
12:30pm – AM Putting contest for \$5,000  
1:00pm – PM Shotgun start  
6:00pm – PM Putting contest for \$5,000  
Dinner following afternoon golf

#### Wednesday, September 21st:

Tee Off Against Drugs Student Golf Tournament

#### \$5,000 PUTTING CONTEST:

A \$5,000 cash prize donation from Park Hills Golf Club will be awarded to the winners of the putting contests!

#### Golf Sponsorship Levels:

##### Gold - \$6,000

- 2 groups in tournament
- Company banner displayed, sign on driveway
- Company name listed in Event Guide
- Specialty Gold & commemorative gifts for each golfer

##### Silver - \$3,000

- 1 group in tournament
- Company banner displayed, sign on driveway
- Company name listed in Event Guide
- Specialty Silver & commemorative gifts for each golfer

##### Bronze - \$2,000

- 1 group in tournament
- Company banner displayed, sign on driveway
- Company name listed in Event Guide
- Specialty Bronze & commemorative gifts for each golfer

##### Individual Golfer - \$400

- Individual entry in tournament
- Commemorative gifts for one golfer

#### Beverage sponsor - \$1,000

- Company banner displayed during event
- Company name listed in Event Guide

#### Closest to the Pin sponsor - \$1,000

- Signage at the sponsored pin
- Company name listed in Event Guide

#### Golf Cart sponsor - \$1,000

- Signage on golf cart (limit 5 sponsors)
- Company name listed in Event Guide

#### Hole in One sponsor - \$1,000

- Signage at the sponsored Par 3
- Company name listed in Event Guide

#### Refreshment Tent sponsor - \$1,000

- Signage on one of the 4 Refreshment Tents or provide your company's tent
- Company name listed in Event Guide

#### Sponsorship Levels:

##### Reception sponsor - \$500

- Company banner displayed during event
- Company name listed in Event Guide

##### "Tee Off Against Drugs" Student Golf Tournament sponsor - \$500

- Sponsorship of School District of your choice within Blair & surrounding counties
- Signage displayed during the event on September 21st

- School District of the winning boys and girls team will receive a \$2,500 grant to be used for a current or new school program that is aimed at the education and prevention of drug use.

##### Greens sponsor - \$250

- Signage at the sponsored green
- Company name listed in Event Guide

##### Tee sponsor - \$150

- Signage at the sponsored tee



# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT:

By Michael A. Fiore, Co-Founder/President, Operation Our Town

Operation Our Town is in its 15th year of operation and we will be starting into our 16th year in November of 2022. We're fortunate that we've been able to continue to provide funding for drug enforcement and prevention programs in Blair County, along with a full-time Drug Prosecutor in the Blair County District Attorney's Office, despite experiencing the harmful effects of the COVID-19 pandemic these past two years.

Our local and small businesses are the backbone of Blair County, and are the major source of funding that helps Operation Our Town to provide

grants for drug enforcement and prevention programs. Many local businesses have been challenged or negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic through supply chain issues and workforce shortages, but many have continued to support Operation Our Town, despite all of these issues.

The continuing COVID-19 pandemic, combined with the opioid epidemic that our area is still facing, has created many challenges. Ongoing issues have changed. In fact, they have worsened through our country's open border policy. Drugs are flowing across our border at alarming rates. For the first time in history, there is more fentanyl

entering our country than heroin. In 2021, the majority of drug buys in Blair County were either for methamphetamine or heroin, much of it laced with fentanyl, causing more deaths than we can imagine. This is a war, not a battle, and we strive to manage it the best we can with our three main focuses on law enforcement, prevention, and treatment.

Our Roundtables continued to work on projects and community issues over the past year, but adapted by meeting virtually in the beginning of the year and gradually transitioned to in-person meetings again by mid-year. Our prevention grant recipients were also

affected. Many had to cancel or reschedule events or programs in the beginning of the year and some were able to transition to in-person programming again by finding new and creative ways to deliver their programs and services safely with enhanced health and safety precautions. It is important for these prevention programs and services to continue during the pandemic, because children and families need the educational, emotional, and mental health resources and support now more than ever.

These past two years have been difficult for all of us in many ways and presented new challenges to overcome. As a

community, we will continue to face new challenges in the future, but we can make a difference if we work together. Because of you, we are able to continue to touch thousands of people because of the generosity and support that the Blair County community continues to provide. We thank you for your commitment to make Blair County a better place to live!

*You can help take back our neighborhoods by volunteering or financially supporting the work of Operation Our Town. Visit [OperationOurTown.Org](http://OperationOurTown.Org) or contact Shawna Hoover at (814) 296-8730 or [shawna@operationourtown.org](mailto:shawna@operationourtown.org)*

## NIGHT OUT AGAINST CRIME



Deputies and Congressman Joyce during the 2021 National Night Out Against Crime (Hosted in Blair County).

## OOT 15 Years

*continued from A17*

As we begin our 15th year of focus to make our community a safer and better place, I can assure you that our mission today has never been more clear, relevant, and purposeful – and we are committed more than ever to continuing to make a real difference. With your support, we can (and will) continue to take back our neighborhoods and make our county a great place to work and live!

Thank you, Blair County, for your support of Operation Our Town by working together, supporting each other, and making this a truly wonderful place to work, raise a family, and live!

## Breaking the Cycle: It Starts with Prevention

*Continued from A1*

which law enforcement and prosecutors “weed” out criminals who engage in violent crimes and drug trafficking, and “seed” in human services that encompass prevention, intervention, treatment, and neighborhood revitalization.

Operation Our Town uses this “weed and seed” model to use the donations that Operation Our Town receives to fund efforts to reduce both the supply and demand for illegal drugs through grants to law enforcement and prevention programs in Blair County. Operation Our Town distributes an annual grant to Blair County law enforcement to reimburse overtime for Blair County Drug Task Force special operations and supports the salary of a drug prosecutor in the Blair County District Attorney's Office. Operation Our Town also distributes funds through one grant cycle each year to programs that are aimed at preventing and/or reducing drug abuse and/or crime in Blair County.

It's been 15 years since Operation Our Town was formed, and since then, Operation Our Town has awarded prevention grants to 70 non-profit organizations, schools, and government agencies and served over 104,000 youth and families. The fight against drugs and crime in Blair County begins with strengthening youth and their families, which is the core of where positive change can begin. Reaching at-risk families through prevention grants that Operation Our Town provides helps to reinforce the importance of making healthy lifestyle choices, which will

lead to healthy behaviors and a healthier community.

The programs that Operation Our Town funds through prevention grants aim to break the negative cycles of poverty, addiction,

incarceration, teenage pregnancy, etc. that carry on from generation to generation. Although all of the Operation Our Town grant recipients aim to address these negative cycles in different ways, the following Operation Our Town grant recipients highlighted below give a snapshot of how they help to break the negative cycles and prevent the next generation of youth from falling into the same cycle:

The Gloria Gates Memorial Foundation aims to break the cycle of poverty through education by providing an after school program at three low-income housing developments at Evergreen Manors, Fairview Hills, and Logan Hills. The grant that Operation Our Town awarded to Gloria Gates Memorial

Foundation funds educational materials, field trips, snacks, and individual assistance to youth. The Gloria Gates Memorial Foundation After School Program provides an opportunity for children to

gather in a safe environment with dedicated staff members who can help steer children toward a brighter future by helping them to gain confidence, ambition, and self-regulation. Developing these non-cognitive attributes is crucial to resisting the lure of drugs, alcohol, and criminal activity.

The 18th Street Community Church Sanctuary Recovery House aims to break the cycle of addiction and incarceration by providing a men's transitional recovery house that is based on a spiritual recovery and the 12-step program to establish a bridge between treatment, incarceration, and the real world. The grant that Operation Our Town awarded to the Sanctuary Recovery

House funds program supplies such as drug testing kits for random drug tests, a computer for assessment and case management, and dressers for the residents. The Sanctuary Recovery House provides

transition housing, education, spiritual guidance, and support for individuals in recovery who struggle with drug and alcohol addiction by providing structured living facilities where residents can focus on their recovery process, formulate a strong foundation of lasting sobriety, and develop the skills needed to lead a productive and fulfilling life.

The Altoona Area School District ELECT (Education Leading to Employment & Career Training) Program aims to break the cycle of teenage pregnancy by providing supportive services to pregnant and parenting teens to help them break the cycle of welfare dependence, earn a diploma or GED certificate, and secure post-graduation employment, education, or

training that will help them become successful parents and self-sufficient adults. The grant that Operation Our Town awarded to the AASD ELECT Program funds nutritious meals and snacks for pregnant and parenting teens at educational events and out of school visits, and provides engagement support to paternal figures that are ineligible for the program but involved in the students' children's lives. Parenting teens, and subsequently children of teenage parents, are at greater risk of drug abuse, criminal behavior, and poverty. The workshops, groups, and individual visits provide students with a place to go to receive the necessary education and support to develop long-term attainable goals and effective decision-making skills.

These past two years have been difficult for all of us during the pandemic, including our prevention grant recipients, which have had to adjust and find new and creative ways to deliver their programs and services safely with enhanced health and safety precautions. It is important for these prevention programs and services to continue during the pandemic, because children and families need the educational, emotional, and mental health resources and support now more than ever. Our prevention grant recipients are our most important asset in the community, as they are providing the guidance, support, and resources needed at this critical time. To learn more, contact Shawna Hoover at (814) 296-8730.





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# OOT BUSINESS SUPPORT

By Shawna Hoover, OOT Executive Coordinator

Operation Our Town was formed 15 years ago in response to the increase in violent crime and drug trafficking that was taking hold of Blair County. The Operation Our Town Board Members and Steering Committee saw a need to pull together financial resources to help tackle the issues caused by the drug problem by providing additional resources through grants to law enforcement to reimburse overtime for Blair County Drug Task Force special operations, judicial support to support the salary of a drug prosecutor in the Blair County District Attorney's Office, and prevention efforts through grants to programs that are aimed at preventing and/or reducing drug abuse and/or crime in Blair County. It was realized that community residents and businesses had the power to do something about what was happening to their community, which formed the mission of Operation Our Town: Facilitating partnerships between community and business to fight drug abuse and crime through proven law enforcement, treatment, and prevention techniques.

Our local and small businesses are the backbone of Blair County, and are the major source of funding that helps Operation Our Town to provide grants for drug enforcement and prevention programs. When Operation Our Town initially formed, a group of over 20 local businesses, which became the Founding Members, initially committed at least \$10,000 per year for three years or more to fund efforts to take back our neighborhoods from drugs and violent crime.

We are truly grateful to the following Founding Member businesses that stepped up

in the beginning to support their community through their financial commitment to fund efforts to reduce both the supply and demand for illegal drugs in Blair County: Blair Candy Company, Blair Companies, D.C. Goodman & Sons, Delta Health Technologies, Fiore Buick GMC/Fiore Toyota, Grappone Law Office, Harry K. Sickler Associates, Holiday Inn Express, Lawruk Realty, Lee Industries, Leonard S. Fiore, McLanahan Corporation, M&T Bank, New Enterprise Stone & Lime Co., New Pig Corporation, NPC, Reliance Bank, Seltzer Financial Strategies, Sheetz, The Hite Company, Thompson Pharmacy, UPMC Altoona, Ward Trucking, Wolf Furniture.

Lee Hite, Chairman of The Hite Company and Operation Our Town Founding Member business, explained how Operation Our Town has helped Blair County, "Operation Our Town has been a guiding force in the community for educational needs to the public, as well as supporting member agencies and organizations who continue to fight the abuse of illegal substances and its continued enforcement."

The success of Operation Our Town, combined with the desire to improve our community, has led additional local businesses to continue the work begun by our Founding Members by joining with them to financially support Operation Our Town. We appreciate the generosity of our current annual donors, which include most of our original Founding Member businesses and some additional businesses/donors that joined in the effort at a later time: Altoona First Savings Bank, Blair Candy

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Call Ashley at 814-944-3313 ext. 101 or  
office@parkhillsgc.com for menus & more information

Company, Blair Companies, John & Doug Wolf, Lee Industries, Leonard S. Fiore, M&T Bank, New Enterprise Stone & Lime Co., New Pig Corporation, NPC, Pyramid Healthcare, Reliance Bank, Seltzer Financial Strategies, Sheetz, Small Tube Products, Stuckey Automotive, The Hite Company, Thompson Pharmacy, UPMC Altoona, Value Drug Company.

Greg Drew, R.Ph., President of Value Drug Company, had this to say about why he thought it was important for his company to join with the Founding Members to support Operation Our Town: "One of my more rewarding experiences was when I had the opportunity 10 years ago to sit down with Michael Fiore and hear his vision for Operation Our Town. I knew immediately that this vision aligned perfectly with Value Drug Company's mission to be a positive force in dealing with the opioid crisis and help strengthen the neighborhoods

of many of our pharmacy members, and believed that we needed to join the Founding Members to help fulfill the vision. As Chair of the Pharmacy Roundtable, I have had the opportunity to see the positive impact pharmacy, law enforcement, addiction treatment, and many other community stakeholders can have in this mission. The grants that Operation Our Town has been able to provide from the financial support of the business community in Blair County and work of the organization has been profound, and I hope that the business community can continue to support, and even grow, the funding of Operation Our Town going forward, our job is far from over."

Because of the generosity of the business community, over the past 15 years, Operation Our Town has been able to raise over \$4,300,000 and provide over \$3,800,000 in grant funding to law enforcement, judicial/drug

prosecutor, and prevention programs. We appreciate and value the commitment of the Founding Member businesses that continue to support Operation Our Town, those that have joined our Founding Members, and our Golf Tournament sponsors that have supported our efforts over the past 15 years. It is through their financial support that we are able to support those at-risk in our community and continue to fight the ever-changing drug problem in Blair County. Progress has been made to reduce drug activity and associated crime, but the battle is not over. We cannot let our guard down or we will find ourselves back where we started 15 years ago. We must remain diligent and unified as a community. We must continue to provide the resources necessary to continue to protect our children, our neighborhoods, and our quality of life. Our communities' future depends on it.

# OOT at Duncansville Community Days

By Shawna Hoover, OOT Executive Coordinator

Operation Our Town participated in the 2021 Duncansville Community Days on July 15-17, 2021 at the Duncansville Memorial Park. Non-profit organizations were invited to have booths at the event, along with a children's activity, to raise money for their causes.

Operation Our Town had a dunk tank booth to help raise money to go towards drug enforcement and prevention programs in Blair County. We

thank our dunk tank sponsor, Fiore True Value Hardware Store, for providing the dunk tank. Volunteers included officers from Allegheny Township and Altoona Police Departments, along with anchor Jordan Tracy from WTAJ, who donated their time for a couple hours and were willing to get wet and cooled off! Because of the generosity of the community, we were able to raise over \$1,100 from the dunk tank!

Mark your calendars for July 15 & 16, 2022 for the 2022 Duncansville Community Days! The event will be held on Friday, July 15th from 5:00pm-10:00pm and Saturday, July 16th from 12:00pm-10:00pm. Operation Our Town will be providing a children's activity on Friday, July 15th and will be doing the dunk tank on Saturday, July 16th. We look forward to another fun-filled community event!



# Thank you for being part of the solution.

Project Supported by:





# OOT IN THE COMMUNITY



Pictured: 2021 mini-golf tournament



Pictured: Student golfers eating dinner after golf



Pictured: McGruff



Pictured: K-9 Ciro bite demo



Pictured: K-9 Freddy &amp; Officer Vazquez



Pictured: Kids at OOT Day at DelGrosso's



Pictured: Penn Cambria - 2021 Girls Student Golf Winners



Pictured: Kiski School - 2021 Boys Student Golf Winners



Pictured: 2021 mini-golf tournament



Pictured: Evolution Expressions - Winning Mini-Golf Team



Pictured: Pete Weeks giving DA Office update at OOT BBQ



Pictured: Fingerprinting at OOT Day at DelGrosso's



Pictured: Golfers enjoying lunch



## SMART Recovery:

SMART Recovery can be used as an alternative, or in conjunction with 12 step meetings for people who are working to recover from addiction. It advocates choice, so that those seeking recovery can choose what works best for them from a variety of options.

SMART Recovery meets every Monday from 6:30pm-8:00pm

## Medication Assistance Recovery Anonymous (M.A.R.A.):

If you, a loved one, or a friend are like us and need the support or understanding of being on a maintenance medication during your recovery journey, come out and get involved. Let us stand together throughout the recovery process and support one another.

M.A.R.A. meets every Tuesday from 6:30pm-7:30pm

## HOPE Group:

We are recovering family members and friends who have been adversely affected by the addiction of our loved ones. We are here to seek guidance and support. HOPE Group offers a safe haven for those who feel they are alone in this struggle.

HOPE Group meets every Wednesday from 5:30pm-7:30pm

## Dual Diagnosis Anonymous:

DDA is a peer support group based on an authorized version of the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous plus an additional 5 Steps that focus on Dual Diagnosis (mental illness and substance misuse).

Dual Diagnosis Anonymous meets every Wednesday at 5:30pm

## Healing Hearts:

Healing Hearts offers a safe haven for those who feel they are alone in this loss. It carries the message of compassion of those affected by addiction and the loss of their loved one.

Healing Hearts meets every 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday from 6:00pm-8:00pm

For more information on these groups and other supports, please visit:

[www.blairdap.org](http://www.blairdap.org) or [www.blairdap.org/recovery/recovery-support-groups/](http://www.blairdap.org/recovery/recovery-support-groups/)

## 2021 GRANT RECIPIENT HIGHLIGHT

By Nick Gordon, PMSC AmeriCorps Member with OOT

The **Healing Patch Children's Grief Program** (by the Home Nursing Agency Foundation) is a peer support program designed for children and their families who have suffered the death of a loved one. The program serves children of all ages (preschool through 18 years) who can benefit from and contribute to

drama, storytelling, and play are just some of the ways children may choose to express their feelings and share with peers who can understand and empathize with those feelings. While the children are engaged, parents or guardians meet separately to discuss the impact of their loved one's death on the family and



Pictured: Dream catchers made by students at Westmont Elementary during an in-school peer support group. Students discussed worries, fears, and how to manage these thoughts and feelings

a peer support group facilitated by specially trained staff and volunteers.

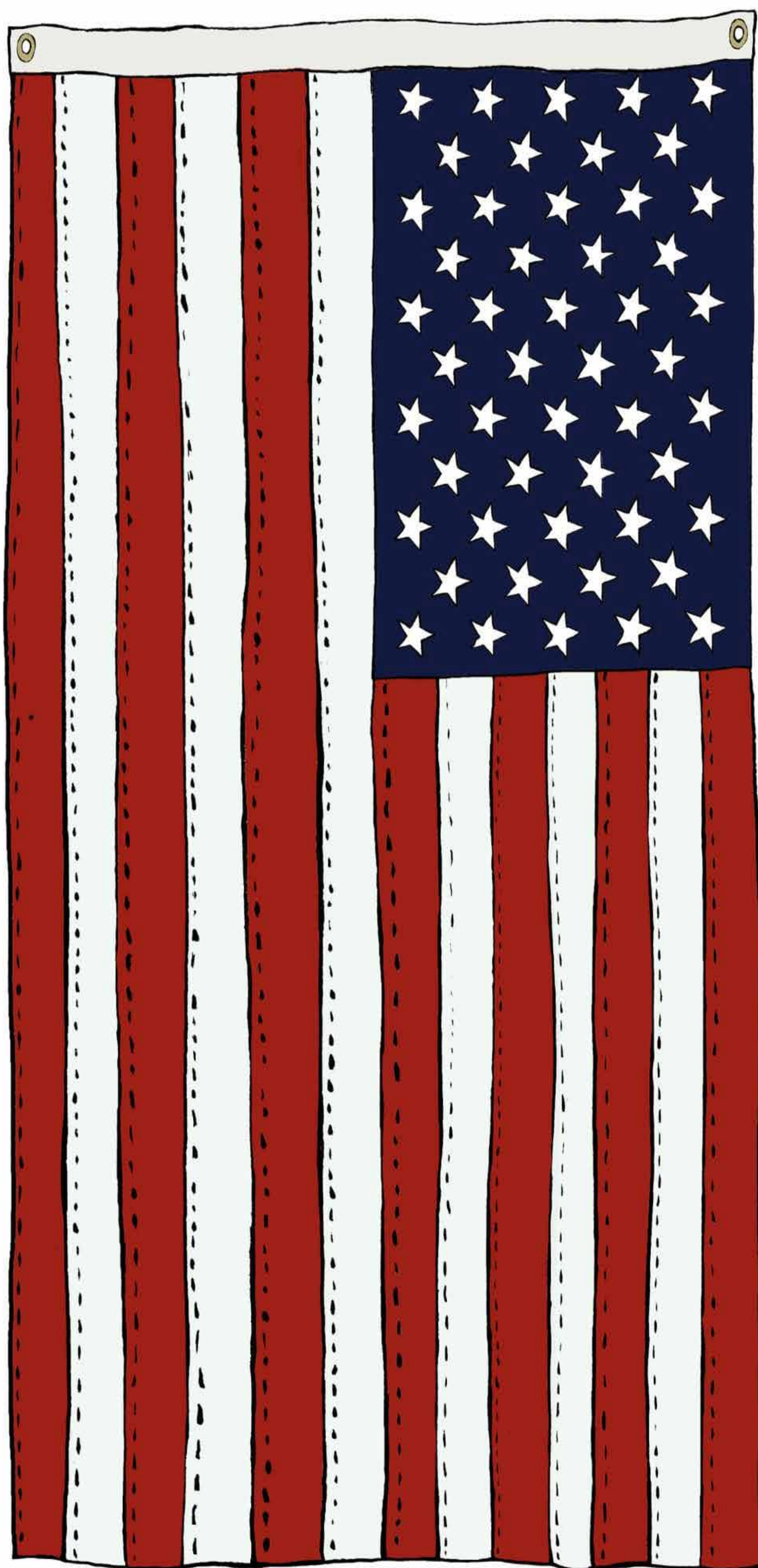
With two centers available (Altoona and Ebensburg), the program meets twice monthly at each location from 6-8 pm from September to May. Every evening begins with a meal for the entire family. Children are then divided between age-specific groups where they engage in various activities and group discussions. The use of art,

learn how to help their children cope. In addition to peer support groups, the Healing Patch offers in-school services, such as Grief Education in the Classroom for middle school students, which is a presentation that introduces the topics of grief, mourning, finding positive ways to cope, and how to support grieving friends. To learn more, or for Families interested in enrolling in the Healing Patch, call 1-800-445-6262.



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**The American Flag is a symbol of freedom, national pride, & history.**





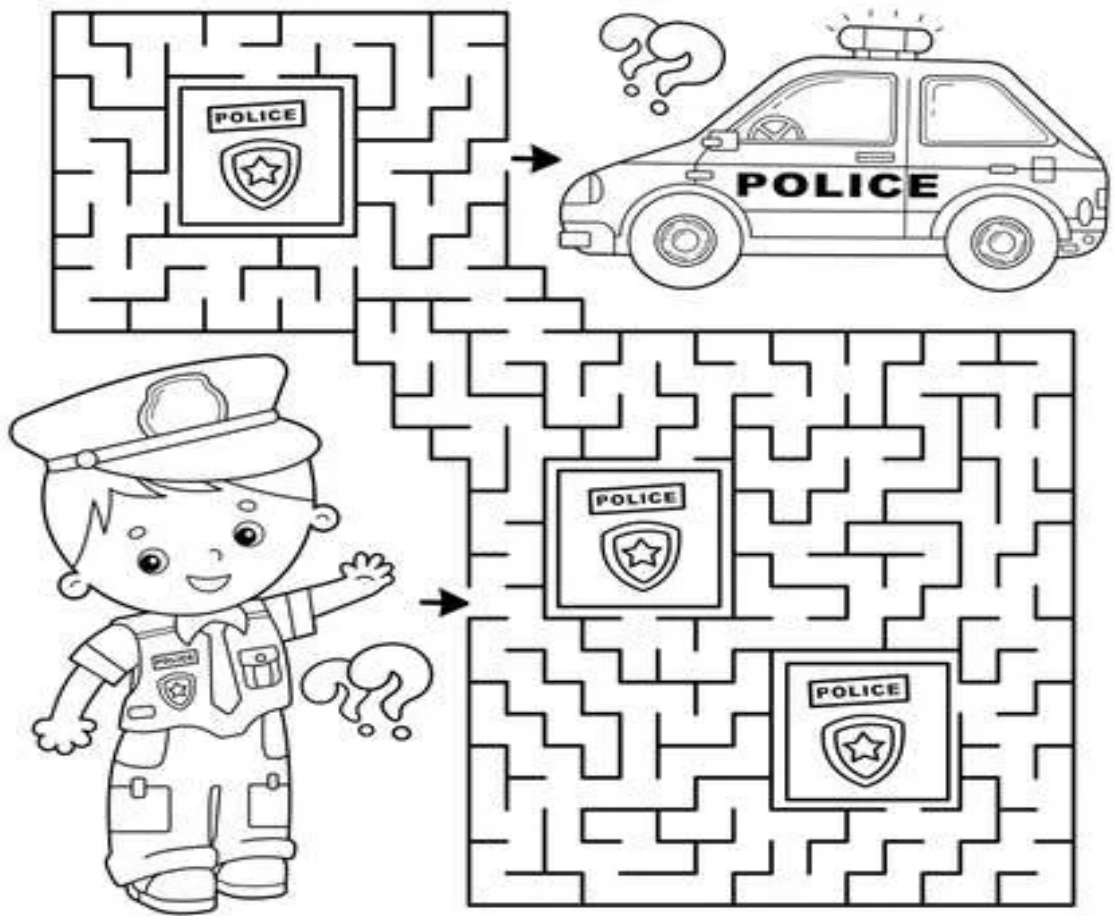
# Kidz Korner



Thank You!



Go through the maze, collecting all the police stripes



## Laugh Out Loud!

Why are policemen such great volleyball players?  
They know how to serve and protect.

What happens when a police officer goes to bed?  
He becomes an undercover cop.

What is a police officer's favorite type of tag?  
Freeze tag.

## Word Search

### Police

S	I	N	V	B	T	M	E	K	K	S	T	E	R
E	A	P	A	E	R	N	O	R	I	C	I	O	S
E	S	D	N	V	H	E	W	N	E	T	C	S	T
N	G	N	E	E	H	I	P	N	E	E	K	O	A
E	T	W	I	S	L	P	C	O	A	Y	E	T	T
L	T	E	K	T	L	T	C	L	R	Y	T	O	E
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S	T	A	R	R	E	S	T	E	M	O	T	R	G
I	H	O	A	C	C	I	D	E	N	T	S	N	A
R	L	O	O	T	A	H	E	C	I	L	O	P	P
P	C	S	K	E	Y	S	R	N	N	E	R	I	S

- WALKIE
- REPORTS
- STATEMENT
- VEHICLE
- CAGE
- ARREST
- KEYS
- PHOTOS
- BADGE
- POLICE HAT
- TICKETS
- ACCIDENTS
- SIREN
- MONEY
- VEST
- TASER
- SERGEANT
- PATROL
- PRISONER
- WEAPON

## Word Scramble

- LPOCEI FFICORE
- YSA NO TO SRUDG
- PKEE IT AESF
- ETH BTES ME IS URDG EERF
- EDBGA
- OPLECI ARC
- RFHIESF
- CPOTETR
- RCIEM ESRPPSTO
- RUO WTNO



# OPERATION OUR TOWN DONORS

Operation Our Town was founded in 2006 with the support of many local businesses. The following businesses with an asterisk (\*) are our founding members that initially committed at least \$10,000 per year for three years or more to fund local efforts to take back our neighborhoods from drugs and violent crime. The success of Operation Our Town, combined with the desire to improve our community, has led additional local businesses to continue the work begun by our founding members by continuing to financially support local programs that prevent and/or reduce drug abuse and/or crime in Blair County.

The donations listed in the donor categories below are cumulative.

<b>\$10,000 and up:</b> AIA Alera Group Alan Gehringer, Rhythm Systems Allegheny Brain & Spine Surgeons, P.C. Allegheny Supply & Maintenance Co., Inc. Altoona Area School District Foundation Altoona Blair County Development Corporation Altoona Curve – Lozinak Professional Baseball, LLC Altoona First Savings Bank Altoona Pipe & Steel Supply Company American Eagle Paper Mills Amtran Anonymous donor APR Supply Co. Arch Insurance Group Blair Candy Company, Inc.* Blair Companies* Bolger Brothers, Inc. Catalano, Case, Catalano & Clark-Radzietz Central PA Landlord Association Chester E. Grannas Family Foundation City Beverage of Altoona, Inc. Courtesy Motors D.C. Goodman & Sons, Inc.* Dean Patterson Chevrolet DeGol Organization Delta Health Technologies, LLC* E.B. Endres, Inc. Encompass Health Rehabilitation Hospital of Altoona Fine Line Cabinets, Inc. Fiore Buick GMC* Fiore Toyota* First Energy Foundation First National Bank Fox 8 TV – Peak Media of Pennsylvania, LLC Grainger Foundation, Inc. Grappone Law Office* Graystone Court Groff Tractor & Equipment Harry K. Sickler Associates* H.F. Lenz Company Holiday Inn Express* Hoss’s – Willard E. Campbell Enterprises, Inc. Infinity Insurance Management Service John & Doug Wolf* Jones Day Kooman & Associates, LLC Lawruk Machine & Tool Company, Inc. Lawruk Realty* Lee Industries, Inc.* Leonard S. Fiore, Inc.* Lezzer Lumber McLanahan Corporation* M&T Bank* Newborn Enterprises, Inc. New Enterprise Stone & Lime Co.* New Pig Corporation* Nic’s Tobacco Outlet, Inc. Norfolk Southern Foundation North American Communications Northwestern Mutual NPC, Inc.* Park Hills Golf Club Patt Organization PNC Foundation Reilly Creppage & Co. Reliance Bank* Rotary Club of Altoona Say-Core, Inc. Seltzer Financial Strategies Sheetz, Inc.* Small Tube Products S&T Bank Stuckey Automotive The Hite Company Division of Mayer Electric* Thompson Pharmacy United Way of Blair County* UPMC Altoona* US Foods Value Drug Company Ward Trucking, LLC* Willard Family Foundation YTI Career Institute - Altoona	AmeriServ Financial Bavarian Aid Society Benzel’s Bretzel Bakery, Inc. Bernard Albert Good Post 8685 Best Line Equipment Blair County District Attorney’s Office Business Planning Service, LLC Concordia Society DelGrosso’s Amusement Park DelGrosso Foods, Inc. Empire Communication Systems, Inc. Fiore Brothers Management, LLC First Commonwealth Bank Galliker Dairy Company Inco Beverage, Inc. Irwin Financial, Inc. Jane & Lee Hite Family Keller Engineers, Inc. Kunzler & Company McQuaide Blasko, Inc. Mountain Research, LLC Northwest Savings Bank Pennsylvania Skill PennTerra Engineering Pepsi Bottling Group, LLC Pyramid Healthcare, Inc. Roaring Spring Paper Products Silk Mills Properties, Inc. Stiffler, McGraw & Associates, Inc. Top to Bottom Office Interiors Xanitos, Inc. Young, Oakes, Brown & Co.	Housing & Redevelopment Insurance Exchange Jack & George’s JP Morgan Chase & Co. Keystone Real Estate Group, LP Kochle Maintenance Kranich’s, Inc. Lakemont Lions Club, Inc. Lamb Foundation Longstreth Brothers, Inc. Low Life Rider Chapter, Inc. Loyal Order of Moose, Altoona Family Center #74 Mama Randazzo’s, Inc. Mariska Eash Realtor, Stultz Real Estate Martin’s Food Market – Ahold Financial Services McAleer’s Plumbing, Heating & Air Conditioning Mock Creations Mountain City Law Dogs of Altoona Mount Aloysius College Nason Hospital Olive Garden - GMRI, Inc. Omega Bank ORX Park Security Systems Penn State Altoona Pennsylvania Prison Warden’s Association P. Joseph Lehman, Inc. Consulting Engineers Prevailing Wage Solution Center, LLC Priority Management & Associates Providence Presbyterian Church Ravine, Inc. Saint Francis University Sam’s Club #6460 Season-Aire, Inc. 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Knights of Columbus Council 551 Kopp Drug Ladies of Virtue Foundation, Inc. Lake Raystown Resort Law Office of Stephen D. Wicks Law Offices of Thomas M. Dickey Llyswen United Methodist Church Logan Lodge #490 F&AM Lumax Lighting Lung Disease Center of Central PA Mainline Medical Associates Manpower Marian Heights at Garvey Manor Marianna’s Fundraisers, Inc. Martin Oil Company Mathew Greenwald & Associates, Inc. McCloskey Builders, Inc. Mike’s Court Mike Servello Garage, Inc. M&M Roofing & Contracting, Inc. Moore Power Sales Morrison’s Cove Herald Moses & Associates, P.C. Mountain Lodge #281 – Free & Accepted Masons Mount Aloysius College – Physical Therapy Club Mueller’s Auto Recycling Musical Society Unter Uns Nimquin, Inc. Nittany Building Specialties, Inc. Okonak, Dean & Lechner, P.C. 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<b>\$5,000 - \$9,999:</b> AGSM Ventures, LLC Allegheny Trucks, Inc.				

Individuals: 243 individual citizens.

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Professional and OOT Titles			
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<b>Tom Brandt</b> Regional Director, PA Office of Attorney General, Bureau of Narcotics Investigations & Drug Control Chairperson, OOT Law Enforcement Roundtable	<b>Brian Durbin</b> President, Durbin Companies Co-chairperson, OOT Housing Roundtable	<b>Joseph Grappone, Esq.</b> Grappone Law Office Solicitor	<b>Heather Crusinberry</b> Vice President, Central PA Landlord Association Co-Chairperson, OOT Housing Roundtable
<b>JR DiAndrea</b> President, DiAndrea Media, Inc. Chairperson, OOT Marketing Roundtable	<b>Zane Gates, MD</b> PeopleOne Health OOT Health Representative	<b>Lisa Hann</b> Executive Director, Family Services Incorporated Chairperson, OOT Faith-based Roundtable	<b>Matt Pacifico</b> Mayor, City of Altoona Chairperson, OOT Community Revitalization Roundtable
<b>Honorable Elizabeth Doyle</b> Blair County President Judge Chairperson, OOT Criminal/Judicial Roundtable	<b>Dr. Robert Gildea</b> Superintendent, Hollidaysburg Area School District Chairperson, OOT K-12 Education Roundtable	<b>Sue Griep</b> Former Blair County Victim/Witness Coordinator Chairperson, OOT Northern Blair Roundtable	<b>Judy Rosser</b> Executive Director, Blair Drug & Alcohol Partnerships OOT Human Services Representative
<b>Peter Weeks</b> Blair County District Attorney OOT Law Enforcement Roundtable	<b>Rodney Green</b> Leadership & Special Education Consultant Chairperson, OOT Early Childhood Education Roundtable		<b>Dr. Todd Negola</b> Clinical Psychologist, James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center OOT Gang Representative