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# Altoona Proud

A Monthly Insight into all that is Altoona

## May is Mental Health Awareness Month

Mental Health Awareness Month has been observed in May in the United States since 1949. It is a month of activities and events to raise awareness about mental health and spark conversation to fight the stigma surrounding mental illness. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) states that, with a growing number of Americans experiencing mental health symptoms, there is a need to join together to advocate for improving our nation's mental health systems.

The past few years have been especially difficult in light of COVID-19 and Blair County Health Choices reports some alarming statistics about the issue of mental health:

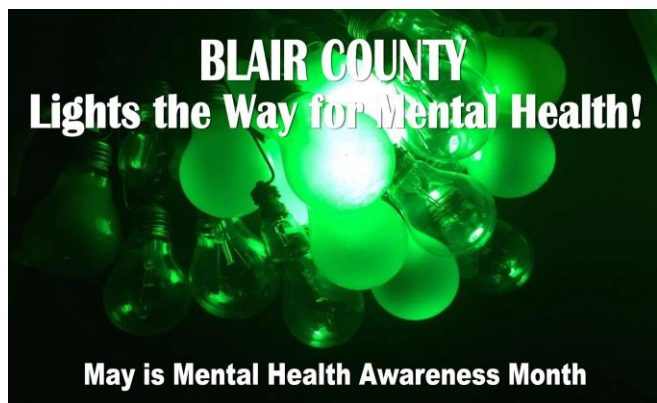
There were 54 suicides reported in Blair County in 2021 and 2022

1 in 5 adults experience symptoms of mental illness each year

1 in 6 youth between ages 6-17 experience a mental health disorder

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among children ages 10-14

One way to display support is to shine the light on mental health by illuminating your business or residence **green** during the month of May. **Green** lights and ribbons are the international symbols for mental health awareness.



Altoona City Hall will be illuminated in **green** during the month of May in support of this important health issue. For more information on the subject of mental health, visit <https://www.nami.org/Get-Involved>

If you would like to learn about ways you can help celebrate Blair County's "Light The Way" initiative, visit

<https://blairhealthchoices.org/event>

## Jewish American Heritage Month

In April of 1980, Congress passed a motion to authorize President Jimmy Carter to declare a week in April or May as Jewish American Heritage week in the United States. In his declaration, President Carter spoke of the significance of April, 1980 in the Jewish calendar, which was the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Solidarity Sunday for Soviet Jewry, Israeli Independence Day and the Days of Remembrance of Victims and Survivors of the Holocaust.

In 2006, President Bush issued the first proclamation designating May 2006 as Jewish American Heritage Month. Every year since then, May has been designated as Jewish American Heritage Month in the U.S. by the President. This year, the U.S. Conference of Mayors has issued a statement in support against rising antisemitism across the Country, and offering hope and optimism through the celebration of the vibrant heritage of the Jewish Americans who have enriched our Country. The National Archives notes May as a month to recognize Jewish contributions to American culture, history, military, science, government, and more.

### DID YOU KNOW?

In 1654, the first 23 Jewish people to permanently settle in America came from Brazil to New Amsterdam, later known as New York City.

The Mayor will be presenting a Proclamation for Jewish American Heritage Month at the annual Veteran's Day celebration held by the Jewish Federation of Altoona, on Wednesday, May 24 at 7 PM.

## Prospect Pool Volunteer Day

### Prospect Pool is opening in May and we need volunteers!

On Saturday May 6 from 9 AM to 2PM, volunteers are needed to help get the pool ready for its re-opening on May 27, 2023! Lunch is being provided, so if you, or members of your organization, would like to volunteer to help, please RSVP to the Mayor's Legislative Aide, Bonnie DeLozier, on or before May 4<sup>th</sup> at 814-949-2476 or [bdelozier@altoonapa.gov](mailto:bdelozier@altoonapa.gov). The committee is working hard to make the pool a fun and safe place, while understanding the history and impact of this pool for our City and its residents, so your help is needed and appreciated.

Opening day is set for Saturday, May 27<sup>th</sup> at noon. Opening Day festivities will include on-site food trucks, musical entertainment and more. A website has been launched to provide information on pool hours, senior swim hours, employment opportunities, season passes, daily prices and information on how to donate to support the pool.

Learn more by visiting:

[www.prospectpoolaltoona.com](http://www.prospectpoolaltoona.com)



## May is Small Business Month

Altoona is home to many small businesses, from coffee shops to clothing boutiques, pizza to party stores. This month we celebrate these small businesses that bring new ideas to life and help to grow our economy.

Small businesses make up 99% of all businesses in the United States and create 1.5 million jobs annually. However, only 50% of those businesses survive the first five years and, with the added impact of COVID 19, small business owners struggle to keep up with big businesses. Small Business Month sheds light on these small businesses and encourages consumers to shop small!

One such business is Student Painters, with a local branch serving Blair and Centre Counties, managed by a business student at Penn State University. Student Painters was developed in 1987 in 15 states as a response to the shortage of summer jobs for college students. All managers and students are full-time students and undergo rigorous training in the spring before going working, painting houses, garages, etc. You can learn more about them at [www.studentpainters.biz](http://www.studentpainters.biz) or contact the branch manager at 570-856-8231.



This month, we encourage everyone to visit and shop in our wonderful local small businesses!

## Operation Safe Space

Operation Safe Space is a joint initiative of the City of Altoona, Blair County Community Action and other health and service organizations in our area. The goal of Operation Safe Space is to identify condemned, red-tagged or otherwise uninhabitable properties that are still being rented by landlords, allowing tenants to live in deplorable conditions. Operation Safe Space moves these tenants into safe, clean accommodations until permanent housing can be found.

In April, one such property was identified and, with the assistance of the Codes Department and the Altoona Fire Department, seven residents were removed from the property to clean, safe accommodations.

Blair County Community Action is currently collecting donations for the people who are being moved out of these properties. These people are having to start all over with nothing and may be staying at a hotel until stable housing is secured. Items most needed include:

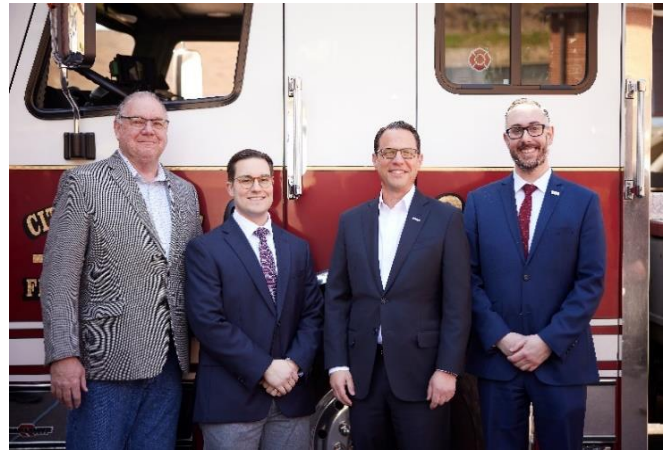
Cases of bottled water	Deodorant (Mens & Women's)	Shampoo
Soda (any kind)	Microwave meals (any kind)	Canned soups, chili or pastas
Can openers	Granola/snack bars	Peanut butter & Jelly
Plasticware	Paper plates & bowls	Paper cups
Napkins	Dog and cat food	Clothing & shoes (all men & women's sizes)

Donations can be dropped off at the Blair County Community Action Program at 2301 Beale Avenue in Altoona or pickup can be arranged by calling Christine Zernick at 814-946-3651, ext. 101. Thank you for your assistance as we join together as a community in helping these citizens transition to safe, clean accommodations and supporting the efforts of Operation Safe Space.



## Governor Shapiro Visits Altoona

On April 4, Governor Josh Shapiro visited the City of Altoona to tour Fire Station #1 and learn more about the needs and challenges that face the Altoona Fire Department. Governor Shapiro commended the City's Fire Department, mentioning that they are "one of the few fully staffed fire departments in the state". He restated his commitment to funding for the safety of all of the citizens of Pennsylvania. The Governor also expressed interest in returning to the City for a walking tour of downtown Altoona.



During his visit, he also had the opportunity to meet a special new member of the Altoona Fire Department. Lucille, who joined the Department in May of 2022, is an accelerant dog, trained to locate possible accelerants that may be the cause of a fire.



## National Fentanyl Awareness Day

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) states that over 110,000 people in the United States died of drug overdoses and drug poisonings during 2022, with a staggering 67% of those deaths involving synthetic opioids like fentanyl. As a result of these drugs, life expectancy in the United States is at its lowest point in the past 20 years. Some of these deaths were attributed to fentanyl mixed with other illicit drugs, with many users unaware that they were actually taking fentanyl.

May 9, 2023 has been designated as National Fentanyl Awareness Day across the United States. This is an opportunity to learn about the dangers of opioids (which also include heroin, oxycodone, and vicodin) and what can be done to prevent deaths by overdose.



Naloxone, (brand name Narcan), is a nasal spray medicine that can be given to anyone showing signs of an opioid overdose, such as unconsciousness, sleepiness, or shallow breathing. It is a safe medication and only reverses overdoses in people with opioids in their system. It does not affect a person without opioids in their system. Any person or business can keep a dose on hand and administer it without fear of legal action through the Good Samaritan Statute. One Altoona official did just that in April and saved a woman's life.

Narcan is available free through agencies such as Families United for Change (Blair County Narcan Squad) and the Blair County Drug and Alcohol Program. To learn more, or to obtain Narcan for your home or business, go to [www.familiesunitedforchange.org](http://www.familiesunitedforchange.org) or [www.fentanylawarenesday.org](http://www.fentanylawarenesday.org)

# History Highlight

110 years ago, Altoona was home to what was dubbed “the most complete department store in the state of Pennsylvania”, so this month we highlight:

## Gables Department Store

William F. Gable founded the Gable’s Department Store in Altoona, PA, opening on March 1, 1884. It was a single, small room with a staff of 10-12 salespeople. The Victorian Neoclassical building that was the forerunner to the modern department store was built in 1891, and by 1913 it was known as “the people’s store”, being the largest and most modern building of its kind in Altoona and employing over 500 people.

The Fourteenth Street side of the building was the last to be developed, including the addition of a restaurant and, at its height, Gables Department Store had over 45 different departments for shopping.

In addition to the business, William Gable was involved in many aspects of Altoona’s growth and development, including the distribution of over 90,000 trees between 1911 and 1914 for school children to plant on Arbor Day. He also organized weekly sewing classes within the store for young girls in the City. In 1923, the family purchased a local radio station, naming it WFBG. Then, in 1952, WFBG-TV was licensed, known today as WTAJ.



After the death of Mr. Gable, the business continued under his own family’s management. The department store was sold in 1968 and was operated by the L. S. Good Company until its ultimate closure in 1980. It has since served as a multi-tenant office building and was, for a time, the regional offices of M & T Bank. Today it is being repurposed as a commercial rental and office space.



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