Area police departments give year end review - A4

TRANQ: The Deadliest Drug, Even Deadlier - A13





OUR TOWN TIMES 2024 ANNUAL REPORT | VOL. XIII

DRUG USE 🔺 NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH **V**

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

EDUCATION **A**

LAW ENFORCEMENT V **VOLUNTEERISM**

The Universal **Fight on Drugs** By State Representative Jim Gregory,

80th House District

In my capacity as state representative for the 80th Legislative District, I've prioritized drug treatment and recovery legislation. In my pursuits, I've met many likeminded people who have helped reinforce the necessity of the fight in my mind. One such person I've met, is Carlos Del Valle who works for Prevention Point Philadelphia which seeks to address the public health challenges caused by widespread drug use, especially homelessness, the spread of diseases, discarded syringe waste, and overdose deaths.

Carlos and I are passionate about two things: our sports teams and saving lives from Recently, while drug use. Carlos was on the ground working in the neighborhood of Kensington, Philadelphia, he and I had a discussion about a number of topics that I would like to share. The dangers of drug use are not isolated to specific areas, they are prevalent in places urban and rural like Philadelphia and Blair County; across the Commonwealth and the nation. While there are similarities between rural and urban areas, there are also differences. Carlos discussed with me how in Philadelphia, there exists an open-air drug market and the effects of substance use may be easily seen in the streets. In places like Blair, however, usage may be much more discreet. On an average day working

for Prevention Point, Carlos

PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS Fentanyl & Xylazine - The Deadly Duo

By Shawna Hoover, OOT Executive Coordinator

Fentanyl and xylazine are now front and center, but why?

A brief look into the history of opioids with Dr. Zane Gates of Gloria Gates CARE:

The opioid crises have been a problem in the US since 1960, but after the Vietnam War, the crises moved from mainly big cities to small and

In the 1980's, the popularity of

rural areas over the entire US. cheaper and easily accessible.

The opioid crises took a turn opioids diminished because of after the abuse of OxyContin, the emergence of crack cocaine because these drugs were that was much cheaper, easily covered by insurance, and accessible, and much easier to "pill mills," doctor's offices use. After Ronald Reagan's that wrote large volumes of the war on drugs decreased the medications for cash rewards supply of cocaine, making it by patients, made heroin take much more expensive, heroin a back seat. The pills were became the drug of choice injectable by crushing them and again, because it was much had a "cleaner" high according

to addicts, which made them the preferred drugs. After the government cracked down on OxyContin and prescription opioids, making them difficult to obtain, the black market started to develop alternatives, which is when fentanyl became incorporated into heroin because it was cheaply made, increased the potency of the See Deadly/Page A22



SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN SCHOOLS

and his co-workers check to make sure there are life-saving medications on the street and seek to get people indoors



wherever possible – especially as we get into the colder weather. He also needs to be able to distinguish between people who have overdosed and those who are sedated, which can look like an overdose. One of the larger concerns now is the presence of illicit Xylazine, an animal tranquilizer, in street drugs which can cause sedation and deep skin wounds that, if left untreated, can lead to complications. We also discussed the relevance of the holidays and people recording videos in areas where drug use is evident. The holiday season is multifaceted. While it is helpful people are more charitable and likely to help during the holidays, it can also add

See Jim Gregory/Page A5

By Edward G. DiSabato, Superintendent, Bellwood Antis School District

Blair County community school district leaders meet regularly to discuss concerns and issues that are negatively affecting our students. One issue that has been a regular point of discussion has been the use of vapes by students in and around our schools. Each of us shares our concerns and/or strategies that we are using to combat this recent trend. The following is

a synopsis of how we are facing and combating this issue locally.

Substance abuse/ vaping issues in schools are serious concerns that can have a significant impact on students' well-being, academic performance, and overall school environment. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach involving educators,

parents, students, and community members. Substance abuse among students in schools has emerged as a critical issue that demands attention. The misuse of drugs and alcohol not only jeopardizes individual student's the well-being, but also poses a significant threat to the overall academic environment of a school. At a recent OOT K-12

Education Roundtable school discussion, local leaders expressed their regarding the concern number of vapes confiscated in school and the increase in illegal substances found in vapes. THC and other narcotics have been found locally. Dr. Betsy Baker, Superintendent of Spring Cove School District stated, "Vapes are easy to conceal,

See Substance/Page A7

VAPING: TH E DANGER ESAN H)-(By Sherri Stayer, Lung Disease Foundation of Central Pennsylvania

E-Cigarettes and vapes became extremely popular around 2014. These products use an "e-liquid" that, in most cases, contains nicotine derived from tobacco, as well flavorings, propylene as glycol, vegetable glycerin, and other ingredients. The liquid is heated through the mechanism to create

an aerosol that is inhaled. Once the few ingredients identified on their labels are heated to create the aerosol, like in science class when chemicals come together, other chemicals such as formaldehyde, ammonia, silicates, metals, and cancer causing agents are formed. Our lungs are not meant to inhale anything other than

air, let alone these dangerous chemicals. These devices come in many different shapes and sizes with some resembling pens or USB devices.

Big Tobacco lies. So did JUUL. JUUL perpetuated old tobacco industry lies. Philip Morris, maker of Marlboro cigarettes, owned a 35% stake in JUUL. With

many adults kicking the cigarette smoking habit, they were looking for ways to sustain their financial stability.

While JUUL and others claimed their devices were to help adult smokers switch from tobacco to e-liquids, they were creating ads and flavors attractive to recruit

Continued on A25



A5
A9
A10



POLICE REPORT

ERATERNAL

ORDER

461

BALD EAGLE

LODGE #51

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HOLLOW ROAD

P.O. BOX 99,

PORT MATILDA, PA.

16870

SERVING OFFICERS

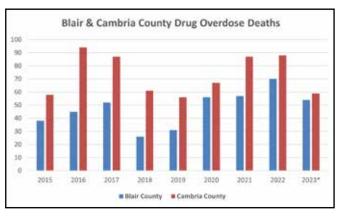
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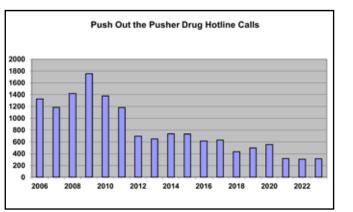
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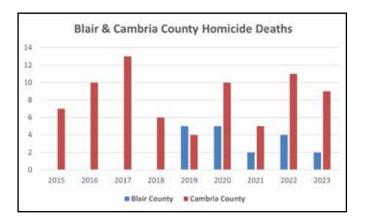
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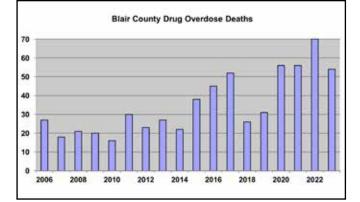
POLICE REPORT



* Cambria County had an additional 4 probable overdose deaths from 2023 that were pending toxicology results as of the printing of the Annual Report







Source: Blair and Cambria County Coroner's Office

Paws and Order: Altoona PD Debuts New K-9 Officers

By Shawna Hoover, OOT Executive Coordinator

provided a grant to the support the start-up costs of Police Department

peration Our Town Keystone Police K-9, LLC.

Altoona impact of OOT's grant funding enforcement and community two new police K-9's certified Joseph Merrill noted, "It has committed to and are constantly in narcotics detection and been over 20 years since the trying to find new ways to tracking. K-9 Blue is assigned Altoona Police Department improve on."

K-9 and K-9 Pongo through went approximately 3-4 months training with their handlers Keystone K-9, LLC. in detection (meth, heroin, and Ecstasy) well as (human scent). During training, they started with the

have the personality suited for repetitive runs enabled the which are Narcotic Detection When asked about the community relations. Drug K-9's and their handlers to build trust in one another. From scent Police Department in 2023 to for the K-9's, former Altoona relations are two areas that the work, they moved onto tracking. Chief Altoona Police Department are They started out laying small tracks in open fields. Once the K-9's became proficient at that, they moved to small, short Blue tracks through the woods. Once the K-9's became proficient at that, they progressed to tracks up constantly in K-9 work. between half a mile and a mile of long through wooded terrain.

from article, K-9 Pongo has had 11 it comes to scenting, the dog their master trainer deployments with 6 leading knows more than I do. This Jim Walstrom of to an arrest. On the topic of Police how his K-9 serves as an asset Both to both the department and K-9's are trained our broader community, Ptlm. narcotics Benjamin Riviera mentioned, "K-9 Pongo enhances my job at cocaine, APD by being a tool to help find as more narcotics during vehicle tracking stops and also during search warrants. K-9 Pongo's nose is a tool that can't be replicated by humans, making it a lot easier basics of learning to find narcotics that are very how scent works well hidden. It also helps when and how air flow people get lost or go missing, having K-9 Pongo as an option to use to get on the right track of In a similar timeframe,

deployments and 2 patrol (tracking) deployments. Blue has searched 48 environments with 20 positive indications (drugs present). Of those 20 positive indications, Blue has 26 drug seizures and 16 arrests. Ptlm. Stephen Fox emphasized, "Trust is a key word that comes 'Trust your dog' is a common phrase used by both handlers At the time of writing this and trainers in K-9 work. When is an area of the job that my partner excels really well in and I constantly am reminding myself, 'Trust your dog.'" Law enforcement work hard to protect our community every day, which is why they need the best tools and resources to help them do their job. K-9's continue to be a great asset to law enforcement because they can perform a variety of tasks within the police department, such as catching criminals, sniffing out drugs, and search and rescue. These K-9's would not be possible without the support and donations from the Blair County community. Thanks to this support, we'll be protected for years to come!



Pongo is assigned to Ptlm. the unit because we recognized worked various scenarios from are 3 year old male Black can be. We specifically focused buses, luggage, and parcels.

to Ptlm. Stephen Fox and K-9 had a K-9 unit. We reinstituted affects scent. From there, they Benjamin Rivera. Both K-9's how valuable of an asset K-9s building searches, vehicles, where the person was last seen." Labrador Retrievers. The K-9's on K-9s that would excel at They conducted several "runs" K-9 Blue has had a total were trained and certified by detecting narcotics, but would through each scenario. These of 46 deployments, 44 of



Law Enforcement Year in Review

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

A NATIONAL LOOK

The CDC indicates that there were 106,661 overdose deaths reported in the 12 months leading up to July 2023. By comparison to the previous 12-month period, there was a 1% decrease in deaths. Opioid related overdose deaths during the twelve months leading up to July 2023 accounted for 81,027 of those deaths, making opioids more than twice as likely to lead to death by overdose when compared to the next most fatal class of drugs. Death by heroin overdose continues to decrease, indicating that more and more opioid related deaths are due to fentanyl.

PENNSYLVANIA

According to the CDC, preliminary numbers from Pennsylvania show there have been 5,190 drug overdose deaths reported for July 2022 to July 2023, marking a less than .1% decrease from the previous year.

BLAIR COUNTY

Through November 16, 2023, there were 94 controlled purchases of substances in Blair County and the majority were either for heroin/fentanyl or methamphetamine. The Blair County Drug Task Force continued to utilize saturation interdiction details, and

search warrants on residences or vehicles and 9 buy/bust investigation into an individual operations. 78 defendants were arrested, many of them with multiple criminal complaints. Notably in 2023, OAG BNI and the Blair County Drug Task Force made several large seizures. In May 2023, agents/ officers seized 126 grams of heroin/fentanyl, 117 grams of cocaine, 116 grams of crack cocaine, 595 grams (1.3 pounds) of methamphetamine, and nearly \$6,000 during a case that moved through multiple jurisdictions in Blair County and resulted in three arrests. In June, agents/officers seized 2,722 grams of methamphetamine (5 pounds), 64 grams of heroin/

executing approximately 43 fentanyl, more than \$2,000 and two firearms during an who had multiple arrest warrants for violent acts. There were many other significant seizures throughout the year and defendants from source states such as Michigan and New York, and source cities such as Philadelphia, were arrested.

PARTNERSHIPS

In 2023, members of the Blair County Drug Task Force, in cooperation with the PA Office of Attorney General, were successful in not only their prosecution of defendants, but also in their investigations. This was not only due to the

hard work of Blair County's Task Force Officers and Agents, but also due to the cooperation of all local, state, and federal agencies operating in the county, specifically the Pennsylvania State Police, the US Marshalls Fugitive Apprehension Unit, and the Pennsylvania Bureau of Probation and Parole (Altoona District Office).

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 and throughout Blair County.

We Support **Blair County** LAW ENFORCEMENT

at log

HONOR THE BADGE OperationOurTown.org

Supporting Our Law Enforcement Family

By James E. Ott, President Fraternal Order of Police, Lodge # 51 "Bald Eagle Lodge 51", Blair County Law Enforcement Officer's Memorial Foundation, Inc.



maybe more so now than ever, of a case are investigated and difficult profession, which could or praise law enforcement for enforcement. the good and courageous acts no one is looking. today's In Quarterback" an provided examined, or

I've always believed, conclusions. When the facts during the course of their shift. that being a law enforcement completed, more times than officer is the single most not, the actions taken by law bar enforcement were justified, yet none. We ask members of the initial judgmental damage law enforcement to do the was already done. Sadly, many impossible on a daily basis of these cases where judgment and then judge them harshly is cast quickly, it is done so if a mistake is made during by many who have never the split-second time allowed received any formal training or determine understanding of the profession, whether they go home to their or by elected officials leaving a law enforcement. We have loved ones at the end of their public opinion of distrust to the made every effort to support/

The statistics are devastating, 1,078 members of law enforcement made the ultimate sacrifice since The Fraternal Order 2021. of Police, Bald Eagle Lodge #51 (Pa.) and the Blair County Law Enforcement Officer's Memorial Foundation have a strong history of support to our brothers and sisters in shift. Yet, we rarely learn about good men and women of law assist any member in need. Sometimes this is accomplished through cooperative efforts from the various administrators, command staff, and our brave boots on the ground.

Remember, members of they perform every day when law enforcement are your neighbors, they are husbands, climate, wives, sons, daughters, mothers, society is quick to "Monday fathers, and so on. Every day, incident these individuals leave their before ALL the facts are homes and loved ones to uphold the oath they took to protect which in so many cases, and serve their communities, leave misleading or false not knowing what will happen

On behalf of all Pennsylvania law enforcement officers and their families, thank you for your support.

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

BLAIR COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY PETER J. WEEKS

BLAIR COUNTY: DISTRICT ATTORNEY

By Peter Weeks, District Attorney

Attorney's Office and Operation Our Town share a common mission of ensuring public safety. Now, more than ever, 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

The Blair County District securing a drug prosecutor. result, offenders As а committing drug and drugrelated crimes or other violent offenses are afforded thorough fair investigations and prosecutions.

> Ensuring public safety is not only accomplished by enforcing the law. Prevention equally important. is Operation Our Town and the District Attorney's Office joined forces with the police departments in Hollidaysburg,

Logan Township, Tyrone, 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. Every person who uses a drop box is a local crime fighter!

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, xylazine, methamphetamine, 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 2023, the recent trends continued and we saw a significant rise in fatal overdoses involving fentanyl, and heroin. The COVID-19

pandemic created an excuse for social activists to release dangerous individuals from prison and has stalled our ability to prosecute jury trials. We continue to fight to prioritize fair and effective jury trials for those who prey on our community.

In 2023, the District Attorney's Office continued to work with law enforcement across the County and the Blair County Coroner's Office to investigate and prosecute the rash of drug delivery resulting

in death cases resultant from the rising numbers of fatal drug overdoses plaguing our

See District/Page A12

DEPARTMENT UPDATES 2023 Year in Review : Dept. Highlights

ALLEGHENY TOWNSHIP

Police Department – Chief

Michael Robison

• The Department handled 4,185 incidents in 2023, slightly up from the 3,955 incidents we handled in 2022. • 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.

 The Department investigated 286 Motor Vehicle Accidents in 2023, slightly up from 274 Motor Vehicle Accidents in 2022.

 The Department participated in several community oriented events.

ALTOONA

Police Department – Sgt. Matthew Plummer

• In 2023, the Altoona Police Department handled over 28,102 calls for service (an average of 77 calls per day), made approximately 2,000 arrests, and responded to approximately 200 drug overdoses.

• The department introduced a K-9 unit, thanks to funding from Operation Our Town, welcoming K-9 Blue and K-9 Pongo to our team. Blue & Pongo made two successful narcotics arrests on just their first 2 days on the street. In addition to narcotics detection, Blue & Pongo are also trained in tracking of missing persons. • 15 APD officers ran 6.7 miles through the City of Altoona, raising \$1,800 for the PA Special Olympics in the Law Enforcement Torch Run.

• 12 APD officers jumped in the frigid waters of Canoe



Photo Courtesy of Altoona Police Department





National Night Out, Home Run Derby at the Altoona Curve, Cocoa with the Popo, and placed 400 flags on Veteran grave sites at Fairview Cemetery on Memorial Day.

• APD partnered with the Altoona Area School District, conducting K-9 demos and police officer presentations at elementary schools to bridge the gap between officers and our local youth.

• The department continued their community outreach program in which officers specifically visited city parks, pools, housing complexes, churches, and various neighborhoods to personally interact with the community. Bicycle patrol was also incorporated, providing extra opportunities for community interaction and talks at local schools/churches.

• Christmas present donations were collected in the APD Pictured: North Woodbury Cruiser

• As part of the impaired driving enforcement, the Department participated in DUI checkpoints and roving patrols organized by the Blair County DUI Task Force

• The prevalence of alcohol and drugs continued to be a factor in a substantial percentage of incidents handled by the Department.

Incidents ٠ involving individuals with mental health issues remained steady and challenged officers to find suitable solutions working with the resources available to them.

• The Blair Township Police Department thanks its citizens, businesses, the Board of Supervisors, 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 2024!

• 37 DUI Arrests

2024, In Hollidaysburg Police Department is excited to continue service to the community and the addition of a ninth police officer. Should you have any questions regarding the Hollidaysburg Police Department, please do not hesitate to call.

LOGAN TOWNSHIP

Police Department – Chief David Hoover

• LTPD Officers responded to 9,218 calls for service in 2023. LTPD Officers had 359 total arrests in 2023.

• On July 31, 2023, Officer Hollern arrested Justin 18-year-old James Watts, Jr., and a juvenile male, with multiple drug offenses, following a drug task force investigation. The street value of narcotics seized is estimated

Photo Courtesy of Altoona Police Department

· 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!

Creek for the Polar Plunge, raising \$5,330 for the PA Special Olympics.

• 50 APD officers participated in the 3rd annual "No Shave November" program, donating \$3,100 to Easter for Eli, benefitting children battling cancer.

• APD hosted numerous other events charity including:

front lobby as the department teamed up with Professional's Body Auto to provide Christmas morning for over 100 local children in need this holiday season.

• APD welcomed 9 newly hired officers in 2023 with ongoing recruitment and hiring efforts.

BLAIR TOWNSHIP

Police Department – Chief Roger Peacock

• 2023 was a busy but safe year for the officers of the Blair Township Police Department. BTPD handled 1,920

incidents in 2023, which is a slight increase from 2022.

• 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 Occupant Protection PA Programs.

HOLLIDAYSBURG

Police Department – Chief Christopher Storm

Hollidaysburg Police Department is comprised of eight full-time officers, four clerks, and an Administrative Officer/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 changes and receiving optimum training for the betterment of the community.

Below are the statistics from 2023:

- 4,561 Calls for Service
- 391 Criminal Arrests
- 17 Juvenile Arrests
- 1,049 Traffic Citations
- 77 Non-Traffic Citations
- 1,192 Vehicle Stops

to be \$9,270.

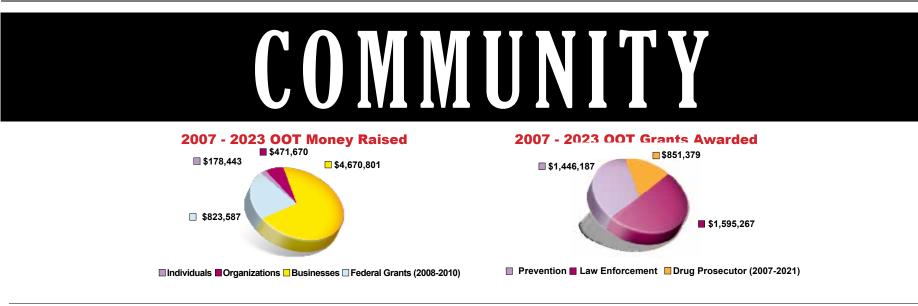
• Corporal Tyler McClellan and Officer Justin Hollern arrested Abigail Watson on August 30, 2023. A search warrant yielded 42 packaged bricks of suspected heroin, 13 loose stamp bags of suspected heroin, 4 knot bags of crack cocaine, \$2,642 of US currency, and drug paraphernalia.

• Officer Justin Hollern arrested Tara Appleman in October of 2023 with drug delivery resulting in death.

 Officer Justin Hollern, Corporal Benjamin Shanholtz, Officer Tyler McConnell, and members of the Blair County Drug Task Force arrested Stephen Majoros, Breanna Turner, and Edward Welsh in November of 2023. Majoros heroin, trafficking was methamphetamine, and firearms in the Altoona, Blair County area.

See Dept. Updates/Page A19





OOT: Roundtable Descriptions

By Shawna Hoover, OOT Executive Coordinator

If you would like to become a part of any of these Roundtables, please contact: (814) 296-8730 or info@ operationourtown.org



Roundtable Descriptions:

Community Revitalization Roundtable: community partnership

to develop and implement

strategies to improve neighborhoods.

Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB):

provide an ongoing То forum for communication among and collaboration key decision makers for the purpose of integrating and recommending action to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the criminal justice system in Blair County.

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

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 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:**

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

Marketing Roundtable:

communicate То 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: То facilitate partnerships

between the community and businesses in Northern Blair County to fight drug abuse and crime through proven law enforcement, drug treatment, and prevention techniques.

Pharmacy Roundtable:

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





JIM GREGORY Continued from A1

anxiety, depression, or stress to those struggling with drug use. It can sadly serve as a reminder of a family member that may have been lost or be disconnected from. When I asked Carlos about people recording videos in these areas, he expressed that it may often have more of a negative impact than people may intend. These videos sensationalize the situation on the street and do not show that each individual has their own story. Every person who uses drugs has a family who may be quite upset to see their loved one and the person being filmed may not have provided consent to be recorded.

wrapped up our We conversation discussing sports. For Carlos, his love of sports keeps him grounded, which I witnessed first-hand when I connected with him at a Flyers game while watching our hometown hero Sam Lafferty. It also serves as a great way to connect with the people he is working with

Continued on A16

ADDRESSING THE OPIOID CRISIS WE FACE HERE AT HOME

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

police chiefs, paramedics, firefighters, and county coroners, who all say the same



thing: the opioid crisis is only getting worse.

Sadly, opioid overdoses remain the leading cause of death for Americans between the ages of 18 and 45.

To address this issue that impacts so many American families, the House of Representatives has recently passed two critical pieces of legislation:

The H.R.467, the HALT

As I travel throughout Fentanyl Act, is a bipartisan area about the impacts that the save lives – and it's critical our district, I meet with piece of legislation that opioid epidemic has had on that both are brought up for a would permanently classify our community. fentanyl analogs as Schedule 1 narcotics. legislation would enforce strict for Patients and Communities penalties on the traffickers Reauthorization (SUPPORT) illicit drugs with these deadly will help continue to provide poisons.

House Energy and Commerce fentanyl analogs for Committee held a field hearing first responders, while also to discuss reauthorizing the ensuring that patients are SUPPORT Act. the hearing, members of treatment for substance use the committee heard from disorder. families, law enforcement,

and a physician working in our of legislation can help to

Recently, the Further, the passed H.R.4531, the Support who have continued to lace Act of 2023. This legislation resources for training and Earlier this year, the education on dealing with our During able to continue receiving

Ultimately, these pieces

vote in the Senate in the new House year. As your representative in Congress, I am committed to finding solutions that will work for our Commonwealth and country. We must continue to work together at the federal, state, and local levels to address this crisis that affects us all.

> Please contact my office at (814) 656-6081 or visit my website at johnjoyce.house. gov to share your ideas on how we can work together to fight against the fentanyl crisis that



Dial 211 • Text Your Zip to 898-211

COMMUNITY

ANNUAL REPORT, VOL. IX

Booker T. Washington Revitalization Corporation

By David Cunningham, Past President

Teamwork makes dream work, and in 2023, the Booker T. Washington were able to begin construction this year. You can find all of Revitalization Corp. lucky to have been part of a record time! great team doing great things! Since last year's article, our has been replaced with a suggest new activities or organization partnered with gorgeous new playground. volunteer to help out! a fantastic group of local The park features include a residents, Leadership Blair 2-5 year old play area, a 5-12 did you know that the BTWRC County's 2023 Class, the City year old play area, a sensory is an entirely volunteer-run Operation Our Town to make and a picnic pavilion. All of exceptional recreational spaces incredible progress on the the new equipment is tailored for residents of all ages and new playground in the Garden Heights neighborhood.

The lot at the corner of Tennyson and Lowell Avenues was home to a completely deteriorated, unusable basketball court. Located close to the Plank Road commercial district, the court was a gathering place for troublemakers and a general nuisance for the neighbors. In 2022, an ad-hoc group of nearby homeowners had had enough. They approached City leadership and asked for can be enjoyed by children of over \$1.5 million worth of a change. That's when the snowball started rolling. The group was put in touch with busy one for our continuing Park along 15th Street; the Booker T. Washington Revitalization Corp to aid with fundraising. Meanwhile, the City itself allocated a significant portion of their American gather with neighbors and Outdoor Facility at 19th Street Rescue Plan Act funds to build community. We had free and 13th Avenue. the purchase of playground food, live music, giveaways, equipment. Next, the BTWRC contests, bubbles, pinatas, Washington was selected by the Chamber's competitions, and lots and Corp. are proud to be one Leadership Blair class as their 2023 servant party of all was at our very is the Blair County community, project, leadership resulted in a huge fundraising Washington Outdoor Facility. Operation Our Town, push. Finally, Operation Our This year, we were honored wonderful volunteers, Town once again selected our to hold a ribbon-cutting on citizens like you, we intend to park project for their annual the newly refurbished Don keep winning!

the drug prevention grant program. Witherspoon Basketball Court. With all of that support, we We'll be doing it all again was of the new park in absolutely the dates and party locations at AltoonaBlockParties.com. Today, that useless court On the website, you can also

Speaking of volunteers, of Altoona, Central Blair Rec dome, drum circle, interactive organization? We are a 501c3 Commission, and of course, panels, a sway bench, swings, non-profit dedicated to creating



Pictured: New Playground in Garden Heights

all abilities.

series of community block Hamilton Park on East Cherry parties! joined us at four different Maple Avenue; and of course, parks around Altoona to the Booker T. Washington County lots of fun! which first project: The Booker T. and with teammates

for maximum inclusivity and abilities. Since our founding accessibility so that the park in 2008, we've completed park projects within the City The past year was also a of Altoona, including Prospect Over 800 people Avenue; Iuzzolino Park on

> We at the Booker T. Revitalization The largest player on the all-star team that like our and

Harrisburg Updates

By State Representative Lou Schmitt

Usually at this time of year when I pen my annual article, I take a look back at the past year's legislative efforts in the Pennsylvania General Assembly that affected law enforcement and other issues important to the mission of Operation Our Town.



Unfortunately, since majority control of the PA House shifted from Republican to Democratic at the beginning of 2023, the PA House has made history -- and not in a good way.

In 2023, the PA House was actually in legislative session fewer days than any year since 1964. That's fewer days than any other PA House has ever been in session under our current constitution, which was adopted in 1968.

To make matters worse,

even when the PA House was actually in session in 2023, it was historically unproductive. In fact, fewer bills passed through the Pennsylvania General Assembly in 2023 than anyone can remember, fewer than in any year in more than a half century.

Some seek to blame the inertness of the legislative branch in Pennsylvania on the fact that we have a divided legislature, with the two chambers of the General Assembly split along partisan lines: Democrats hold a majority in the PA House and Republicans hold a majority in the PA Senate. Throw a Democratic governor into the mix and it is difficult to accomplish anything, they say. That argument simply doesn't pass muster.

Pennsylvania is one of ten states that currently have government divided along partisan lines. The others: Wisconsin, Kansas, Vermont, North Carolina, Kentucky, Arizona, Louisiana, Nevada, and Virginia.

If divided government is the problem, one would expect that all of these states would exhibit

Continued on All



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PENNSYLVANIA SENATE TACKLES DRUG AND CRIME ISSUES

By Senator Judy Ward (R-30)

County and shows the impact for our first responders to year included increases in two get clean. This legislation that can be made when people save and treat those who have important line items. Drug would allow us to support from across the community overdosed. come together in pursuit of a common goal. In the 2023 grant cycle alone, a total of \$60,000 was distributed to numerous recipients in their work to further the mission. What makes this even more incredible is that those funds were donated to Operation Our Town by the local business community, caring organizations, and individual members of our neighborhoods that want to make a difference. With substance abuse and crime trends continuing to rise, the support of our communities and the collaborative efforts of Operation Our Town are needed now more than ever. Fentanyl has become one of the deadliest drugs in the history of our nation. In 2023, the federal Drug Enforcement Agency seized a record 86,000,000 Fentanyl pills, exceeding last year's total of 58,000,000 pills. They have also seized thousands of pounds of powdered Fentanyl. This is even more alarming, considering it only takes 2 milligrams to create a lethal dose. The unfortunate rise in Xylazine has made matters worse. This drug is often Fentanyl pills laced into and powders. Since it is not an opioid, Narcan and other emergency overdose

Operation Our Town is medications do not counter it. the 2023/2024 Fiscal Year counter to the goal of helping law

a tremendous asset to Blair This has made it much harder budget we passed earlier this people with substance abuse acute care hospital to include enforcement funding those with substance abuse conducts a urine drug screening disorders without creating an to assist in diagnosing the environment that is enabling and harmful to drug users and testing can play a huge part communities. Senate Bill 235 would create "Tyler's Law" and target drug dealers who peddle Fentanyl resulting in a fatal overdose. Under current law, drug dealers often receive lenient sentencing because of negotiated plea deals. Under Tyler's law, an individual who sells or engages in a monetary transaction to distribute Fentanyl resulting in a death would face a mandatory minimum 25-year sentence conviction. upon This mandatory minimum penalty would not apply to drug users who share drugs with friends or family members or those who seek medical help for individuals who overdose. A mandatory minimum would ensure that the people who are supplying these terrible drugs are taken off the streets when convicted. SB959 amends the Controlled Substance, Drug, Device, and Cosmetic Act to automatically reschedule controlled substances pursuant to their federal classification. This will Senate Bill 165 would ban help to prevent dangerous controlled substances from slipping through the cracks by creating continuity between

SB 683 requires a general testing for Fentanyl in a urine drug screening if the hospital patient's condition. This in combating the epidemic, and the knowledge gained as a result would be an invaluable By identifying those tool. who are using, providers can refer people to treatment and services or provide life-saving medications like naloxone. SB 941 addresses the need for staffing flexibility for addiction treatment programs. Addiction treatment facilities, like so many other healthcare fields, are experiencing crippling staffing shortages. The additional flexibility that this legislation would provide would enable these facilities and programs to operate more efficiently and effectively so that they can better care for the people who are desperately seeking their help. It has been a busy 2023, and the Senate has done significant work in advancing legislation to help law enforcement and those in the community fight back against the devastating effects of Fentanyl and Xylazine. However, the work is not finished. We will continue to work together with our colleagues in the General Assembly and our community partners to do all we can to keep our communities healthy and safe.



abuse problem Pennsylvania increased by \$7.3 million, and is fighting also has impacts on crime rates in our communities because of the close relationship between drug abuse and crime. Drug users often turn to crime to fund their addiction or commit crimes while under the influence. Some users also turn to drug trafficking to fund and supply their addiction. This viscous connection between drugs and crime has taken a tragic toll on families and towns across Pennsylvania.

Assembly has taken steps to try and push back against this

The drug and substance under the Attorney General the Department of Drug and Alcohol received an additional \$213,000, bringing their total amount to \$48.1 million.

> The state Senate has also passed several pieces of legislation that would give law enforcement more tools to combat the Fentanyl epidemic. While they are all currently in the state House, I am hopeful that they will receive full consideration by the state House soon.

This year, the General the implementation of any safe injection sites. While well intended by those who support serious problem. For example, them, these injection sites run state and federal criminal law.

See Something? Say Something! 693-3020

Substance Abuse Continued from A1

so there is likely a far greater into school curriculum to continue to work together in know within our schools." Altoona Area School District information. Superintendent Brad Hatch also shared his concern regarding continues to be a focus as we sessions for parents to increase districts have teams trained to

Early

prevalence than any of us ensure that students receive the best interest of the students support services can provide age appropriate and relevant we serve. Many local districts the needed support to students substance and organizations have offered struggling with substance intervention workshops or informational abuse/vaping issues. Our local

Counseling and

pressure or stress.

addressing By abuse/vaping issues through a multifaceted approach, schools can create a supportive and informed environment that promotes the health and well-being of all students. It is important to foster a culture that encourages communication, open understanding, and initiativetaking measures to prevent and address substance abuse and vaping.

Wagner, Dr. Don Bellwood Antis Middle School Principal concluded, "Preventing middleaged students from using vaping devices involves a combination of education, communication, and creating a supportive environment. BA has curriculum in health and guidance courses to address the dangers of vaping and drug use and to provide students with skills to avoid peer pressure. This school year, we are pleased there have been zero incidents related to vaping in school, but we are aware that does not indicate there is no problem. Teachers and staff continue to monitor and have conversations with students about the dangers of drugs and alcohol."

It is vital that we all continue to work together to educate students and families regarding the risks associated with vaping and drug and alcohol use. By addressing root causes, providing education and support services, schools can create an environment that discourages substance abuse and empowers students to make healthier choices for their lives and futures.



being laced with THC or other of substance abuse. time.

and to combat these issues:

Education and Locally, and alcohol use. districts substance abuse

the frequency and volume look to establish mechanisms awareness of vaping and vape contents to identify students at risk strategies Counseling services Here are a few key support for these students and outside agencies.

> Parental involvement about the risks of substance not find their way into our education prevention methods. We must and symptoms of addiction."

and for This substance abuse and vaping narcotics, and indicated that may involve training staff to with their children. I encourage collaborations are vital to our vaping is the biggest concern recognize signs of substance parents to take advantage efforts. We need to continue of illegal substances at this abuse or behavioral changes. of these opportunities when to collaborate with community and possible.

aspects to consider as we work identified as at risk are School Principal, Mr. Rick to address these issues on together to educate our students available through our schools Schreier, when asked about a broader scale. parental involvement stated, with these agencies, we can "I encourage parents to speak provide the resources for prevention programs are vital. is another essential element with their children on the support to affected students. Local districts are working of our continued success. dangers of vaping. Another Collaborating with our local to implement evidence-based Together, we need to promote helpful tactic would be to be school leaders, we can monitor substance abuse programs open communication between more vigilant with searching and discuss the effectiveness that educate students about parents and school staff. We and monitoring students for of prevention and intervention the risks associated with drug need to keep parents informed vape products so that they do programs and share successful are incorporating abuse and involve them in our schools, and to look for signs factors that may contribute to

provide provide intervention services addressing to students in need.

Finally, community agencies, healthcare providers, Bellwood Antis High and law enforcement agencies Working dealing strategies with substance abuse, such as peer



814-296-2348

Ask Reliance Bank.

NEWLY ELECTED BLAIR COUNTY CORONER

By Ray S. Benton, Blair County Coroner

mvself.

elected Blair County Coroner. My wife and I live in Claysburg and we have one adult daughter, a son-in-law, and three beautiful grandchildren. I have been a resident of Blair County most of my life and have been proud to call this county my home.

Before becoming the Blair County Coroner, I had served as the Chief Deputy Coroner under the nowretired Coroner Patricia Ross. My background includes being а Registered Nurse, police municipal officer, Pennsylvania

State Constable, Greenfield history, Township business owner, and the prior Blair County Emergency Management Coordinator.

As the Coroner, I look prevention.

Benton and I would like to responsibility is to determine related deaths. The primary thank Operation Our Town for the cause and manner of drugs detected post-mortem this opportunity to introduce death through interviewing were Fentanyl and Xylazine.

conducting Supervisor, investigations, and if needed, and begin a dialogue. You requesting an internal exam.

of the Coroner is death forward to helping families like all of the United States, and for all they do throughout obtain closure after the loss of Blair County has seen a Blair County.

Hello, my name is Ray their loved ones. My primary significant increase in drug-I am the newly witnesses, obtaining medical These drug-related deaths are

> of all ages, races, and economic status. I feel my role is to make the community aware of the number of drugrelated deaths and the drugs being used that lead to their deaths.

As this battle of drug use, abuse, and addiction continues, believe the I key to prevention İS reestablish the to family unit. I call this the "table talk". We need to become more involved in our children's lives and find out what they are doing. Take the time to sit down with your family over dinner,

field without electronic devices, may be surprised what you Another important role may find out if you just ask!

> Thanks again to Operation Unfortunately, Our Town for this opportunity

Faith-Based Roundtable How to Love Your Neighbor

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

the Faith-based Roundtable for in the number of homeless about twelve years now and in our community and have the one constant I see every been focused on how to best time we meet is a concern for support them. There is no easy others and the willingness to answer. With a shortage of share resources. Each meeting, affordable housing, an increase we see different faces. Some people join us for a season and health concerns, there is no then move on. We are richer and quick fix. What I know is that a more equipped to serve others group of people who are willing by having a variety of people to come together on the third

I have been involved with we have seen an increase in substance use and mental come and share their thoughts Thursday of each month at 2pm



and knowledge. We identify are making a difference, making resources for food, clothing, housing, and other opportunities for our neighbors who are on you have the ability to love your the streets. Compassion is a neighbor even if they do not valuable tool in our arsenal have a roof over their head? Join against the ravages of substance us and see how a few people can abuse and homelessness.

Over the past two years, come together!

connections, and prayerfully considering those in need. Do make a huge impact when they



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Keeping You Safe

Value Drug Company assists Operation Our Town in its mission. We also provide our pharmacists with tools and resources to help fight the prevalence of opioid addiction and misuse in their communities.





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BUSINESS **Central PA Landlord Association Report**

By Heather Crusinberry, President

Association is a non-profit group of independent property investors, owners, and We educate and managers. assist landlords with issues such as compliance, tenant relations, and regulations on a local, state, and federal level.

the image of today's landlord. We care about safe, affordable housing while maintaining suitable homes for our tenants. Our goal is to provide landlords with the knowledge, resources, and tools they need to succeed. We offer our landlords a library of documents to help landlords meet once a month to hear guest speakers such as attorneys, magistrates, fair housing representatives, and an array of other professionals in the area. The CPLA also has an active Pennsylvania Realty Owners Association (PROA) representative who provides updates on pending legislation that affects our landlords locally and statewide.

We believe

Therefore, we are proactive topics covered were: with local municipalities and • Housing Assistance interest groups to provide Programs our support in their efforts. • Common Fair Housing Our relationship with the Violations Operation Our Town Housing • City of Altoona Rental The CPLA is changing Roundtable has been beneficial Inspections in coordinating workshops, meetings, and reaching all segments of the community.

The CPLA, in accordance OOT Housing with Operation Our Town and developed Altoona Housing Authority, Resource Guide for Landlords hold the Landlord Workshop so that they have access to annually to continue our different organizations that can in their business venture. Our efforts to educate landlords on assist them or their tenants in residential and/or commercial hot topics in our profession. their real estate business. The This is also an opportunity Resource Guide is a valuable to answer any questions tool that connects landlords to or address concerns that resources related to landlords. landlords are having in our The guide is posted on the ever-changing field. 2023's CPLA website. The following Landlord Workshop was a huge topics are listed in our guide success! We had in attendance with information and contact nearly 80 people who had the numbers: opportunity to hear from our • Blair County Municipalities informative speakers, talk one • Notice of Fair Housing on one with 15 vendor tables, • Drug Activity-Rental better and ask their questions to a Properties

The Central PA Landlord's landlords help build and panel of professionals from • Section 8 Housing maintain better communities. across the county. Some of the • Student Housing

- in our efforts in working Eviction Process & Tax Sales Veterans

 - landlord Warning Signs of Illegal roundtable Activity in Rental Units

The CPLA and Roundtable а Quick-Tip

- Disability Resources
- Food Banks-Blair County
- Daily Meals-Blair County
- Blair County Adult Parole & Probation
- Central PA Landlord's Association
- PA 211-Information
- Resource
- Blair County Medication the Collection Box Locations

Check out our website CentralPaLandlords.com. at The CPLA residential listings website allows landlords to post property for sale or rent. The student housing website connects student housing landlords with students looking for off-campus housing.

Benefits of becoming a CPLA member include: • Online rental listings

- Online business directory
- Extensive online document librarv
- Membership to Johnstown Credit Bureau

- Credit checks
- Background checks
- Collection services
- Issues addressed with local government
- Educational workshops
- Membership to PROA
- Legislative updates
- Monthly meetings
- Address current issues
- Informative and educational speakers
- Tenant database

We would like to encourage all landlords to join our association to help continue our success in supporting and educating landlords. There are many benefits to joining the Landlord's Association, but our biggest asset is landlords helping landlords.

Monthly meetings occur the 3rd Tuesday of the month at 7:00 p.m.

Contact the CPLA: www.centralpalandlords.com

Blair County Agencies Who are Partnered with OOT

Allegheny Township Police - 814-695-3333 **Contact Person: Chief Michael Robison**

Altoona Police - 814-949-2489 **Contact Person: Interim Chief Derek Swope**

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 Peacock**

N. Woodbury Township Police - 814-793-4897 **Contact Person: Chief Lance Morris**

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 - 814-889-2121 **Contact Person: Chief Greg Servello** 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 Ray Benton**

PA Fish & Boat Commission - 717-486-7087 **Contact Person: Frank Mehalko**



Duncansville Police - 814-695-1930 **Contact Person: Chief Rodney Estep**

Freedom Township Police - 814-695-8545 **Contact Person: Chief Nathan Claycomb**

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

Hollidaysburg Borough Police -814-695-3711 **Contact Person: Chief Christopher Storm**

Hollidaysburg Area School District -814-695-4416 Contact Person: N/A

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

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

Pa State Police - 814-696-6100 **Contact Person: Sgt. Tom Snyder**

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

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

James E. Van Zandt VAMC Veterans Affairs Police -814-943-8164 **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**

OOT Pharmacy Roundtable

By Greg Drew, RPh – Chairman, Pharmacy Roundtable;

President, Value Drug Company

report for our roundtable, I can't help but pause and be thankful for Michael Fiore's the OOT Board of Directors to fulfill that mission to our community make a better place to live. I would like to point out that our Pharmacy Roundtable encompasses much more than pharmacy, including leaders from the addiction treatment, law enforcement, and medical communities, in addition to our pharmacist contributors. I very much appreciate each of them starting their day once a

As I write the annual month at 7:15 in the morning to work on our objectives. Our primary objective is to inform the pharmacist community initial vision and the work of of trends and happenings in the area with prescription continuing opioids, and focus reducing to on diversion and addiction through patient counseling and overdose treatments.

This past year, we did a lot regarding Naloxone (Narcan) awareness, especially with the drug now being available over the counter without a prescription. We hope that this may remove one of the barriers to consumer uptake

of this drug, which has been States, according to someone overdoses on an Naloxone, for prescription or over the counter, including awareness of the PA Surgeon General's standing order allowing pharmacists to prescribe Naloxone to facilitate insurance coverage.

We produced quarterly newsletters and distributed them to all pharmacies in Blair County, highlighting Naloxone and other issues important pharmacists to reducing diversion in addiction, including and highlighting treatment options in the area.

Opioid use disorder affects over 16 million people worldwide, with over 2.1 opioid

the proven to save lives when National Institutes of Health. This results in over 120,000 opioid product, legal or illegal. deaths worldwide annually We also provided information attributed to opioids. There regarding insurance coverage are currently plans on the part whether of many government entities, from the federal government to local towns and cities, to use funding from the global opioid legal settlement that will pour billions of dollars in settlement funds into education for, and support and treatment, of those affected by the opioid crisis. Particularly important is the medicationaided treatments to help addicts become less dependent be on opioids. Pharmacists will play a significant role addiction in the counseling of these regarding patients how to use their medications. Although efforts to curb

diversion, abuse, as seen in a 64% decrease in deaths from prescription opioid overdose, despite an overall rise in deaths from other forms of opioids, our work is far from finished. Pharmacists need to be diligent in our efforts to ensure prescription opioids are used exclusively for a legitimate medical purpose. The scourge of illicit drugs, as described elsewhere in this newsletter, is causing deaths at an alarming rate, and we must be sure prescription opioids continue to decline as a cause of death.

In 2024, we will working with other disciplines to increase the awareness of mental health disorders in drug abuse and addiction, as pharmacists in our area continue to be champions for our patients and the last stop for many in million of these in the United and addiction are working, the healthcare continuum.

LOCAL 2007–2023 OOT 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 Org. ArtsAltoona Bellwood-Antis School District BEN Blessed 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 Corp.

Calvary United Methodist Church Catalyst Church **Catholic Charities** 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) Morrisons Cove Memorial Park

Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church N.E.W.S. Worthy Network, Inc. Northern Blair Recreation Commission **Overflow Church** 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. at 2nd Ave Tyrone Area High School Tyrone Area School District Tyrone Elementary School Tyrone-Snyder Public Library Williamsburg Borough Williamsburg Public Library YES to Kids Young Life of Central Pennsylvania Young Readers Council of Blair County-CPCF

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 Altoona Housing Authority added Fairview Hills, Green Avenue Tower, and 11th Street Tower in the 1960's and 1970's. 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 39 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 OOT 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, fair housing regulations, illegal activity, and new ways to navigate the ever-changing housing industry, etc. The workshop agencies helps and landlords implement strategies to tackle those issues.

Operation Our Town held the annual Landlord

go back to the original format and removed the breakout sessions. We included vendor tables this year so that landlords can understand how local agencies can serve them more efficiently. This year's workshop focused on fair housing, legal rights for landlords, Section 8, criminal activity, and various agencies informed those in attendance of the services they provide. We concluded the workshop this year with a panel of local leaders in the housing community who were able to answer local housing questions.

The Housing Roundtable has been meeting since 2007 and was created to identify

serve an educational purpose. The Roundtable began to hold Landlord Education Workshops 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 help solve and address current issues that they are seeing in our city and county. During the year, agency members are welcome to discuss programs or services available to the community. This helps landlords and agencies partnered with the OOT Housing Roundtable to get the word out about services the available.

Our city continues to take 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 topics and 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.

Educational Workshop on 11/3/23. There were over 76 individuals in attendance. The Housing Roundtable decided to

solutions to drug activity and crime created by transient tenants. Throughout the years, the Roundtable progressed to

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LOCAL

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BeaCrim 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:

- Allegheny Township Police Department (814) 695-9563 3131 Colonial Dr. Duncansville, PA 16635 Monday - Friday, 8:00am - 4:00pm
- Altoona Police Department (814) 949-2489 1106 16th St. Altoona, PA 16601 24 hours per day / 7 days per week
- Blair County Courthouse (814) 693-3000 423 Allegheny Street Hollidaysburg, PA 16648 Monday - Friday, 8:00am - 4:00pm
- Blair Township Police Department (814) 696-3846 375 Cedarcrest Drive Duncansville, PA 16635 Monday – Friday, 8:00am – 4:00pm
- CVS (814) 944-9224 200 E. Plank Rd. Altoona, PA 16602 Available During Store Hours

- Freedom Township Police Department (814) 695-8545 131 Municipal Street East Freedom, PA 16637
- Giant Eagle Pharmacy Altoona (814) 946-4267 181 Sophira Ln. Altoona, PA 16602 Available During Store Hours

Monday - Friday, 8:00am - 4:00pm

- Greenfield Township Police Department (814) 239-5313 477 Ski Gap Road Claysburg, PA 16625 Monday - Friday, 8:00am - 4:00pm
- Hollidaysburg Police Department (814) 695-3711 401 Blair St. Hollidaysburg, PA 16648 Monday – Friday, 7:00am – 11:00pm
- Logan Township Police Department (814) 949-3364 100 Chief Logan Circle Altoona, PA 16602 Monday - Friday, 8:00am - 4:00pm

State Police-Troop G - Hollidaysburg (814) 696-6100 1510 N Juniata St. Hollidaysburg, PA 16648

DROP BOX

- 24 hours per day / 7 days per week Tyrone Borough Police Department (814) 684-1364
- 1100 Logan Avenue Tyrone, PA 16686 Monday - Friday, 8:00am - 5:00pm
- VA Medical Center (814) 943-8164 2907 Pleasant Valley Blvd Altoona, PA 16602 Monday - Friday, 8:00am - 4:30pm
- Walgreens Pharmacy (814) 944-3236 508 E. Plank Rd. Altoona, PA 16602 Available During Store Hours
- Williamsburg Police Department (814) 832-2022 305 E. 2nd St. Williamsburg, PA 16693 Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri, 9:00am - 3:00pm Wed, 8:00am - 4:00pm

Project Supported by:







IY WEBSTER'S GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR 2024

BLAR COUNTY COMMISSIONER



Lou Schmitt

Continued from A6

similar levels of legislative Not the case. inactivity. Through the end of the budget season in July of 2023, states

with divided government passed the following number of bills:

- Wisconsin 75 Kansas – 91 Vermont – 91 North Carolina – 137 Kentucky - 226 Arizona – 240 Louisiana – 466 Nevada - 536 Virginia - 812
- Pennsylvania? 15

To make matters even worse, a number of those 15 bills were related to the Fiscal Year 23/24 budget, not substantive bills relating to other issues. And oh by the way, as of the writing of this article in December, the Pennsylvania General Assembly had still failed to fully pass the state budget – which was due June 30.

With a Democratic majority in the PA House, there has been little legislation of note passed at all, let alone legislation that would advance the interests of law enforcement and other issues important to Operation Our Town. That was the case in 2023 and I expect that unfortunate trend to continue into 2024. Despite the paucity of legislative production, there was one piece of legislation that passed the PA House and that I was proud to sponsor. House Resolution 70 honors the memory of law enforcement officers who gave their lives in the line of duty in 2022 in the Commonwealth. That resolution was one of the few pieces of legislation to actually make it through the PA House in the first half of 2023, passing unanimously on April 24.

By Amy Webster, Blair County Commissioner

That are my goals and objectives for Blair County? My priorities are and continue to include increasing efficiency the services county in government provides, creating a more positive and hopeful environment for our citizens and the county employees, promoting and expanding economic opportunity, making county government more useful and relevant to our entire community, and expanding economic and recreational opportunities to draw in new business and people to grow our area. I hope to preserve and showcase the good we have here in Blair County. Those may be lofty goals, but these are the issues we must address in order to create a thriving and optimistic county.

Unfortunately, we are faced with problems that mar the image of our community. We must prioritize and tackle those problem areas if we expect to attract people to the area. We must focus on controlling and minimizing negative influences as we develop the positive attributes of our community. As an attorney, what stands out to me is the burgeoning problems our county faces from the immense strains on our law enforcement officers, our prison, and our courts, resulting from the addictions and mental health struggles that exist in our community.

Much of our county funds are allocated to providing services that are mandated by the state and federal governments. Crime is an issue everywhere

eliminate crime. However, we can make use of the knowledge, experience, and supports available within our community to be vigilant in

throughout America and the world. Much of our crime locally results from addictions and from mental health problems.

No one person, group, or board of commissioners can

observing those who exhibit problematic tendencies, and involving the necessary services to deflect and deter problematic behavior. This includes availing ourselves of the services and contributions

of our non-profit agencies and our faith community to assist and redirect people who need assistance.

Blair County does apply for and receive grant funds for specific projects, and has used much of those funds for infrastructure improvements, public safety upgrades, and broadband expansion. Our tax dollars are allocated to the general operations of the county, but as the demand increases to deal with crime and addictions, the expense of operating the county continues to increase exponentially, placing increasingly larger demands upon our taxpayers. We must resolve the addiction, mental health, and crime crisis to attract people and businesses to the area which will, in turn, bolster our economy and community, which should lead to lower demand for services to address addiction, mental health issues, and crime. We will receive opioid lawsuit settlement award funds to address drug addiction and mental health problems that plague our area and drain our resources. We also rely on the assistance of the Operation Our Town program, which provides funds to assist in the identification of offenders. We are grateful to all those who contribute financially and those who invest their time and expertise in conducting the program to make Blair County a better place to live!

OOT: ON **THE AIR**

By Silke Morrison, OOT Marketing Roundtable Member

Greetings all! My name is Silke Morrison and I've providing been fortunate enough to Roundtable on the Seven Mountains Media local radio stations for over six years.

Media Sunday Community Spotlight, in which I recorded an interview that was aired periodically on Sunday mornings throughout the year. Seven Mountains Media is

In 2024, we will be information on their "radio circuit" on each be the spokesperson for the of the local radio stations Operation Our Town Marketing via a live interview. We are certainly grateful to have this opportunity to get the message out to the community In past years, we were given regarding all the good things air time on the Seven Mountains Operation Our Town and its Morning supporters accomplish together! "It has been a pleasure

working with Silke Morrison and Operation Our Town.





LOCAL

proud to keep the community connected to everything Operation Our Town has done and continues to do," said Bill Kurtis, Public Service Director all Seven Mountains for Media Radio Stations: FROGGY 98.1 / WALY 100.1 / ROCKY 104.9 WOWY 103.9 / POP 104.5.

On the radio circuit, we plan to highlight some events in 2024, such as the Operation Our Town Prevention Grant Cycle, Operation Our Town Night at the Altoona Curve, 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 Seven Mountains Media, which has provided us with an excellent resource to get information out to the communities in our area!



community.

The District Attorney's Office works to dismantle the organizations profiting from drug dealing and resultant crimes. In 2023, the District Attorney's Office continued to prosecute dozens of defendants with a known history of involvement with controlled substances. The District Attorney's Office is committed to not only protecting the citizens of Blair County from illegal substances, but also from firearms that may come into the hands of individuals who would use them to commit crimes and are not permitted to legally possess them.

In 2023, the District Attorney's Office was able to resolve several cases that underscore the dangers of drug trafficking and the inherent violence that it brings to our community. Christopher Aikens, a lifelong criminal and drug trafficker, was arrested in 2021 for drug and firearms charges. While at Central Court awaiting his preliminary hearing, he assaulted Corrections Officer Ronda Russell; forcibly disarmed her; and held her hostage, ultimately causing her death. On the date his jury selection was scheduled to occur, Aikens entered pleas to all charges, including the second degree murder of CO Russell. Aikens was later sentenced to Life Without Parole plus 60 years additional incarceration.

In 2020, Onya Lewis solicited Mikal Jackson-Stevenson and Isiah Payne to assist her in trafficking cocaine into Altoona from

the Beale Avenue residence of Natalie Washington. Payne and Lewis sold the drugs together while Jackson-Stevenson supplied them with cocaine from Philadelphia. Tensions reached a peak in late May 2020 when Lewis and Payne ran up a debt to Jackson-Stevenson and ripped off Washington's friends, which culminated in Payne Lewis murdering and Jackson-Stevenson and Ms. Washington in her Altoona home. On the date their jury selections were scheduled to occur in November 2023, they entered guilty pleas. On December 14, 2023, Payne was later sentenced to 2 sentences of Life Without Parole, while Lewis was sentenced to not less than 30 years to not more than 60 years incarceration.

Now, more than ever, it is imperative that we return to our roots and sentence those who traffic these deadly drugs to significant terms of incarceration. This may not be the popular approach in our country's current social and cultural climate, but it is the timetested method that has been proven to reduce crimes of violence within our community. 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 justice for victims above accommodations for those who commit crimes.

Operation Our Town K - 12 Education Roundtable Report

By Edward G. DiSabato, Superintendent, Bellwood-Antis School District

The Operation Our Town program that are beneficial to seniors. The AASD ELECT with transportation to class, K-12 Education Roundtable, their families. Grant funding Program is so thankful to and refreshments for learners intense look at various health

This course will take an

from the seven Blair County School Districts, continue to meet regularly to discuss and confront the ongoing challenges facing our school communities. Significant efforts have been made with the support of OOT and local providers in delivering support and services to those in need. Our school leaders recognize the direct correlation of future drug use by students who are exposed to childhood trauma and whose mental wellness needs are not addressed at an early age. The support and cooperation of OOT has been significant and we are extremely grateful for their ongoing assistance. A few examples of the outstanding work and programs in our local schools:

AASD ELECT

The AASD ELECT Program, a program that serves pregnant been fortunate enough to their family members. funds to aid in aspects of their and in 2022, they celebrated 11 Sheetz gas cards to assist

consisting of superintendents has enabled them to offer their have Operation Our Town in to enjoy while studying. and resiliency topics that are items. This has aided their families since inflation has in healthy, safe spaces. occurred, while SNAP benefits were cut simultaneously. Over (HSE: Bright Futures) the last year, they were able to help 17 students and their and education. Another area that participate in educational Program. Fifty-eight GED they attended the educational to OOT funding! sessions and Because of Operation Our and continue to study! The 33 able to offer gift cards to 18 of 16 males and 17 females, partners that engage in their 22 under the age of 24, 8 selfseniors with a celebration lives for themselves. at Jethro's to celebrate their and parenting youth, have graduates' success, along with purchase: 150 GED Official

grant funding "HSE (High postsecondary

Eleven workshops. others passed subtest exams

In Practice Test Vouchers, receive Operation Our Town 2023, they celebrated 8 seniors 2022/2023 graduation tassels,

students monthly food pantry our community, and for their The generosity of OOT support in keeping our youth invests in the future of Blair County adults and families. AASD Adult Education As a result of this project, educated citizens are entering The Operation Our Town the workforce or pursuing education/ families with nutrition support School Equivalency): Bright training and contributing to Futures" impacted 33 dedicated the local economy and taxof need was having the ability Blair County adults enrolled base. Educated parents are to offer gift cards to partners in the AASD Adult Education raising children who value education and will be prepared events with their students. Subtest Exam Scholarships to graduate. Earning one's Even though these partners are were awarded to assist with the HSE leads to bright futures, not eligible for the program cost of GED exams. Seventeen breaking the cycle of poverty, for one reason or another, individuals graduated thanks crime, and drugs in Blair County.

Tyrone School recently started a new program Town funding, AASD was adult learners are comprised to educate and support students in dealing with relevant issues. This program is a collaborative student's children's lives. This reported as ex-offenders due effort of school counselors, PE K-12 Education Roundtable funding also ensures that they to drug-related crimes, and all teachers, social workers, and can provide their graduating are determined to create better others. There has been great feedback from students and OOT funds were used to teachers, and this is another example of the great work taking place within our local schools.

Health and Resiliency

currently impacting the lives of high school students. It will focus on areas that will help students develop a sense of understanding for their transition between high school and their early twenties. By exploring and discussing these topics, students will gain knowledge and understanding of the following topics:

- Drugs and Alcohol
- Healthy Relationships
- Work Ethic and Career Exploration
- Social Media
- Conflict Resolution
- District Anxiety/Depression/General Stressors
 - Belonging and Connecting
 - Strategies for Coping

The Operation Our Town continues to meet monthly in a collaborative effort to ensure the health and wellness of our children, increase the likelihood that they lead a drug-free life, and are productive members of our school communities.

OOT Mini-golf Tournament Results

By Nick Gordon, OOT Community Outreach Coordinator

Operation Our Town held its tournament had a Hawaiian a success. This year's

Annual Mini-Golf Tournament theme. All funds raised benefit on Monday September 18, local drug enforcement and kicked off at 4:00pm on 2023. The event was held at prevention programs in Blair Monday at Lakemont Park's Lakemont Park in partnership County thanks to our teams Keystone Falls 18-Hole Miniwith the Young Professionals and sponsors! Many thanks, Golf Course. A total of 18 of the Blair County Chamber once again, goes to the OOT mini-golf teams participated, of Commerce and sponsored Golf Committee, Lakemont marking a record high and by Levity Brewing Company. Park, and all the volunteers the first time the event has mini-golf who helped to make the event sold out. The winning teams

The Mini-Golf Tournament



were: 1st Place: Veeder Root, 2nd Place: UPMC Foundation, 3rd Place: Blair Companies Real Estate. The Hole in One

skill prize winner was Michael DePiro, representing the Redd Up Altoona Foundation. Continued on A16

TRANQ': THE NEW DRUG MAKING THE DEADLIEST DRUG CRISIS EVER, EVEN DEADLIER By Jordan Tracy, WTAJ News

Xylazine, referred to as 'TRANQ' on the street, is a veterinary drug meant to sedate large animals. Now it is found mixed into any drug, whether it be meth, cocaine, or the already deadly fentanyl.

'TRANQ' is a drug that Drug Enforcement Agency Agent Patrick Trainor said has devastated Philadelphia for the last five years. "Fentanyl is the deadliest street drug we have ever seen in our history. It is wreaking absolute havoc here and across the country," Trainor explained. "Xylazine is making the fentanyl issue even worse."

According to the National Institutes of Health, Pennsylvania saw the number of overdoses that involved xylazine rise from just 2% in 2015 to 26% by 2020. This deadly additive has moved its way west, popping up in coroner's offices across Central PA.

Fentanyl mixed with 'TRANQ' increases the risk of deadly overdose, because xylazine knocks people out. It slows the heart rate and breathing, making users appear to be the walking dead.

Another alarming side effect of xylazine is necrosis. Users often develop large open wounds at injection sites, which can lead to infections such as gangrene and even amputations.

"They should be scared, if you know that your loved one is using an opiate, there's a chance there's xylazine in it and it could kill them,"

said Justyn Patton, BHT Supervisor at DreamLife Recovery.

What makes this drug more dangerous is that there is no quick answer to an overdose. Naloxone on its own, won't work. Dr. Mario DeYulis is an attending physician in the emergency department with Conemaugh Health in Johnstown and has seen these overdoses firsthand. He detailed, "A lot of times these are mixed overdoses. They have part opiate, they have parts xylazine and other substances that they mix into these drugs. However, the Narcan is going to reverse the opiate element, but not the xylazine element."

But how is a drug meant for animals getting onto the streets? Agent Trainor says there isn't evidence of any wrongdoing from manufacturers. The drug is coming from the same place many illegal items are found: the dark web.

Agent Trainor said, "More often than not, the dark web is and the internet is still the single largest marketplace to obtain anything you want. Certainly, xylazine is no exception to that."

Trainor explained that dealers mix it into their product because it increases the potency and causes a longer high. That's something former Blair County Coroner Patty Ross said causes deadly consequences for users.

"They take it and they

die right there and they go straight down on their knees under their head, and they're like a frog-like position and they're dead," Ross described. "Almost everyone here that's on xylazine...that's how they were found. In that position, because it instantly kills them."

For those battling addiction, that threat of death is actually the drug's biggest endorsement.

Justyn Patton is a recovery specialist who works as a behavioral health technician supervisor at DreamLife Recovery. He explained why this is the case saying, "You got \$20 to spend on some drugs today. I want the most drugs I can get for \$20. And that's just how the brain works with the addicted community, which makes sense. You want the most, most for your money and that's what they're getting."

Agent Trainor agreed, "There is no greater endorsement for a drug trafficker than when his or her product is so strong that it can cause an overdose. As disturbing and as hard as that may be to understand, it's true."

Governor Josh Shapiro took action in April 2023, making xylazine a schedule three narcotic. This will allow them to track it better, prosecute anyone illegally selling it, and they hope to control the spread.

For those with loved ones battling addiction, Patton said the best answer is treatment. He claimed there is money out there, as well as resources, that can help.

Patton explained that as long as someone is still alive, there's a chance. He "Whether they died said, from fentanyl, car-fentanyl or xylazine, or whatever killed them, all hope is lost. Somebody lost a loved one. Somebody lost a parent. Somebody definitely lost a child. And there's nothing you can do in that situation anymore... If we can get them into treatment, we stand a chance, but we have to connect with these individuals."

2023 OOT Prevention Grant Recipients

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

The 2024 Grant Cycle will open on May 1, 2024 with a deadline for grant applications on June 7, 2024. Applicants have the option of using the "\$2,999 & Under" or "\$3,000 & Above" grant applications to apply for funding. To access the updated grant applications, please visit www.operationourtown.org and click on the Grants tab on the homepage.

A total of \$60,000 in grants was awarded by Operation Our Town during the 2023 Grant Cycle to the following 24 programs: AASD Adult Education Program: HSE: Key to a Bright Future

2212 Sixth Avenue, 2nd Floor, 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 pay for the cost of GED subtest exams necessary to earning their High School Equivalency Credential. AASD ELECT Program: ELECT (Education Leading to Employment & Career Training)

1201 8th Avenue, Altoona (814) 946-8551

Funding awarded will be used to provide pregnant and parenting teens nutritious meals at special events, provide students with necessities for their household, and ensure students have safe and suitable car seats/safety items for their children. Altoona Area Public Library: Focused on Foundations

1600 5th Avenue, Altoona (814) 946-0417

Funding awarded will be used for a new playgroup for children, birth to age 3, which teaches the parents/ guardians about their child's early development, identifying developmental delays, and how to obtain early intervention services.

Continued on A25



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HEALTHY BLAIR COUNTY COALITION: WORK GROUP HIGHLIGHTS

By Coleen Heim, Director

The Healthy Blair County Coalition (HBCC) is a partnership of individuals and organizations working to promote the social, economic, emotional, and physical well-being of residents. Our mission is to assess facets of a healthy Blair County by sharing resources, engaging local partnerships, and implementing strategies. There are 186 partners who have served on work groups, participated in activities, and/ or provided funding.

In 2024, we will be conducting our sixth community health needs assessment. Its purpose is to identify community assets, identify targeted needs, and develop an implementation plan to fill those needs. Surveys will be sent to 3,000 random households across the county, key leaders, service providers, and faith-based organizations. We offer the opportunity for any other organization to provide that anonymous survey to their families, clients, employees,

Our six work groups/ committees meet regularly and implement to plan educational programs and activities. In the last needs assessment, bullying/ cyberbullying was identified as more of a significant concern than in the past.



The Youth Connection Task Force launched a Let's Move Into Kindness Campaign. Bullying/harassment often leads to depression and suicide, especially among young people. Students in Blair County reported on the 2021 PAYS that 24.4% experienced bullying in the past 12 months. And 40.0% of students felt depressed or sad most days as compared to 30.1 % in 2011. Over 17% of students seriously considered suicide in the past year with 14.5% that made a plan. Blair County's suicide rate is at

13.2 per 100,000 and in 2022, there were 22 suicides in the county. Although our Youth Connection Task Force is taking the lead, this campaign is meant for everyone, as bullying isn't exclusive to just young people. If your organization would like to be



involved and/or is promoting kindness, please use the QR code to share your ideas. Lastly, if interested, we are selling Let's Move Into Kindness Blair County t-shirts.

The Let's Move Blair County Committee continues to promote eating healthier and being more active. The next Let's Move Blair County Day is planned for Saturday, June 15, 2024. Our Active Living Brochure is a where-to guide for locations across the county.

The Mental Health & Suicide Prevention Committee is identifying and addressing related needs to mental health. Free training is available on the Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS) which 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. Thirty-one trainings have been conducted with 875 people trained. The Protocol Columbia App, which was developed locally, was updated to coincide with the new 988 initiative.

The Food for Life Committee is addressing food insecurity and promoting healthy eating.

The Substance Use & Physical Health Coalition's goal is to enhance communication and coordination between drug/alcohol and healthcare Under providers. the leadership of BDAP, early intervention programs have resulted in more individuals being referred to and receiving treatment for substance abuse disorders.

The Alliance for Nicotine Free Communities supports programs to reduce nicotine use in collaboration with the Lung Disease Foundation of Central Pennsylvania. In 2023, they entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Blair Regional Y to assist with smoking cessation programs, vaping awareness events, and other grant activities.

We continue to promote the "collective impact" concept in Blair County with research confirming that a highly structured collaborative effort can achieve substantial impact on large scale social problems. The long-term sustainability of HBCC has been a priority for the Steering Committee. As a result of the merger between the United Way of Blair County and the United Way of Laurel Highlands, a full-time position of HBCC Director will become part of that new entity in 2024. For more information visit www. healthyblaircountycoalition. org and like our Facebook pages.

Operation Our Town Day at DelGrosso's Amusement Park

By Shawna Hoover, OOT Executive Coordinator

The seventh Operation Our Town Day at provided by PA State Police DelGrosso's Amusement Park Trooper Jacob Rhymestine. and Laguna Splash was held Officer Traci Winters and her on August 3, 2023. For each K9 Getro from Tyrone Borough coupon that was redeemed Police Department conducted that day, \$3.00 was donated to a drug sniffing demonstration

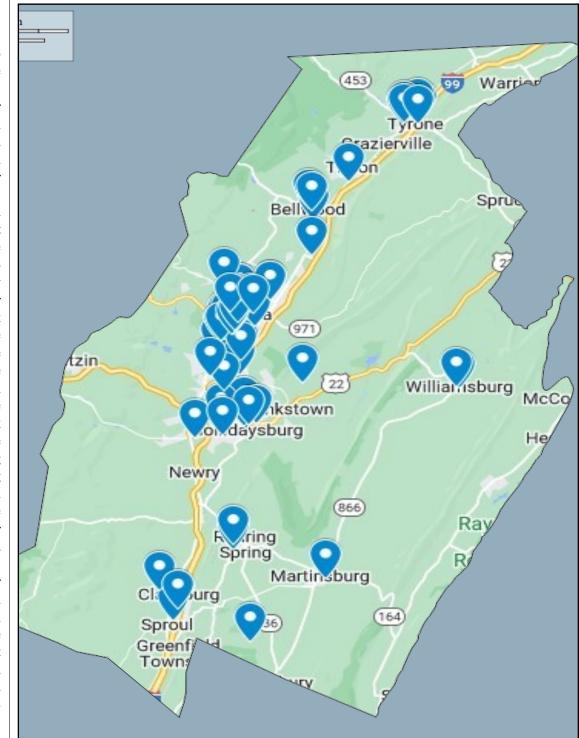


annual Child fingerprinting was also Operation Our Town. A total outside the main entrance for

park guests to watch.

The owners and management team at DelGrosso's Park value opportunity the 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 "If we presentations. have just one of our park guests make a drug-free





of \$1,983 to Operation Our Splash. Town!

drug-free pledge banner to look forward to another funsign to get a free OOT t-shirt. filled day!

decision after hearing what they learned during the day, then it was worth it," says Amy Mearkle

of 661 coupons were redeemed – Director of Marketing for that day, resulting in a donation DelGrosso's Park & Laguna

Mark your calendars for Operation Our Town had August 1, 2024 for the eighth a booth at the main entrance annual Operation Our Town to the park and distributed Day at DelGrosso's Park! We "Choose Life, Not Drugs" thank DelGrosso's Amusement wristbands, drug prevention Park for their continued information, and provided a partnership and support, and

Early Childhood Education Roundtable Report

By Rodney Green, OOT Early Childhood Roundtable Chair

In 2023, the Operation Our increasing tuition fees. They one another? Childhood Town Early Education Roundtable moved from a monthly meeting to a quarterly meeting format. that we had fewer issues to discuss! In many ways, the 2023 early learning challenges were a continuation of the many disruptions that became routine during the 2021-2022 pandemic years. For example: Local early learning providers continued to have great difficulty in finding and hiring qualified staff – both teachers & teacher assistants.

Related to staffing issues, our local providers saw operational costs increase during the rapid inflation of the past 18 months. State subsidies did not increase

(the providers) are literally place.

because closures.

Parents, faced with increased fees, were asking Grimm-Thomas, a consultant for announcements about the themselves, "How can I afford for the Pennsylvania Key. to work and also pay for Karen informed us about childcare?" The result is more a service to provide free numerous workers, mostly females – childcare needs assessments dropping out of the workforce. that help employers identify extremely painful for all local needs of their employees, businesses.

of quality workforce development. Who about this program, we are not increase wages without would be so closely related to presentation in 2024.

In response to which assists them in attracting

that carried over from 2022 to between a rock and a hard these issues/challenges, our 2023 was the creation of the Roundtable set out to learn Early Learning Investment From the parent's side more. We began in February Grant Program. Our original Fewer meetings did not mean of the table, fewer providers by attending a seminar given goal of rolling out the grants are now left to offer childcare by The Learning Lamp and in 2023 got moved back to of the provider the Bedford County Chamber 2024 in order that we could of Commerce. The keynote refine how to target the grant presentation was from Karen to its intended audience. Look rollout in early 2024.

Finally, had we discussions that led to another priority strategic action - the need and This is making labor shortages and address the childcare opportunity to conduct another Early Learning Symposium. Our first symposium in 2022 I could go on, but as and retaining qualified staff. helped us to connect childcare you can see, the provision This service is FREE and providers, affiliated agency childcare/early available to all businesses, representatives, employment learning is closely aligned with large and small. After hearing professionals, and local school districts and higher education. at the same rate and the knew that child development committed to bringing Karen However, we believe that Devorris Center for Business providers noted that they could and workforce development to Blair County to do a similar another symposium should Development. Join us. We focus on the relationship welcome your help!

Another ongoing goal/strategy between the early learning providers and the K-3 educational providers. This would include public schools, non-public schools, and private educational academies. Our goal is to strengthen the transition supports for children to move from pre-school to those first years in elementary school. We are scheduling the second symposium for March of 2024.

> Overall, the Operation Our Early Town Childhood Education Roundtable had a very active and productive Our door is always year. open and our meeting dates for 2024 are: March 7, June 6, September 5, and December 5. Meetings are at 10:00am in the Blair Chamber offices at the

LOCAL

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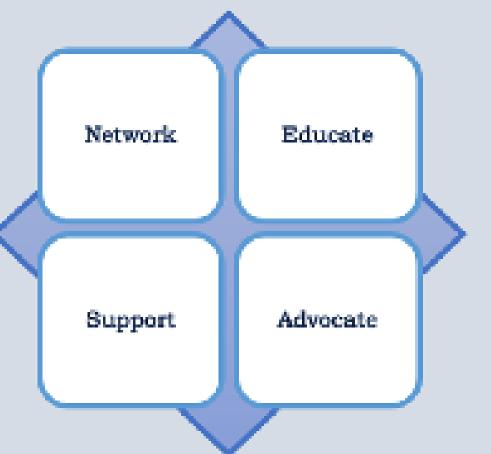
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PAPER PRODUCTS



LOCAL STUDENT WINS ESSAY CONTEST

By Shawna Hoover, OOT Executive Coordinator

Marissa Altoona Area Junior High lead to being disliked and cast you're feeling anxious about School, whose essay was out socially. Furthermore, something. chosen out of 60 entries as another form of peer pressure you can avoid peer pressure the winner of the Altoona is social media, television, is by spending your time Mirror and Operation Our and film. Celebrities and doing something you love. If Town Essay Contest! Marissa influencers are shown doing you find something you're received \$250 in gift cards to drugs, which young minds passionate about, you can 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.

See below to view her 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:

Living with addiction is something I would not wish upon my worst enemy. After witnessing my uncle's battle with addiction, I learned the devastating effects that peer pressure can have. His could misconstrue that drugs spend more energy into that compulsion to fit in with his lead to fame and fortune. co-workers eventually lost him his job, his wife, and reasons, kids can resist falling ten dollars. Finally, my uncle kids. From my own personal influence to peer pressure. learned from his mistakes and experience, I've learned that Foremost, students should has turned his life around. He peer pressure is merely the avoid peer pressure by is now an inspiration to me of

ongratulations to popular and liked too. And probably shouldn't be doing Rosas, consequently, students feel it at all. It's also good to talk an 8th grader at that if they refuse drugs will to a trusted adult whenever

The last way

JIM GREGORY Continued from A5

than we often recognize. Carlos also thanked me for visiting Kensington earlier this to share this story to show year, as it is important to an the hard work of people organization like Prevention like Carlos in places like Point to see legislators who Philadelphia. However, drug care, legislators who see and use transcends the boundaries understand what is happening of rural and urban, and if

as sports unites us far more wish the work he does wasn't necessary.

It is important, I feel,



Pictured from left to right: Barb Harpster (Media Consultant, Altoona Mirror), Joe Meadows (Partner, The Meadows Original Frozen Custard of Hollidaysburg), Marissa Rosas (Essay Contest Winner), Fred Imler Jr. (President, Imler's Poultry)

instead of thinking about how Despite all these many highs you can buy with These are also the you can avoid peer pressure. You can't control the people doing drugs will make them of your grandma then you let anyone tell you what to do.



help build hope. He shared places like Blair County could that he wished there were quickly see first-hand just how more legislators like me, but dire the situation is. I will I certainly wish we had more continue to fight for substance people like Carlos doing use prevention and recovery, good in the world, though I across the Commonwealth.

in the world around us and appropriate action is not taken,



reflection of the pressures associating themselves around someone who has carved his that we apply to ourselves. the right crowds. Hanging own path in life. To conclude Our desires to conform to the out with the right people with one of his favorite quotes opinions of others and gain that encourage you to better by Robert Frost, "Two roads popularity are the reasons so yourself will make you an diverged in a wood, and I-I many students, and adults, are overall better person. Now it took the one less traveled addicted to drugs. According is almost impossible to make by, and that has made all the to Teensavers, "55% of every single kid drug free, at difference." teenagers who tried drugs self- least in my generation. Even report doing so because of though you might not agree reasons kids give in to peer peer pressure." Peer pressure with other people's actions, it pressure with drugs and how occurs when students and is good to still be kind to them teens want to feel they belong and treat them like a human. to a group or gain self-esteem. Another way of avoiding peer around you, but you can When students see popular pressure is by trusting your gut control yourself. Remember, and well-liked classmates and having good judgment. you always have the right to doing drugs, they believe that If you wouldn't do it in front say no and that you shouldn't

Updates - News - Events

Duncansville **Comprehensive Treatment Center**

DUNCANSVILLE COMPREHENSIVE TREATMENT CENTER

provides medically supervised, medicated assisted treatment to individuals who are seeking to overcome an addiction to or dependence on opioids such as heroin, fentanyl, or pain pills.

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IF YOU WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION, please call us at 814-944-7000, ext. 450 and speak with one of our caring staff members.

DUNCANSVILLE COMPREHENSIVE TREATMENT CENTER is located at 3438 Route 764, Duncansville, Pennsylvania 16635

OOT Mini-golf Continued from A12

The winning team by prize!

Hole in One skill prize, is a fun team-building Gingrich Agency, and participants had the event for businesses and Rene-Paul Forier and opportunity a Hawaiian lei while and a great alternative of \$4,200 was raised golfing. If they opted for those who are not from mini-golf teams in and got a hole in one, regular golfers. OOT and sponsorships! then they were given a is grateful for the short period of time to support of the Young supporting spray other mini-golfers Professionals this year Our with a water gun. and Throughout the event, especially to Marcus of our annual several holes in ones Edwards, Laura Green, tournament events, as were secured, leading and Devin Saylor who they have become a to some fun for all! We now also serve on our major source of funding lucked out with some golf committee. great weather for the event as well.

Participants invited Town" Appreciation sponsors: Night

also received a special afterwards for great food Excursions by Scully, and networking. The PA Chimney Doctor, In addition to the mini-golf tournament Riley, Inc., Warren A. to wear employees of all ages, Theresa Boyer. A total going forward,

We would also like The to give special thanks from this tournament were to the other 2023 OOT goes towards funding to the "Our Mini-Golf Tournament drug enforcement and sponsored Eagles, Charlie & Blair County.

Imler's Poultry Gail Sheetz, Freedom

Please consider Operation Town through participating in any golf for the organization. money raised Bellwood prevention programs in

OUR TOWN TIMES | Page A17



In our busy lives, family comes first. But keeping communication open and healthy can feel like a challenge. That's where we come in!

Our free 11-week program empowers families in Blair County and beyond to build strong bonds and nurture open communication. Through engaging activities like arts, crafts, games, and music.

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Why is this important: A recent survey shows 48% of 10-17 year olds want to talk to their parents, but don't know how. We bridge that gap!.

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- Create a lifetime of open connection and understanding.

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Invest in your Family's Future

Open Communication Starts Now







It Pays to Pass: voluntary student drug testing program

Shawna Hoover, OOT Executive Coordinator

Roundtable created the It Pays to Pass Program 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, Hollidaysburg School District provides a packet to all Junior and Senior High students and families to sign up for & alcohol testing program. Students and parents must complete the consent packet. Upon turning in the consent

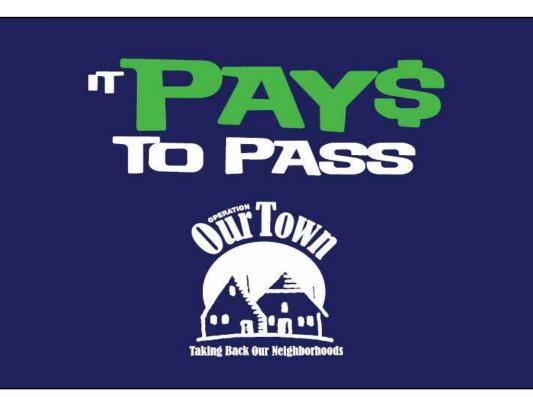
The Operation Our packet, the students are Town Marketing given a "Choose Life, Not Drugs" wristband provided by Operation Our Town. Student eight years ago to encourage names are put in a lottery system and each week students are randomly picked from the lottery to be tested. If a student passes the 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 the counseling or a rehab program. They are also referred to the school SAP (Student Assistance Program) team.

In the Junior High, 62 the district's voluntary drug students signed up to participate in the program in the 2023-2024 school year. The Junior High randomly tests one student each week. Christine Snyder,

the drug testing for the Junior The Senior High randomly in the Junior High population. Senior High School Nurse Positive lifestyle choices are who administers the drug very important for students testing for the Senior High purchase of the Sheetz gift

Hollidaysburg Junior High participate in the program in them say they will use the gift School Nurse who administers the 2023-2024 school year. card for gas." High said, "The program helps tests four students each week. support of the following local to promote healthy behavior Erin Fogle, Hollidaysburg

We are truly grateful for the businesses and organizations that have contributed monetary donations to help sponsor the



Sheetz gift card!"

117 students signed up to our students drive, so many of this valuable program!

of this age as they are often said, "The program has been cards for the 2023-2024 school trying to fit in with their peers. a positive healthy behavior year: The students are very excited promotion aspect for the school Police Association, P. Joseph to be chosen for testing and environment. The students are Lehman, Inc., and Stiffler are thrilled about receiving a enthusiastic about being called McGraw. for testing and are thrilled with huge thank you to Sheetz for In the Senior High, the Sheetz gift cards! Most of partnering with us to support

Allegheny Township We also offer a 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 a safe and healthy area is a goal of the Northern Blair Roundtable of Operation Our Town.

The Northern Blair Roundtable is a network of business, education, social services, 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 are held monthly at The Bull Pen restaurant in Tyrone. In January 2023, Pastor Sharon Erb, President and Gary McGovern, Secretary of Tyrone Area Cooperative Ministries (TACM) spoke to the Roundtable. TACM was the third identified

sector of the community (police department, school district, ministerium) that we held discussions with about working together and identifying any ways we can be of help. Going forward, we need to circle back and bring all three sectors together to brainstorm what are the highest needs and how we can help bridge any gaps.

Uplift Tyrone was created in partnership with Every Life Matters Support Services, in an effort to help people learn new skills and/ or sharpen their knowledge of various life improvement topics. Kickoff picnics were held for community members throughout the summer of 2022 to gather their input on classes/resources that they would like to learn more about. The first workshops were held on budgeting and home maintenance in September 2022, and were met with small attendance. In an effort to revitalize Uplift Tyrone and see more engagement, kickoff informational а breakfast was held in February 2023 to educate the community about Uplift Tyrone. At the time of writing, plans for Uplift Tyrone are on hold, though we look forward to continue being of service to the Northern Blair community going forward.

The Roundtable 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 included Bullying/ have Suicide Prevention; Landlord Tenant Regulations; Stop the Bleed/Active Shooter; and Understanding Addiction, Mental Health, and Cooccurring Disorders. While we did not offer a workshop in the spring of 2023 due to our focus on supporting Uplift Tyrone, we are beginning to formulate ideas to resume the

workshops in the spring of 2024.

Our group has been working on poverty, homelessness, transportation, and employment/educational needs. Josh Baker, CEO of AMTRAN, talked to the Roundtable in June about their Northern Blair pilot route. The pilot route began in June 2023 with service on Saturdays only, then added Tuesdays and Thursdays to the route in August. The route currently operates on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. However, dedicated pilot funding will last until June 2024, and AMTRAN will need to discuss local share funding to continue operations.

In December 2023, some members of the Roundtable spent their day learning more about AMTRAN by experiencing it firsthand. The group boarded at Penn Highlands Tyrone Hospital and rode to Walmart in Altoona where we got off and had lunch at Valley Dairy Restaurant and then retraced our trip back home. All agreed it was easy to ride, actually comfortable, and so reasonably priced. The most we waited for the bus was maybe 10 minutes, and the drivers were incredibly helpful. We came away excited that AMTRAN gave Tyrone this option and opened up the service. We rode with those going to work, going to school, going shopping, going to medical appointments etc., and we heard that often seniors from different facilities will ride just to get out and have lunch or for a change of scenery. Many thanks goes out to AMTRAN for helping Tyrone serve its people by providing our community this service!

For more information about the Northern Blair Roundtable, contact Shawna Hoover at shawna@operationourtown. org.



2023 OOT Golf Tournament Results

By Shawna Hoover, OOT Executive Coordinator

peration Town held 18 & 19, 2023. The two-day an update from the District outdoor patio. event included the following Attorney's Office. Attendees events on Monday: "Tee Off were invited to showcase was Against Drugs" Student Golf Tournament at Park Hills Golf Club, Mini-Golf Tournament at Lakemont Park, and the "Our Town" Appreciation Night sponsored by Imler's Poultry at Park Hills Golf Club. The 11th Annual Golf Tournament was held on Tuesday at Park Hills Golf Club.

All funds raised benefit local drug enforcement and prevention programs in Blair County thanks to our 158 sponsors and in-kind donors! 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 "Our Town" Appreciation Night was sponsored by Imler's Poultry on Monday evening in conjunction with the golf tournament. The dinner was provided by Imler's Poultry and beverages were provided by Furrer Beverage. their chipping skills in a fun September 19th and golfers the morning session and ten Dana Thompson and Thompson Pharmacy provided the beautiful theme décor for the event.

Our announced the winners of the evening ended with a 50/50 lunch, and snacks on the golf the golfer that got their putt in its Student Golf Tournament and drawing, and golfers, sponsors, course. City Beverage provided the hole or closest to the hole. 11th Annual Golf Mini-Golf Tournament. District and OOT grant recipients the beverages for golfers on the After golf, the evening ended Tournament on September Attorney Peter Weeks provided enjoyed networking on the golf course.

held on

golf The The main Golf Tournament included the "Golden Ticket" Tuesday, contest in which ten golfers in

with dinner on the outdoor patio tournament provided by Park Hills Golf Club.

> A total of 45 golf teams participated. The winning golf teams were: 1st Place: Richard Fiore Jr, Todd Homan, JP Stultz, 2nd Place: Brett Weibley. Danny Green, Dan Green, Randy Green, Wesley Rhone. 3rd Place: Matt Neumeyer, Darryl Owens, Harry Benjamin, John Ventura. The Closest to the Pin 2nd Shot winner on Hole 2 was Jim Emiliani with a measurement of 4 feet, 2 inches. David Willnecker got a Hole in One on Hole 14 (157 yards, par 3)! The winning teams and skill winners all received special golf gifts! Please consider supporting Operation Our Town through our 2024 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.



The OOT Board members thanked all of the sponsors and Chip a Duck game. A special had the opportunity to choose golfers in the afternoon session fundraiser was also held to cut from an 8:00am or 1:00pm had the opportunity to putt for Michael Fiore's ponytail on tee time. Sheetz was the main a \$5,000 cash prize donation Tuesday, with proceeds going food sponsor on Tuesday and from Park Hills Golf Club. The

to Operation Our Town. The provided a delicious breakfast, winner of each session was

Please contact Shawna Hoover at (814) 296-8730 or shawna@operationourtown.org for more details on how you can support this year's tournament!



Department Updates: Year in Review

Continued from A4

TYRONE BOROUGH

Police Department -Chief Jessica A. Walk

Tyrone Borough The Department, Police along with members of the Blair County Drug Task Force, conducted drug investigations and conducted surveillance on several homes that were believed to be involved in drug activity and several arrests were made with field contacts and traffic stops.

• Officers and members of the DTF also conducted several saturations throughout the year. • The police department had 60 drug related arrests for the year. • The police department handled 5,151 calls for service in 2023. • The police department made 270 criminal arrests.

The police department issued 103 traffic citations and conducted 367 traffic stops.

The K-9 was used for numerous K-9 sniffs throughout Blair County, Huntingdon County, and Centre County, leading to several arrests.

N. WOODBURY

Police Department – **Chief Lance Morris**

• The Department consists of 1 Full-Time Officer and 2 Part-Time Officers. Officers handled

1,077 calls for service in 2023 consisting of the following: 329 Traffic Citations, 18 Non-Traffic Citations, and 5 Criminal Arrests.

• The Department stays busy investigating various crimes such as Fraud, Sex Crimes, Child Line Investigations, Traffic Complaints, and Motor Vehicle Accidents.

• In 2023, the Department was allocated funding from Public Traffic Safety and now participates in the statewide Aggressive Driving program.

• The Department continues to participate in DUI Roving and DUI Checkpoints that focus on detecting and arresting impaired drivers.

Equipment upgrades for the Department include the following for 2023:

-Suppressors for duty rifles.

-A new Records Management Software called CNET. This software also allows the Department to transition to NIBRS from UCR.

-A new AED provided by the Nason Foundation.

North The Woodbury Township Police would like to thank its citizens, community, and OOT for their continued support in keeping North Woodbury Township and Blair County a beautiful place to live and raise a family.



Sheriff James E. Ott Names and Titles

of Command and **Supervisor Staff:**

Chief Deputy Richard "RJ" Peo, Lieutenant Kermit Alwine, Sergeant Justin Bennett; Corporals Timothy Mearkle, Bethany Cocola, David Dauria

The following reflect what full complement would be if fully staffed. Sadly, the majority of law enforcement nationwide face this same crisis. We continue to 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 Number of deputies: 26 Number of part-time deputies: 2 Number of K-9 deputies: 1 Number of office staff: 3

Ways Our Office Serves the Community:

We continue to be blessed with great partnerships throughout the community, which allows our office to participate in and 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 training assessment and for various businesses 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

By the numbers

Blair County Sheriff's Office

Our office is proud to provide the following statistics for 2023:

	Opened/New	Closed/Old
Civil and Criminal process received/served:	1,558	2,192
Personal property eviction-writs, Garnishment:	144	193
Real estate executions:	139	284
Processed-issued license to carry firearms:	3,818 NEW	2,492 RENEW
Warrants served/processed:	2,017	2,093
License to sell firearms:	11	
License to sell precious metals issued:	8	
Protection from Abuse (PFA) opened/processed:	572	1,506

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: 205,172 Number of items X-rayed: 99,305

Number of prohibited items declared: 161

Number of items intercepted by our deputies (drugs, weapons, etc.): 843

for more convenient and safer education efforts. handling. We have also added a prescription medication Services the drop off box inside the front **Office Provides:** entrance of the courthouse so that citizens and employees for way of disposing unwanted unused prescription or medications.

We constantly encourage residents, groups, to organizations 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.

SpecialAccomplishments:

The office continues to participate in many of the county-wide targeted impairment and drug activities, as well as traffic safety programs, as these all promote safer communities and roadways for the public. For the 6th consecutive year, our office has been recognized by AAA at the highest level (platinum) for our traffic safety efforts in keeping our roadways safe. This comes from involvement in traffic

the entrance of the courthouse enforcement and community

Sheriff's

Our office is responsible prisoner transports can have a safe and proper for Common Pleas Court, safety and security of the courthouse campus, process and service PFA's, including weapons retention related to or PFA's, real estate sales, and issue license to carry. We also conduct on view arrests for criminal violations, traffic enforcement efforts, serve warrants, and assist all other law enforcement agencies upon request. We now have a QR Code that will take you to the online application process using your smart device:



By Sheriff James E. Ott

Name of your Sheriff:

Operation Our Town Mini Golf Tournament



Save the Datel

Monday, September 16, 2024 @ 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 – "Our Town" Appreciation Night at Park Hills Golf Club

In Partnership With:



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.

Page A20 OUR TOWN TIMES

LOCAL

Blair (ounty Police	Dept. Drug	Collection	Boxes Data
IST QUARTER	2ND QUARTER	3RD QUARTER	4TH QUARTER	TOTAL
154 Ibs.	160.5 lbs.	n∕a **	n/a ≯∹	314.5 lbs
36 Ibs.	40 lbs .	33 Ibs.	35 Ibs.	144 lbs.
14.5 lbs.	17 Ibs.	32 lbs.	O Ibs.	63.5 lbs.
23 Ibs.	35 Ibs.	77 Ibs.	34 lbs.	169 lbs.
227.5 lbs.	252.5 lbs.	142 lbs.	69 lb s.	691 lbs.
	1ST QUARTER 154 Ibs. 36 Ibs. 14.5 Ibs. 23 Ibs.	1ST QUARTER 2ND QUARTER 154 Ibs. 160.5 Ibs. 36 Ibs. 40 Ibs. 14.5 Ibs. 17 Ibs. 23 Ibs. 35 Ibs.	IST QUARTER 2ND QUARTER 3RD QUARTER 154 Ibs. 160.5 Ibs. n/a** 36 Ibs. 40 Ibs. 33 Ibs. 14.5 Ibs. 17 Ibs. 32 Ibs. 23 Ibs. 35 Ibs. 77 Ibs.	154 lbs. 160.5 lbs. n/a** n/a** 36 lbs. 40 lbs. 33 lbs. 35 lbs. 14.5 lbs. 17 lbs. 32 lbs. 0 lbs. 23 lbs. 35 lbs. 77 lbs. 34 lbs.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS - STUDENT EXCERPTS By Nick Gordon, Operation Our Town Community Outreach Coordinator

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

"You have been hanging around a new group of kids at school. However, your mom is concerned about your erratic



Parents and schools can open up the lines of communication by starting conversations and education about drugs at a very young age. Additionally, the importance of self-respect and values need to be taught in the home environment to help strengthen a teen's coping skills when dealing with peer pressure."

Atticus, a 10th grader at Hollidaysburg Area High School, and second-place prize winner, leaves us with some profound thoughts about how being passionate about something can raise your standard of living and effectively fend off peer pressure:

"I feel as though one of the most effective pieces of armor one can have against peer pressure is passion. Whether it is art, music, sports, education, community service, or when you find something you're passionate about, you automatically become a part of something bigger than yourself. Devoting yourself to something provides structure and a higher standard of living."

ESSAY CONTEST RUNNER UP

By Shawna Hoover, OOT Executive Coordinator

Atticus Imler, a 10th grader sources, rather than from at Hollidaysburg Area within themselves. More Senior High School, was often than not, this will lead chosen as the runner-up to the loud, collective voice in the Altoona Mirror and of herd mentality drowning Operation Our Town Essay out the inner conscience Contest! Atticus received a of the person struggling \$100 Visa gift card provided with confidence. The lowby Imler's Poultry.

Co-sponsors of Essay Contest were the their Altoona Mirror, Imler's Poultry, and The Meadows Original Frozen Custard in I feel as though one of Hollidaysburg.

See below to view a portion of armor one can have of his winning essay on against peer pressure is why people give in to peer pressure from those who use music, sports, education, or drugs and some of the best community service, when ways to avoid giving in to you find something you're peer pressure:

There are three main automatically become a part reasons, all interconnected, of something bigger than why people fall victim to yourself. Devoting yourself peer pressure: They struggle to something provides with self-confidence, they structure and a higher are vulnerable to herd standard of living. You will mentality, or they lack find that dedicating time ambitious personal pursuits or passions.

confidence individual may the find themselves ignoring personal morals and values to obtain peer acceptance.

> the most effective pieces passion. Whether it is art, passionate about, you feeding your passion, honing your skills, and chasing your ambitions leaves a lot less time to be affected by the negative influence of your Personal passions peers. give life direction and purpose. When your life has direction and purpose, your self-confidence will grow leaps and bounds, making you a lot more likely to use drugs or alcohol. After all, feeding your passion requires a healthy mind and body.

thoughts on the matter, which is exactly why we want to share some of the highlights from our 2023 essay contest finalists.

Emma, a 6th grade student at Altoona Area Junior High School did a great job of explaining the importance of being intentional about who youth hang out with, in order to educate her peers, stating,

"If you surround yourself with bad people, they are most likely to pressure you into doing something bad, like drugs. An easy way to solve this is to surround yourself with people who have the same values as you, and people who actually care about themselves and you."

Megan, a 12th grade student at Central High School painted a picture of what might happen if youth hang out with the wrong crowd, facing peer pressure to use illegal drugs, suggesting,

behavior due to your sudden change in friend groups. You inform her that they are the cool kids of the school and not to worry. Shortly after making these new friendships, you agree to hang out. The hangout is going great, or that was your perception. All of a sudden, your new friends remove something from their pockets. You feel your stomach plummet to your feet, and your face begins to pale, knowing they are doing drugs."

Carter, an 8th grade student at Altoona Area Junior High School took the approach of giving words of wisdom for his peers. Here's what he had to say about the role parents and schools play when it comes to illegal drugs and peer pressure:

"Although difficult, there are ways in which giving into peer pressure can be avoided. Excerpt from essay submitted by HAHS 10th grader, and second place winner, Atticus

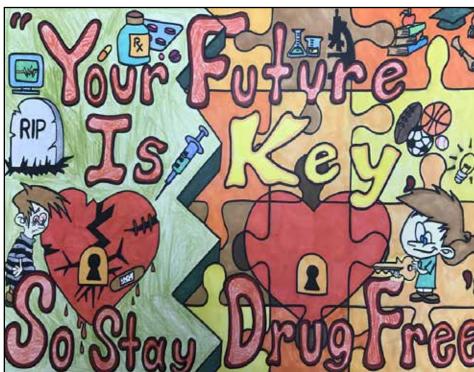
On behalf of the Marketing Roundtable and Operation Our Town, we want to extend our gratitude to those who participated in our essay contest, and we look forward to another great year in 2024!

When a teen struggles with self-confidence, they are often easily manipulated by others, making them easy prey for the vulturous nature of peer pressure. The fear of ostracism often overpowers common sense and blurs the line between right and wrong.

Individuality or going against say no when pressured to the crowd can be downright terrifying for someone with low self-confidence. The low-confidence individual is likely to succumb to herd mentality due to the deep yearning to belong is fortified and our selfto a group. confidence individual will us more and more capable of find themselves validation from

Each time we choose ourselves, our resolve The low- confidence grows, leaving seeking standing strong against peer outside pressure.





Tee Off Against Drugs - Student Golf Tournament Results

By Shawna Hoover, OOT Executive Coordinator

In addition to the main golf tournament, Operation Our Town held its Annual Tee Off Against Drugs Student Golf Tournament on September 18, 2023 at Park Hills Golf Club for high school golf teams from Blair and surrounding counties.

In an effort to include as many schools as possible and ensure a

Club provided burgers & fries for the morning and afternoon student golfers and coaches, Travis Seymore of Alto Markets cooked wings provided by Imler's Poultry, and students enjoyed ice cream provided by Ritchey's Dairy. Sheetz provided a To-Go dinner of various deli sandwiches and chips for the afternoon

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 and girls teams were both from State College Area High School!

The winner of the Closest to the Pin on Hole 3 was Will Sankey from Altoona



quicker pace of play for the students, the event included a morning and afternoon shotgun start. A total of 36 teams (144 students) from 23 school districts participated! We would like to give special thanks to the OOT 2023 Student Golf Tournament sponsors: Sheetz, Seltzer Financial Strategies, SRM Holdings, and The EADS Group.

Sheetz provided snacks, water, and sports drinks for the students and coaches to enjoy throughout the day. To start off the event, Sheetz provided To-Go breakfast sandwiches for the morning student golfers and coaches. For lunch, Park Hills Golf student golfers and coaches to take on their way home.

Officer Rivera & K-9 Pongo from Altoona Police Department conducted a drug sniffing demo for students to watch during lunch, which provided the students with an example of how Operation Our Town funds benefit the community, since Operation Our Town helped to provide the start-up costs for two new Altoona Police Department K-9's.

The Student Golf Tournament included an exciting prize for the winning golf teams. A \$2,500 grant was awarded to the winning boys and girls teams

12 TH ANNUAL

Area School District with a measurement of 2 feet. The winner of the Closest to the Pin on Hole 11 was Trenton Ripple from Bedford Area School District with a measurement of 4 feet, 8 inches.

We look forward to continuing the Tee Off Against Drugs Student Golf Tournament to educate students on the mission of Operation Our Town. If your business would like to sponsor the Student Golf Tournament, please contact Shawna Hoover at (814) 296-8730 shawna@ or operationourtown.org for more details on how you can support this year's tournament!

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Save The Date! September 16 & 17, 2024



PARK HILLS GOLF CLUB, ALTOONA

Schedule of Activities:

Monday, September 16th:

8:00am – Tee Off Against Drugs Student Golf Tournament 1:00pm – Tee Off Against Drugs Student Golf Tournament 4:00pm – Mini-Golf Tournament at Lakemont Park 5:00pm – "Our Town" Appreciation Night sponsored by Imler's Poultry

Tuesday, September 17th:

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

\$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

Sponsorship Levels:

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

Reception sponsor - \$500

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

"Tee Off Against Drugs" Student Golf Tournament sponsor - \$250

 Signage displayed during the event
 School District of the winning boys and girls team will receive a \$2,500 grant 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.

> Greens sponsor - \$250 - Signage at the sponsored green - Company name listed in Event Guide

> > Tee sponsor - \$150 - Signage at the sponsored tee

LOCAL

R FROM THE PRESID By Michael A. Fiore, Co-Founder/President, Operation Our Town

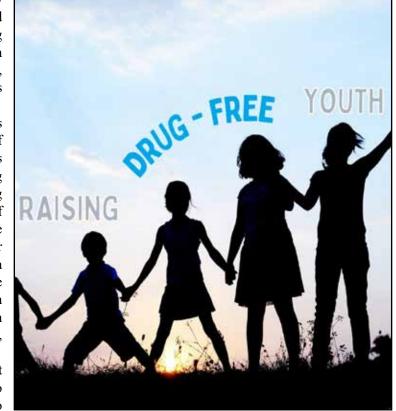
peration Our Town patrols. is in its 17th year of operation and will be starting into our 18th year in November of 2024. We're fortunate and appreciative of the continued support from our local businesses and community at large that have continued to provide funding for drug enforcement and prevention programs in Blair County, despite the economic effects from the pandemic.

Many of our ongoing issues have worsened as a result of the pandemic. Lethal drugs such as fentanyl are coming across our border at alarming rates. In 2023, the majority of drug buys in Blair County were either for heroin/fentanyl or methamphetamine. 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.

The Law Enforcement Roundtable is continuing to work on different ways to attack the supply of drugs, including heroin/fentanyl and through methamphetamine, special ongoing operations which include conducting search warrants, operations, and

The and addiction in the community early the pharmacist community of Learning Investment Grant

Pharmacy in our community. Roundtable is continuing to Early Childhood Education communicating and promoting focus on reducing diversion Roundtable is working to support OOT activities and projects to childhood through awareness of over-the- and providers with financial drug problem and how they can counter Narcan and informing assistance through the Early become involved, such as the



area with prescription opioids.

roundtables all work together identified and addressed through is working to address the needs buy-bust in different ways to reduce mental health counselors, social in the Northern Blair community helped to make Blair County a saturation the demand for those drugs workers, and SAP teams. The by meeting with different great place to live!

Roundtable is ensuring that annual Landlord Workshop. The remainder of our student wellness needs are being The Northern Blair Roundtable

The Marketing Roundtable programs educate the community on the new Amtran bus wrap with the message, "See Something? Say Something!"

The Community Revitalization Roundtable is working to decrease blight in Altoona through utilizing various tools and resources, such as the City's fullyoperational Land Bank. The Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB) is looking to focus on key initiatives of building more collaboration among CJAB members, improving community safety, and enhancing funding for future CJAB efforts. The Faithbased Roundtable is working to identify the most urgent needs in the community and connect those in need with food resources, shelter, clothing, and support services. The Housing Roundtable is working to educate landlords and identify trends and happenings in the Program. The K-12 Education housing solutions through their

is sectors of the community to see how we can work together and assist with any needs.

Through our prevention grants, we are supporting many community and neighborhoodbased programs that are doing important community outreach to the youth and families that need it the most. Our prevention grant recipients are the most important asset we have, because they realize that the key to gaining control of substance abuse begins with working with youth and their families, which is the core of where positive change can begin.

Our grants also continue to support law enforcement by giving them the resources and equipment that they need to stay on top of the drug problem, and to do their jobs safely so that they can come home to their families every night. We appreciate all Blair County law enforcement that risk their lives every day and continue to show our gratitude.

As a community, we will continue to face new challenges in the future, but we can make a difference if we work together. Thank you for your ongoing support. Your efforts have



The Deadly Duo Continued from A1

heroin, and increased drug dealers' profits. The need for risky large shipments from East Asia was replaced by labs in the US making the synthetic fentanyl, decreasing the risk as well. Xylazine, a horse sedative, is easily obtained and now is mixed with heroin and fentanyl to make the cost of production of the street drugs that are much cheaper, increasing profits significantly. Xylazine is the deadliest of the three because it doesn't respond to Narcan (brand name of the generic drug naloxone) and creates a zombie like state for people who inject it. A quick look into how local law enforcement sees fentanyl and xylazine in our community with Jarod **Quist, Supervisory Narcotics** Agent, PA Office of Attorney General: Blair County, like most communities in the Commonwealth, has been inundated with fentanyl. To further cause harm to our communities, drug suppliers have made the choice to cut fentanyl with xylazine. For the past couple of years, Blair County and the surrounding counties have started to see fentanyl mixed with xylazine, which is also known as "tranq." Xylazine in vials have also been seized prior to dealers having a chance to mix it with fentanyl. The rate of seizure for fentanyl over the past few years has remained steady. The Blair County Drug Task Force has been successful in identifying suppliers from out of the area and conducting investigations which lead to search warrants, significant seizures, and arrests of those involved.

with Judy Rosser, Executive Director, Blair Drug & **Alcohol Partnerships:**

A comprehensive public health approach is needed to address one of the most fatal combinations of drugs, fentanyl and xylazine, that has resulted in increased

in the drug supplies that they have seized. Blair County has seen xylazine showing up in the overdose death toxicology reports since 2021. Overdose rates have increased to over 70 deaths in Blair County since 2022 and now 2023. Approximately fifty percent like the plague and forget that this is a disease, not a character flaw. A lot of people use drugs, few become addicted, and the ones that do are genetically predisposed to this disease."

As part of a public health approach, Pennsylvania has made available numerous

that treat opioid use disorders. Locally, Blair County partners have received grant funding to increase trauma training of front line counseling staff to improve the therapeutic interventions provided at our treatment providers. In addition, the increase of case management services and certified recovery specialists (persons with lived experience) help to support individuals in early recovery to build their pathway of recovery. Healthcare professionals and other social service professionals receive training on substance use disorder and brief interventions and referral to treatment. Dr. Gates agrees that better educating healthcare professionals and increasing access to primary care, as well as more engagement and understanding for primary care, are essential to slow the progression of those suffering and prevent further deaths. These are just a few of the areas that have improved in the last decade. We still have a lot of work ahead of us to address the stigma. Continued education is needed to help expand the knowledge and understanding around this disease. We hope you, as a community, will consider your own understanding to this complex issue and challenge yourself to learn more about this issue. We hope you are willing to guide someone you may know to get help. Help is available 24/7 at Blair Drug and Alcohol Partnerships just by calling 814-381-0921. You can receive free naloxone at Blair Drug and Alcohol Partnerships Monday through Friday, 8am-4pm or by mail at https://nextdistro.org/ pennsylvania.

Addressing the effects of fentanyl and xylazine entering our community

deaths. Fentanyl is a potent synthetic opioid drug that has replaced heroin in the drug

of admissions to our treatment system are for opiate use disorders.

harm reduction approaches to intervene on overdoses. PA has expanded access to naloxone,



supply. This drug is being mixed with numerous other illicit drugs in our community and packaged in different forms. When ingested, fentanyl attaches to the opioid receptor sites in the body and can result in respiratory arrest and/or death. Xylazine is a very strong sedative used in veterinary medicine practice. It is not approved for human use. Xylazine can lower blood pressure, heart rate, and breathing, resulting in an increased sedative state of the person ingesting this substance. The combinations of these drugs have resulted in higher risk of overdose.

Currently, the DEA reports an increase in xylazine

A public health approach addressing this ongoing crisis requires the ability to integrate approaches, including understanding the disease of addiction, which addresses stigma through brain science, best practices of pharmacology in treating the substance use disorder, harm reduction approaches, and counseling strategies that also specialize in trauma response and prevention. Integration of these approaches across different sectors of our community is critical.

Dr. Zane Gates shared a similar sentiment regarding substance use disorder stigma, stating, "Most primary care offices avoid these patients

a medication that intervenes on an opioid overdose. It unfortunately does not reverse the effects of xylazine. The FDA approved naloxone in May of 2023 to be an overthe-counter medication, which has enabled increased access to this life-saving tool to the general community. PA legislation was approved to allow for the possession of drug testing strips (fentanyl/ xylazine) and the availability of these supplies. The test strips provide the individual the ability to test their drug supplies for the presence of these drugs.

Statewide, we have seen increased access to medication assisted treatment providers

Help save a life!

ANNUAL REPORT, VOL. IX

LOCAL

OUR TOWN TIMES | Page A23





COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION UTILIZING NEW TOOLS TO FIGHT BLIGHT IN ALTOONA By Mayor Matt Pacifico, City of Altoona

Rebecca Brown, Director of Codes and Inspections

The City of Altoona implemented several unique approaches in 2023 as we continue our fight against blight, all while recognizing the challenges and obstacles faced by many property owners in the City.

We know that blighted, abandoned, and vacant properties constitute a danger to the public and can also lead to an increase in crime. The feedback received from our Comprehensive Plan Survey confirmed that people who reside in, work in, and visit Altoona also have an interest in the revitalization and improvement of our neighborhoods. Not only does blight create a negative effect and appearance in our neighborhoods, it also impacts both adjacent property owners and the community as a whole, resulting in loss of real estate tax revenue. Significant resources are dedicated to conduct enforcement actions against the owners of these properties.

The City of Altoona has utilized a significant portion of its HUD Community Development Block Grant and HOME Program funding

to help prevent and eliminate blight. The City's housing loan program and the HOME rental loan program are both in place to benefit low-tomoderate income residents with rehabilitation. The City utilizes CDBG funding to demolish homes that are unable to be saved after all avenues of compliance have been exhausted, and the demolition program is a valuable and necessary tool in the City's efforts in blight elimination.

One of the most significant efforts is the City's fullyoperational Land Bank. The Land Bank, through the Redevelopment Altoona Authority, is a tool for local governments remove to problematic properties from vacancy, abandonment, and tax foreclosure. In 2023, our Land Bank was successful in obtaining and acquiring several dilapidated properties that were originally slated for demolition; these properties will be rehabilitated and returned to productive use. The Land Bank was also instrumental in obtaining several vacant lots for future redevelopment purposes.



City staff will continue to identify structures that have rehabilitation potential prior to the end result of demolition. We are eager to see the growth of the Land Bank with new initiatives for blight remediation and community revitalization.

Although the City was unable to hold our annual Community Cleanup Day in 2023 due to staffing issues, several local churches and organizations held their own cleanups in various City neighborhoods. We encourage, support, and thank our volunteer groups that have provided our community with their time and efforts! The City will be conducting a Community Cleanup Day in 2024; stay tuned for more information on that initiative.

In an effort to encourage homeowners to take pride in their property and neighborhoods, in 2023, we implemented a "Welcome Letter" that is sent to new property owners each month, providing them with helpful information in the hope of increasing a sense of community and pride throughout our neighborhoods.

Altoona is a resilient City, full of strong residents who have shown perseverance. We all should be proud of our community, and we remain committed to working with you to continue to move our city forward!

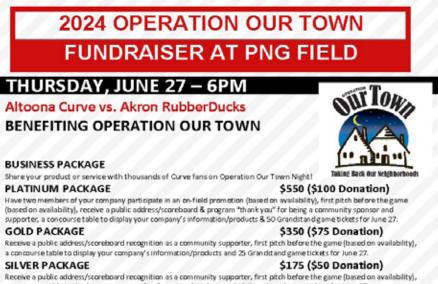
OOT Night at the Altoona Curve

By Shawna Hoover, OOT Executive Coordinator

annual The third Operation Our Town Night at the Altoona Curve was held on June 22, 2023. For those who purchased their June 22nd Curve game tickets through the Operation Our Town Night order form, a portion of those ticket sales was donated to Operation Our Town, resulting in a donation of \$211 to OOT! Operation Our Town had a booth on the concourse and distributed drug prevention information, "Choose Life, Drugs" wristbands, Not provided a drug-free pledge banner to sign to get a free OOT t-shirt, and Curve staff distributed Push Out the Pusher yard signs at the exits of the ballpark. K-9 Blue & K-9 Pongo, the two new Altoona Police Department K-9's that Operation Our Town helped to provide the start-up costs for,

and their handlers, made an appearance on the field before the postgame fireworks.

Altoona "The Curve were excited to partner with OOT again in 2023. The Curve fully support the mission of promoting healthy neighborhoods and protecting the citizens of Blair County from illegal drug use and the crime that results from it. We are looking forward to partnering up again in 2024 in order to raise more money for a great cause," said Nate Bowen, General Manager of the Altoona Curve. Mark your calendars for June 27, 2024 for the fourth annual OOT Night at the Altoona Curve! We thank the Altoona Curve for their continued partnership and support, and look forward to another great event!



Receive a public address/scoreboard recognition as a community supporter, first pitch before the game (based on availability), a concourse table to display your company's information/products and 15 Grandstand game tickets for June 27. BRONZE PACKAGE \$85 (\$25 Donation)

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(814) 283-3118 or NBowen@AltoonaCurve.com



OOT IN THE COMMUNITY 2023 GRANT RECIPIENTS



Pictured: Sheetz Fellows volunteers & McGruff at 2023 RV Expo



Pictured: 2023 Red Ribbon Week Proclamation with Hollidaysburg Senior High SADD Club



Pictured: "Our Town" Appreciation Night sponsored by Imler's Poultry





LOCAL

Pictured: 2023 OOT Community Partnership Award - Central PA Landlord Association



Pictured: Blair County Chamber 2023 Non-Profit of the Year Award



Pictured: First National Bank check presentation



Pictured: Landlord Workshop agency participants



Continued from A13

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

1404 6th Avenue, Altoona (814) 243-0235

Funding awarded will be used for supplies and program materials for students that have been identified to receive financial assistance to pursue a post-secondary education, given that they meet program guidelines and participate fully in the program.

ArtsAltoona: After School Arts **Program (ASAP)**

2212 Sixth Avenue, Altoona (814) 201-7004

Funding awarded will be

319 Sycamore Street, Altoona (814) 946-4068

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, as well as topic related crafts, games, and activities.

Evolution Expressions: Arts for Healing Program

1331 12th Avenue, Suite 300, Altoona (814) 201-2751

Funding awarded will be used to provide quality, strengthbased, preventative, therapeutic programming for youth with the purchase of art supplies for trauma-focused arts related



Pictured: 2023 Operation Our Town Grant Recipients

used to offer free, consistent arts programming for youth in Elementary and Middle school throughout each school year. Big Brothers Big Sisters of Blair County: S.M.A.R.T. (Students & Mentors Achieving **Results Together) 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 School/Site-based Mentoring Programs throughout Blair County; thus providing children with meaningful relationships to help reduce the likelihood of substance abuse, criminal mischief, school absenteeism, and violence.

Blair YMCA: Family Y-Nite 1111 Hewit Street, Hollidaysburg (814) 695-3204

Funding awarded will be

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, incentives, healthy snacks, field trips, 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: The 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.

Pictured: Duncansville Community Days

Pictured:1st Summit Bank check presentation



new users - youth and young adults who had never previously smoked.

As of December 3, 2019, the CDC began reporting EVALI (E-Cigarette Vaping Associated Lung Illnesses) hospitalizations and deaths across the United States. These injuries are much more serious than shortness of breath and can result in placement on a ventilator, types of pneumonia, wet lung, and can be serious enough to require lung transplantation. As of February 18, 2020, a total of 2,807 hospitalizations were reported, as well as 68 deaths. 82% of hospitalized patients reported using THCcontaining products. Illicit drugs can also be added and then vaporized, such as LSD, GHB, and ketamine. Even scarier was many reported acquiring products from sources other than commercial sources, creating a riskier situation relative to what the products contain. The reporting by the CDC was halted by the COVID pandemic, which created a gap in the availability

of information relative to

EVALI.

monitors The FDA the national usage rates for all tobacco products, including an annual youth survey, which has shown a drastic increase in youth use of e-cigarette products. The FDA has called this an "epidemic" of youth use and has prioritized prevention efforts.

There are NO safe tobacco products. Some of the safety problems include:

• Overheating, fires, and explosions of the devices • Lung injuries hospitalizations requiring

and even lung transplants • Seizures and other neurological symptoms

Some myths relative to e-cigarettes and vaping devices are:

They are safer than smoking cigarettes or using smokeless tobacco.

-Youth use of tobacco products, in any form, including unsafe, is e-cigarettes.

• E-Cigarettes/vapes contain the same amount of nicotine as a pack of cigarettes.

- Some of these devices

contain up to five times as much nicotine as a full pack of traditional cigarettes.

• E-Cigarettes are used more often by adults, not youth.

- In 2018, more than 3.6 million U.S. middle and high school students used e-cigarettes in the past 30 days.

What can be done to help someone who is using e-cigarettes?

For 24/7 free and confidential information and referrals, call SAMHSA's National Helpline at: 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357) or visit the SAMHSA Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator at: findtreatment.samhsa.gov.

The INDEPTH Program is an alternative to suspension or citation program that is offered as an option to students who face suspension for violation of school tobacco or e-cigarette policies, available use locally at The Lung Disease Foundation of Central Pennsylvania located in the Lung Disease Center at 800 Chestnut Avenue, Altoona (814-946-2845).

used to help low-income families attend family-based activities that bring families together in a fun, safe, affordable, and drugfree environment which provides food, resources, art, music, and crafts for all.

Booker Washington Т. **Revitalization Corp.:** Garden **Heights Playground**

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

Funding awarded will be used toward the construction of a new park and playground in the Garden Heights neighborhood of Altoona, designed for children of all abilities.

Catholic Charities of the **Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown:**

Getting Ahead

1300 12th Avenue, Altoona (814) 944-9388

Funding awarded will be used to walk beside those in poverty, homeless, or nearly homeless, to introduce strategies and tools to become self-sufficient, allowing them to have a choice to get ahead.

Central Blair County Park & **Recreation Commission: Youth** Sports Program Supplies & Equipment

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

Funding awarded will be used for new program supplies and equipment for the following youth sports programs: elementary, instructional, and happy hoops basketball; elementary and junior high volleyball; NFL flag football program; instructional/indoor and elementary soccer.

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

Morrisons Cove Memorial Park: Stay Drug Free at Spring Cove

S. Walnut Street, 201 Martinsburg (814) 793-2176

Funding awarded will be used toward providing a drug prevention and mental wellness event for area youth.

Blair Northern County Recreation **Commission:** Sponsored NBCRC Youth Program

4080 E. Pleasant Valley Blvd, Altoona (814) 742-9500

Funding awarded will be used to work with at risk students or those in need, by providing programming/activities that promote a healthy lifestyle while also being educated on drug and alcohol awareness.

Overflow Church: Jefferson **Park Community Engagement**

125 5th Avenue, Altoona (615) 430-9987

Funding awarded will be used to provide supplies for neighborhood outreach events at Jefferson Park such as community cookouts, clean-up days, community meals, trunk or treat, and Easter egg hunts.

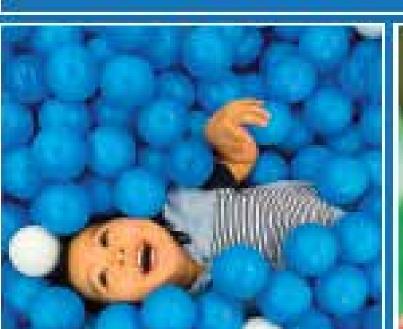
Roaring Spring Community Library Association:

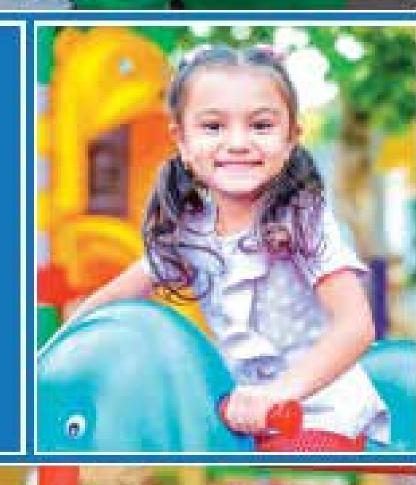
Hydroponics on a Shoestring

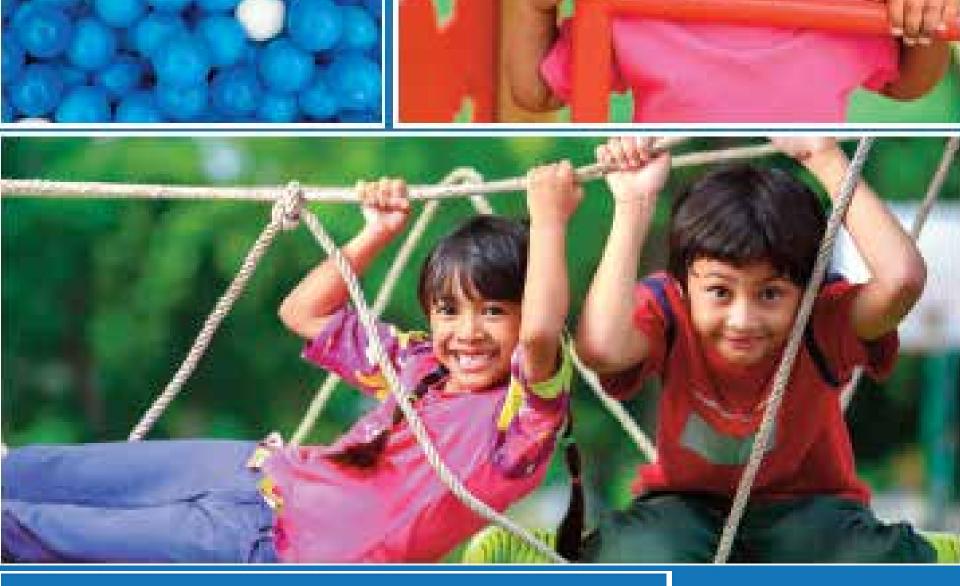
320 E. Main Street, Roaring Spring (814) 224-2994

Funding awarded will be used to promote drug prevention and recovery through reducing Continued on A27

Our Kids Deserve to Be Happy, Healthy, & Safe.







Stuckey Automotive Is a Longtime Supporter of Operation Our Town + Their Mission to Promote + Protect Healthy Neighborhoods from Illegal Drug Use + Resulting Crime.

Stuckey Automotive - Here for Every Mile.





Drug Free																							
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Addiction	Alcohol	Beer
Caffeine	Cigarette	Cocaine
Drugs	Hallucinogens	Heroin
Liquor	Marijuana	Prescription Drugs



Say No

Substance

Tobacco



2023 GRANT RECIPIENTS Continued from A25

food insecurity in Pennsylvania by offering hydroponics. 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 supplies for a program held on Wednesdays for youth in Pre-K to 12th grade, which provides a home-cooked meal, gym/physical activities, the arts, and age-appropriate small groups that encourage healthy living.

Tyrone Area School District: **Arts Elevate**

1001 Clay Avenue, Tyrone (814) 684-1800 ext. 3707

Funding awarded will be used to purchase an additional potter's wheel for an after-school arts connection program aimed at creating an environment to support disenfranchised and disconnected students through mentorship and art.

Tyrone Snyder Public Library: Socialize Our Salute

Pennsylvania 1000 Avenue, Tyrone (814) 684-1133

Funding awarded will be used to support the Socialize our Salute social group for veterans that will help foster a core support group in a substance-free environment for local veterans centered around the veteran experience.

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

Education Classes

Plaza, 208 Hollidaysburg 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 (evidence-based home visiting) and Parent Education Classes.

YES to Kids: Youth **Empowerment Scholarships**

338 Deer Run Drive, Roaring Spring (814) 502-4435

Funding awarded will be used to improve the lives of disadvantaged youth by keeping them active and involved in the extracurricular activities of their choice while they develop important life skills, build their self-esteem, and improve their academic performance by providing all young people with the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Young Life Central of Pennsylvania: Young Life Camp

117 Quince Court, Hollidaysburg (814) 312-2061

Funding awarded will be used to help high school students attend Young Life Camp who financially cannot afford the cost of camp otherwise.

OPERATION OUR TOWN DONORS

Operation Our Town was founded in 2006 by a core group of local businesses dedicated to support efforts to take back our neighborhoods from drugs and violent crime. Sustaining Members have committed to providing \$10,000 per year to support these efforts. Our Founding Members are marked with an asterisk (*) in appreciation for their role in establishing our organization by contributing at least \$30,000 over our first three years.

The success of Operation Our Town, combined with the desire to improve our community, has led many local businesses to financially support local programs that prevent and/ or reduce drug abuse and/or crime in Blair County.

Sustaining Members: 1st Summit Bank Blair Companies* First National Bank John & Doug Wolf* Lee Industries, Inc.* Leonard S. Fiore, Inc.* McLanahan Corporation* M&T Bank* New Enterprise Stone & Lime Co.* New Pig Corporation* NPC, Inc.* Pyramid Healthcare, Inc. Reliance Bank* Rockland Manufacturing Sheetz, Inc.* Small Tube Products Stuckey Automotive The Hite Company Division of Mayer Electric* Thompson Pharmacy UPMC Altoona* Value Drug Company Ward Transport & Logistics Corp.* Donors:

A-1 Paving ABC, Central PA Chapter Accurate Bookkeeping Service AFSCME Local 2188 – Altoona City Employees AFSCME Local 906 – Hollidaysburg Veterans Home AGSM Ventures, LLC AIA Alera Group Al'a Tavern Alan Gehringer, Rhythm Systems Allegheny Brain & Spine Surgeons, P.C. Allegheny Club of Hollidaysburg Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries Allegheny Mountains Convention & Visitors Bureau Allegheny Orthotics & Prosthetics Allegheny Supply Allegheny Township Police Association Allegheny Trucks, Inc. Allegro Restaurant All Things Automotive, Inc. Alto Markets, LLC Altoona Area School District Foundation Altoona Arthritis & Osteoporosis Center Altoona Auto Auction Altoona Blair County Development Corporation Altoona Catholic Nurses Altoona Center for Clinical Research, Altoona Center for Nursing Care Altoona Community Theatre Altoona Curve Altoona First Savings Bank Altoona Honda Altoona Housing Authority Altoona Jewish Community School Altoona Mirror Altoona Pipe & Steel Supply Company Altoona Police Narcotics Division Altoona Soft Water American Eagle Paper Mills AmeriServ Financial Amtran Anonymous donor Ansley RV Appalachia IU8 APR Supply Co. ARC Federal Credit Union Arch Insurance Group Arrow Land Solutions, LLC A. Thomas Farrell Law Offices Atlantic Broadband

Bickel's Surplus Too, LLC Bill Wertz & Sons, Inc. Blair/Bedford Builders Association Blair Business Technologies Blair Candy Company, Inc.* Blair County Anesthesia, P.C. Blair County Beverage Blair County Chamber of Commerce Blair County Children, Youth & Families Families Blair County Crime Solvers Blair County District Attorney's Office Blair County Golf & Driving Range -Madey Corp, Inc. Blair County Health & Welfare Council Blair County NAACP Blair County Police Departments Blair Drug & Alcohol Partnerships Blair Gastroenterology Associates Blair Medical Associates Blair Orthopedics Blair Roofing, Inc. Blake Solutions, Inc. Blue Knob Golf Club Blue Knob Valley Chainsaw Carving Competition Bob's Storage Bolger Brothers, Inc. BrandDemon Strategy + Design Buccinese Society Bun Air Corporation Burgmeier's Hauling, Inc. Burns White, LLC Business Planning Service, LLC Carlin & Associates Insurance Carmike Cinemas, Inc. Carnegie Equipment, Inc. Catalano, Case, Catalano & Clark-Radzieta Catholic War Vets Post 1691 CBT Bank a Division of Riverview Bank Central Blair Recreation Commission Central PA Cardiology, LLC Central PA Digital Learning Foundation Central PA Landlord Association Centre Concrete Company Cesare Battisti Mutual Benefit Association Chester E. Grannas Family Foundation Chimney Doctor, Inc. City Beverage of Altoona, Inc. Clear Creek Environmental Cleveland Brothers Equipment Co., Inc. Clip Art Salon Cohen & Grigsby, P.C. Coldwell Banker Town & Country Conducted Insurance Combined Insurance Concordia Society Construction Applicators Contact Altoona Courtesy Motors Craig Eencing Craig Fencing Credit Control Collections Cresson Lions Park Association Cumming Motors, Inc. D.C. Goodman & Sons, Inc.* D. Freemont, Inc. Daversa Pest Control Days Inn & Suites, Altoona Dean Patterson Chevrolet DeGol Organization DelGrosso Foods, Inc. DelGrosso's Amusement Park Delorosso's Antisement Park Delorier Construction Delta Health Technologies, LLC* Despoy & Robertson Law Firm Deus Ex Machina DiAndrea Media DiAndrea Promos Dick's Pharmacy, Inc. Discovery House Doing Better Business, Inc. Domino's Douglas V. Stoehr, Attorney At Law Drayer Physical Therapy Institute Durbin Companies East Freedom Surgical Associates E.B. Endres, Inc. Edward Jones Investments - Michael Harris Edward Jones Investments - Richard Logan Eldorado Kiwanis Club Empire Communication Systems, Inc. Empower Business Solutions, Inc. Encompass Health Rehabilitation Hospital of Altoona

Bickel's Surplus Too, LLC

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