

FLEX FLEX Your Ideas

FYI

brought to you by the **future leaders & entrepreneurs exchange**

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Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Difficult conversations can be uncomfortable, but they are necessary. We were grateful to have a Speaker Series in October with Amariliz Sanchez of PennWest Clarion - Venango and Jeff Polley with Together We Can, on the topic of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) and how we can do better to have these conversations and bridge gaps in our community.

Jeff and Amariliz shared important information and led discussions around racism and how it still permeates our society. They talked about the importance of stepping out of your comfort zone to learn to identify racism, then practice having



tough conversations and addressing it. A lot of the evening was spent in a conversation in which attendees shared many eye-opening experiences they've had in response to these prompts:

- Share the first time you remember realizing race.
- Share a moment when you had to come out of your comfort zone to

get to know someone of a different background, ethnicity or race.

- What are your thoughts on both past and current protests? What is your definition of a "peaceful protest?"
- What is one action you can take to help bridge a racial divide?

This short presentation and discussion was impactful, but could have lasted much longer.

There is a lot more work to be done and conversations to be had. If you are interested in getting involved with DEI in our area, contact Jeff at jeffrey.polley@clarionfamilytherapy.org.



Thursday, November 10 • 5:30PM • Trails to Ales II

Join us for an evening of networking and fun at our 2022 Annual Meeting! We'll have free headshots, food and drinks, election of new FLEX officers, update on FLEX happenings, and trivia.

Register is required. Visit venangochamber.org/events to RSVP.



FLEX Feature: Bridge Builders Community Foundations with Lauren Hart

We started our “FLEX Feature” series in January of this year to share about Venango County businesses and nonprofits through the eyes of young professionals who work there. We specifically wanted to feature organizations that do interesting and amazing things, but are not talked about enough or what they do is misunderstood.

This month we’re excited to hear from Lauren Hart of Bridge Builders Community Foundations, which is located in the Transit Building Annex in Oil City.

Tell us about Bridge Builders.

Bridge Builders Community Foundations is a grantmaking public charity that is dedicated to improving the lives of people in our community. We work with individuals, families, and businesses to set up funds that help the community. Those funds can be scholarships, donor advised funds, field of interest funds, and so many more. The funds created with the Community Foundation provide grants or scholarships to local nonprofits and students in need.

What is your role there?

I am the Director of Finance & Operations. I have been with the Community Foundation for almost nine

years now. My main duties are to plan and complete tasks needed for the day-to-day operations of the Foundation. Some of my responsibilities include fiscal management, essential office functions, scholarship administration, technical support, and administrative support of the Foundation and supporting the President & CEO.

What is your favorite part about working at Bridge Builders?

One of my favorite parts about working for the Community Foundation is working with our generous donors. I look forward to getting to know them and assisting them with their philanthropic endeavors. I also really enjoy being a part of making our community a better place.

What is surprising about the organization?

There are many ways to give through the Community Foundation. Although cash gifts are most common, we are also able to accept donation of property, appreciated stock via securities, bequests, wills, and trusts as well as beneficiary designations through a person's life insurance or IRA. Our most unique gift is a Mausoleum located in the Grove Hill Cemetery which we still own and maintenance.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Although we are a small staff of just three people, the Community Foundations’ footprint includes Venango, Clarion, and Forest Counties. Last year alone, we awarded over \$550,000 in grants to local organizations and over \$380,000 in scholarships to the students in our community.

Learn more about Bridge Builders Community Foundations at bbcfc.org.

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Member Profile: Elizabeth Schmude



Elizabeth Schmude is the owner and photographer at Elizabeth Schmude Photography.

She is originally from the Seneca/Cranberry area and attended Point Park University in Pittsburgh, where she earned a bachelor's degree in Communications and Photography with a concentration

in commercial photography.

Elizabeth has had opportunities to be a part of many local and regional art exhibits, which has led her to having her work seen and critiqued by museum curators in Pittsburgh such as David Oresick (Mattress Factory) and well known photographers like Ed Panar and Tabitha Soren.

She has goals to continue to grow her business and move to a much bigger studio space and would love to have an area to give photography lessons and have a gallery space.

Most of Elizabeth's free time is spent being a leader of Cranberry Clovers 4-H Club. Her 4-H kids are very busy and active in the community so they keep her busy most of the time. When she's not spending time with them, she's usually spending time with family and her cat, Smiley, and she likes to garden, bake, and go to concerts.

"I enjoy all Venango County has to offer," Elizabeth told us. "There is an event almost every weekend to go to with family. If we're not at an event, we're grabbing a bite to eat at a local restaurant and checking out what the local shops have to offer."

She also loves the people here. "Having a business isn't easy, but everyone has always been so supportive," she said. "We have a support system for our businesses here that you won't find anywhere else in the country and that's what I love about Venango County. I also love that I'm able to capture the beauty of the area when working with my clients"

Holiday Happenings

FLEX has a busy next couple of months with holiday activities! We invite you to join us at one or all of these events:

- **Barrow-Civic Theatre Christmas Tree:** Help us decorate a tree for the Barrow's annual display! We'll meet to set it up during the week of November 14.
- **Franklin Light-Up Night Parade:** Join us in the parade during Light-Up Night on Saturday, November 19.
- **Ugly Holiday Sweater Party:** Our Annual Sweater Party will take place Thursday, December 8, at FoxTales Pub in Franklin. Wear your festival, ugly sweater and join us for a fun evening with other young professionals. We ask each attendee to bring a donation to a local charity.

We'll have more details (including exact times) for all of these events on our Facebook page and in our Weekly Update email.

Hope to see you during this holiday season!



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Event Photos: Game Night & Two Mile Trunk or Treat



October Events & Meetings:

Annual Meeting: Thursday, November 10 • 5:30 p.m. • Trails to Ales II • Register at venangochamber.org/events

Barrow-Civic Theatre Christmas Tree: Decorate a FLEX tree with us! • Week of November 14-18 (exact day & time TBD) • Barrow-Civic Theatre, Franklin

Events & Fundraising Committee: Tuesday, November 15 • 12 p.m. • Zoom

Marketing Committee: Wednesday, November 16 • 4:15 p.m. • Zoom

Franklin Light-Up Night Parade: Saturday, November 19 • Decorating & Meeting Time TBD • Downtown Franklin

Monthly Meeting: Monday, November 28 • 12 p.m. • Zoom

Find more event details on our Facebook page or in our Weekly Update email.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Seth Herrick

Interested in joining?

Email the FLEX Membership Committee Chair Joslyn Dechant at joslyn.dechant@gmail.com or join online: VenangoFLEX.org.

FLEX 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.

CONNECT WITH US: VenangoFLEX.org • flex@venangochamber.org

