

Operation Our Town Reporter

A monthly newsletter *by* our volunteers *to* our volunteers
about our fight against drugs and violent crime in Central PA.

Volume 1, Issue 4

April 2009

PUSH OUT THE PUSHER 693-3020



OperationOurTown.org

Board Members:

Michael A. Fiore | Joe Sheetz
Phil Devorris | Ron McConnell

Administration:

Shawna Hoover, Exec. Coordinator
Lynne Mondock, VISTA Volunteer

Steering Committee:

Dr. Lori J. Bechtel-Wherry
Robin Beck
Jackie Bernard
Richard Consiglio
JR DiAndrea
William Earnest
Randy Feathers
Dr. Zane Gates
Donna Gority
Betsy Hurst
Cheryl Johns
Honorable Jolene Kopriva
Pastor Betty Landis
Dr. Todd Negola
Judy Rosser
Dr. G. Brian Toth

Founding Members:

Altoona Regional Health System
Blair Candy Company
Blair Companies
DC Goodman
Delta Health Technologies
Fiore Buick/Toyota
Grappone Law Offices
Harry Sickler & Associates
The Hite Company
Holiday Inn Express
Lawruk Realty
Lee Industries, Inc.
Leonard S. Fiore, Inc.
M&T Bank
McLanahan Corporation
New Enterprise Stone & Lime Co.
New Pig
NPC, Inc.
Reliance Bank
Sheetz, Inc.
United Way of Blair County
Ward Trucking
Wolf Furniture

Committed Businesses:

Grainger Industrial Supply
Small Tube Products

Steering Committee Notes from March 16

K-12 Education:

- Sharing best practices between school districts regarding drug & alcohol and threat situations.
- Bellwood & Tyrone school districts are involved in Penn State's "Keepin' It Real" Program. Will be filmed locally, showing teens how to get out of certain situations.

Gang:

- Gang training completed at Teen Power Day. Additional trainings scheduled.
- Compiling a report of gang signs seen around Blair County.

Faith Based:

- 2nd Myth Busters Drug Treatment Forum on April 23rd from 7-9 pm at the Bellwood Calvary United Methodist Church.
- Recognized a need for a single phone number for people to call for drug addiction treatment information.

Marketing:

- Working on an overall Operation Our Town awareness campaign.
- Working with the Altoona Mirror to publish a bi-weekly report of crime statistics and positive stories from OOT.
- Re-launching the Push Out the Pusher campaign in May.

Housing:

- Working on the rental inspection program with the City of Altoona.

Volunteer:

- Participating in several outreach events in April.
- Conducted site visits to Evergreen Manors and Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Human Services:

- 5-10 individuals will attend Juvenile Drug Court after school starting in 6 weeks.
- The Blair County Drug & Alcohol Office will soon be managed as a separate non-profit. Non-profit status will allow more flexibility in funding and programming.

Law Enforcement:

- Several drug raids have been conducted over the past few months.
- Working with the Pharmacy Roundtable to develop a program to place undercover officers in pharmacies.

Pharmacy:

- Sending a letter of inquiry to Blair County pharmacies to inform them of the undercover program and ask for their participation.
- The Blair County Drug & Alcohol Office is launching a prescription drug abuse awareness campaign and offered to provide educational posters.

Judicial:

- CJAB committee has their strategic planning meeting on April 17th.
- Looking into the need for a Central Booking location in Blair County.

Operation Our Town Announces Web-site Enhancements

Check-out the updates made to OperationOurTown.org! Changes include a more comprehensive navigation list on the left-side banner, featuring links to monthly newsletters, lists of supporters & a variety of resources.

- Click [Newsletters](#) to download past newsletters in PDF format.
- Click [Founding Members...](#) for an extensive list of our partners.
- Click [Resources](#) for links to relevant services.

Do you have suggestions that will improve Operation Our Town's web-site? Send us an [email](#) with your ideas!



Mission

Facilitating partnerships between community and business to fight drug use and crime through proven law enforcement, treatment, and prevention techniques.

Our Partners & Friends

[Blair Countians for Drug Free Communities](#)

[Crime Solvers of Blair County](#)

[Pennsylvania Gang Investigators Association](#)

[United Way of Blair County](#)

Volunteer Update

Volunteers play an important role in Operation Our Town. Volunteers participate in community events to help us reach more people. Volunteers serve on Roundtables, the Steering Committee & the Board.

Volunteers provide valuable services such as artwork & design, software development, and more.

We thank all our Operation Our Town volunteers. It is only through the support of active community members like yourselves that we will be able to take back our neighborhoods from illegal drugs and crime.

[CLICK HERE to register as an Operation Our Town Volunteer](#)



To serve on an Operation Our Town Roundtable, contact Shawna Hoover by [email](#) or call 296-8730.

Upcoming Operation Our Town & Partner Meetings and Events

RECURRING WEEKLY MEETINGS:

Wed.	HOPE Support Group Meeting	7:00PM	Blair Co Courthouse Jury Room
04/20	Holocaust Commemoration Service	7:00PM	Agudath Achim, Altoona
04/23	*OOT Marketing Roundtable	4:00PM	OOT office
04/23	Myth Busters: Treatment Public Forum	7:00PM	Bellwood Calvary UMC
04/24	Press Conference w/Tom Corbett, AG	9:30AM	Calvin House
04/25	Week of the Young Child Celebration	10:00AM	Penn State Altoona
04/25	YMCA Community Wellness Fair	10:00AM	Hollidaysburg YMCA
04/30	25 th Anniv. of Victims of Crime Act	1:00PM	YTI Career Institute, Altoona
05/04	Booker T. Washington Meeting	4:00PM	Community Action Agency
05/07	*OOT Law Enforcement RT	11:30AM	OOT office
05/07	*OOT Faith-based Roundtable	1:30PM	1st Methodist Church, Altoona
05/07	Big Bro/Big Sis Bowl for Kids' Sake	6:00PM	Pleasant Valley Bowling Ctr
05/08	Altoona Sunrise Rotary 20th Anniv	6:00PM	The Casino at Lakemont Park
05/09	AmeriCorps Week 2009	all week	Nationwide recognition events
05/14	*OOT Pharmacy Roundtable	7:15AM	OOT office
05/18	*OOT Steering Committee Meeting	6:00PM	OOT office
05/21	*CJAB Meeting	11:45AM	Blair County Courthouse
05/21	Neighborhood Watch Mtg (County)	6:00PM	Blair Senior Services Bldg.
05/22	Health & Welfare Annual Meeting	8:00AM	Arc of Blair County
05/22-5/24, 5/26	Operation Our Town Days at the Altoona Curve	varies	Blair County Ball Park
05/30	Trash To Treasure (United Way)	8:00AM	Adler Gym, PSU Altoona

*OOT Meetings: For more information about Operation Our Town meetings, contact Shawna Hoover at oot@lsfiore.com or call 296-8730.

News from the Gang Roundtable by Dr. Todd Negola, Chairperson

Gangs, guns, drugs, drive-bys, and crime. News articles and programs have demonstrated that even rural America, including Central Pennsylvania, is not immune to the ills of gangs and gang activity. Many are aware that street gangs have been arriving in Central Pennsylvania in recent years. Everyone has an opinion about why gangs are coming to our region. What is the truth?

Very early in development, Operation Our Town recognized the need for an eco-systemic approach to tackling the problems associated with drugs and crime. Striving to maintain the peace, serenity and solitude that we have come to know and appreciate in Central Pennsylvania,

Operation Our Town elected to initiate a Gang Roundtable to provide information about gangs and gang activity as a component of the overall approach to maintain the heritage and lifestyle appreciated by our residents.

The Gang Roundtable is comprised of a broad representation of individuals (law enforcement, researchers and community program providers) with knowledge and experience in gang identification, gang prevention and gang activities. Roundtable participants meet to share ideas, activities and awareness and provide consultation to the Steering Committee for Operation Our Town. Another component of the Gang Roundtable is to provide training to our schools, program providers and the community at-large about gang awareness, prevention and intervention.

So why would gangs come to our region?

1. Gangs travel here to sell drugs for greater profit than in their hometowns;
2. Some gang members have come here to escape pressures in their hometowns;
3. And some gang members have come to our region for the same reason that many people come here....to visit and enjoy the serenity and beauty of our region. Gangs have become sophisticated and now use the internet to investigate where they can "lay low," sell drugs or escape the bustle of big city living.

The good news.....we have exceptional law enforcement and intervention programs that are working well! While the trend over the summer of 2008 was shootings, assaults and drug sales associated with gangs, our community-work efforts have sent a clear and decisive message:

Gang members...

You are not welcome here. If you come to our area to peddle your drugs or harm our community—we have a cell for you in the Blair County Jail!

-WEST COAST GANG TATS-



Upcoming Events



Myth Busters:
A Public Forum on
Treatment for
Substance Abuse/Addiction
Thursday, April 23, 2009
7:00 - 9:00 pm
Bellwood Calvary
United Methodist Church
601 N. Fourth St., Bellwood, PA
call 296-8730 for more details



**Week of the Young
Child Celebration**
A celebration to focus public
attention on the needs of young
children and their families.
Saturday, April 25, 2009
10:00 am—2 pm
Penn State Altoona

Operation Our Town
**VOLUNTEERS
NEEDED!**
Call 296-8730

call Autumn at
the United Way
at 944-0884
for more details



**Celebrating the
25th Anniversary of the
Victims of Crime Act**
A celebration to increase public
awareness of the resources
available to victims of crime.
Thursday, April 30, 2009
YTI Career Institute, Altoona
2900 Fairway Drive, Altoona
Call Cindy Estep at 296-2651
for more information



McGruff™ the Crime Dog helps
Logan Township patrolmen with
Child Fingerprinting at Logan
Valley Mall's Kids' Fair April 4

Volunteer Committee Visits 2008 Prevention Grant Recipients

Members of the Volunteer Roundtable recently conducted on-site visits to Gloria Gates Memorial Foundation's After-School Program at Evergreen Manors and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Blair County. Both organizations received grants from Operation Our Town in 2008 to help fund proven drug prevention programs.

The Gloria Gates Memorial Foundation's after-school program, run by Toni Bilik-Bennetti, is for youth ages 4 to 12 years old. It meets at Evergreen Manors weekdays during the school year from 3:30 pm to 6 pm. The program is so successful that elementary school staff regularly refer parents to the program, which often results in a waiting list. Forty-six children are enrolled for this Spring semester, and the program consistently achieves 80-90% attendance.

This achievement is due in large part to the personal care provided by Toni, her staff and volunteers. Promptly at 3:30 pm, the door opens and more than 30 children pour into the small but cheerful activity room. The children are greeted by name, asked about their day and are served healthy snacks such as apples, granola bars and milk. Once everyone is settled, children hustle to be the first in line for "announcements." This is a chance for those children who feel so inclined to be the center of attention – if only for a minute. They tell about a good test score, or their brother who came to visit. Or maybe they show an art project of which they are proud or a new pair of shoes. Then it's homework time, followed by play time for the last hour.



Program volunteers, including students from Penn State Altoona, provide valuable assistance but more volunteers are needed to ensure all children receive the attention and support they deserve. Would you like to share your love of science, crafts or gardening? Or maybe you have fond memories of being part of a children's choir and would like to ensure area youth have the same opportunity. Volunteer just once for either this program or the 4-week summer program, and you'll see first-hand how YOU can make a difference! Please contact Toni at 949-8838 or tonibilik@winbeam.com for more information. ...[READ MORE in the Altoona Mirror](#)



**Come support Big Brothers Big Sisters of Blair County
at their 25th Anniversary Bowl for Kids' Sake!**
Thursday, May 7th (6 - 9 pm) Pleasant Valley Bowling Center
Bowlers & volunteers are needed. Call 944-6129 NOW!

Located in a turn-of-the-century brick house near the Jaffa Mosque, [Big Brothers Big Sisters of Blair County](#) served over 140 children in the past year alone. The organization matches at-risk children and youths, ages 6 – 17, with a Big Brother, Big Sister, or Married Couple based on the child's needs. These professionally-supported volunteer mentors spend time with their "Little" at least twice a month. The Littles also participate in a variety of activities sponsored by the agency. In the past six months, the agency held 11 different activity programs for the children, including trips to the Pittsburgh Zoo and the Carnegie Science Museum.

Some "Bigs" are empty-nesters who have sent their own children off to college and enjoy helping their Littles learn social and life skills - and some Bigs are those same college students! Bigs are asked to commit 2-3 hours to their Littles at least twice a month for one year. On average, mentors donate 78 hours a year to their Littles – that's only 1% of their waking hours! And yet children that have been matched for at least one year have shown 100% improvement in school attendance and performance, family and peer relationships, and in their ability to avoid substance abuse. "We had four Littles turn 18 this past June. All four graduated from high school. Two started college this past fall and the other two are employed in the community," says Karen Kelley, program director. "We are very proud of our Bigs and Littles for this accomplishment."

Unfortunately, the current Blair County waiting list includes 75 Littles looking for a Big Brother or Big Sister. The agency is currently in need of adult mentors, including couples, that want to contribute by helping at-risk children reach their potential. The greatest need at this time is for male mentors. Please contact Karen at 944-6129 or KKelleybbbs@aol.com to find out how you can become a mentor.

Contact Info

Operation Our Town - PO Box 2486 - Altoona PA 16603 - 814.296.8730 - info@OperationOurTown.org - www.OperationOurTown.org

You may [unsubscribe](#) if you no longer wish to receive our emails.