

FLEX FLEX Your Ideas

FYI

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Holiday Happenings

FLEX Ugly Holiday Sweater Contest & Volunteer Opportunity

As the holidays approach, there will be less gathering this year, but that doesn't mean there has to be less connection and community.

Like most of our 2020 events, we are taking our Christmas Party & Food Drive online. To participate, all you need to do is:

- Take a photo of yourself in an ugly holiday sweater holding items you plan to donate to the food pantry.
- Email the photo to FLEX at flex@venangochamber.org.
- Drop off your food drive donations to the Venango Chamber in Oil City or St. John's Episcopal Church in Franklin (Can your business be a drop-off location for donations? Please let us know!)

On December 14, we will share all the submitted photos to the FLEX Facebook page and have people vote with "likes" until Christmas. Winners will receive a gift certificate to a local business!



Also in December, FLEX is giving our time to the Salvation Army. From 1 to 2 p.m. on Saturday, December 12, FLEX will prepack food bags that will be distributed to area families who signed up to receive Christmas Assistance.

To keep volunteers safe, masks are required and social distancing will be practiced. Also, those wanting to volunteer **MUST REGISTER** through the United Way Get Connected site, because we are limited to 10 volunteers.

Learn more & sign up to volunteer at: bit.ly/FLEXVolunteer2020.

No matter what your holidays look like this year, we encourage you to support local organizations and businesses as much as you can.

If you'd prefer to limit your time out in public, some other ways to show support include:

- Like and share Facebook posts
- Give a positive review online
- Tell a friend about a local business you love
- Purchase gift certificates or local items online
- Order takeout
- Make a monetary donation

Although this year is different, it is still the "most wonderful time of the year" and we hope you have a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

FLEX FOOD DRIVE

Professional Development Tip: Getting Involved in Local Government

This month, talked to Mike Dulaney, a FLEX Member and Venango County Commissioner, about how and why young professionals should get involved in local government.

What are first steps a young professional can take towards a position in government?

My journey started with recognizing and filling needs of my community. I volunteered with various festivals, and after some time, I noticed a need for volunteers for a couple of boards for the city. I approached the mayor about my willingness to serve and was appointed to the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Franklin Redevelopment Authority, which I eventually chaired.

After a couple of years, I ran for Franklin City Council. Running a campaign for City Council was much simpler than running for commissioner. When I ran for commissioner, I had to familiarize myself with campaign finance law, name a manager and treasurer, build a team of volunteers, and fundraise like crazy.



The point is—it all started with recognizing the need for volunteers and stepping up to fill those needs.

What skills should someone practice or learn to help them in local government?

The job is more than just decision making. Elected officials serve as a liaison between citizens and their government. You have to be a friendly face that is always willing to

listen to someone's concern whenever and wherever. You also have to be willing to make tough decisions, no matter how unpopular. The COVID Pandemic is obviously something no one alive has dealt with before and it forced us to rewrite the playbook.

People may first think of becoming a mayor or a commissioner, but what other ways could they be involved?

Volunteering for sure. Check your local government's website for a listing of each board or authority and what they do. Find out what piques your interest and ask if they have any openings.

Why do you feel it is important for young professionals to get involved in local government?

Eventually, the next generation has no choice but to take up the mantle. Venango County has the youngest team of commissioners in PA. At 32, I'm still the one of the youngest Commissioners in the state. The more young professionals that get involved early, the more prepared they are when the torch of leadership is passed to them. There is value in the wisdom and experience of the generation above ours, but sooner or later we are all forced to take the lead.

If someone wants to be involved, but is not interested in a leadership position, what else can they do?

If you don't want to hold an elected office and don't have the time to commit to serving on a board, the most effective thing to do is be informed. Know what is going in your community. Reach out to your elected officials and voice your concerns or ask them why they made the choices they did.

Also, vote. Let your voice be heard. Local government has more impact on your daily life than national. Your voice does matter. I often tell people I may be a leader in the county government, but I'm a servant to the people.

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Alex Gunter recently joined the team at Raymond James Financial in Oil City as a Financial Advisor.

After growing up in Clarion and attending Clarion University, Alex moved to Pittsburgh for five years. After the birth of his son early this year, his family moved back to the

area and are now settled in Kennerdell.

Besides his bachelor's degree, Alex holds licenses for the Financial Advising Series 7 and 66, PA Life, and Health and Accident Insurance. At his father's advisory firm, where he is now employed, Alex hopes to help grow and expand so that they may help more community members gain financial peace of mind.

As for his personal goals, Alex wants to provide a comfortable life for his family, while helping to impact the community in a positive manner.

Alex and his wife, Kara, have held health and fitness near and dear to their hearts, making it one of their favorite hobbies/aspects of their lifestyle. They enjoy being outdoors with their son and two dogs, as well as spending as much time with family as possible.

Besides being closer to family, the gorgeous scenery, mountains, and nature in Venango County is what truly attracted Alex's family here.

"We also love supporting local small businesses and restaurants," Alex said. "And we appreciate the people. After working in Pittsburgh for five years, the people here are vastly different in how they are towards one another. We just love that hometown feel."

Alex looks forward to building a network of colleagues and hopefully friends, and we're excited to get to know him more!

Member Highlight: Alisha Bidish



Congratulations to FLEX Member Alisha Bidish on the opening of Sprinklez in October! Located on Route 257 in Seneca (previously Goozebumpz), Sprinklez offer a variety of fun and delicious items like soft-serve custard, shaved ice, milkshakes, sundaes, and flurries.

Sprinklez also has many combinations of items to enjoy on a hot dog, over fries, or in one of their signature "puffle cones," such as chicken and waffles or mac and cheese.

"I loved the idea of having a business where everyone is happy! No one decides to go get ice cream because they're mad," Alisha said. "Families come because they're celebrating something or to reward their kids, and even if someone is having a bad day, they always get a smile on their face when you hand them their ice cream. Best feeling ever!"

The business is seasonal, and their last day was Sunday, November 29. Find their menu, hours, and updates by searching for "Sprinklez" on Facebook.

Pictured right: Alisha with her son, Aden, and husband, Jason.



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FLEX held our Annual Meeting virtually on Thursday, November 5. It was a fun evening with networking activities, a year in review, election of new officers, a look at the rest of the year, and member shout outs, followed by a game of trivia. Thanks to everyone who attended!



OUR MISSION

FLEX represents the needs and interests of Young Professionals by positioning ourselves as leaders, entrepreneurs and advocates for the sustainability of the Venango Area through civic engagement, leadership development, and networking.

Upcoming Events & Meetings:

Ugly Holiday Sweater Contest: Submissions due: Dec. 11 (send to flex@venangochamber.org) • Voting: Dec. 14-25 (on Facebook)

Salvation Army Volunteering: Saturday, Dec. 12 • 1-2 p.m. • 112 Circle St, Franklin • Register at: bit.ly/FLEXVolunteer2020

CONNECT WITH US:



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Hailee Crimbchin
Ashlee Goodman
Madalyn King
Amy Mook

Interested in joining? Email our Membership Chair Laura Ordaz at laura.ordaz@mining.komatsu.