

The past 6 months, I have been a member of the 2017 class of Leadership Centre County. Going in, I thought it was just one of those things you did if you were in a position like mine. It would likely be boring and dry and I would probably not learn much. After all, I've lived in this county as a fulltime resident and employee for 10 years now. I was completely wrong. It's a whirlwind of learning and experience. Recently we had our Economy Day and I learned how much attention is paid to incubation of businesses led by bright local entrepreneurs. I was enthralled by the panel discussion on collaboration between the Chamber of Business and Industry of Centre County (CBICC), Innovation Park, and an impressive number of local businesses. One key to economic success is to recruit appropriate businesses to your area. I had no idea Penn State is a leader in Materials Sciences, but our economy leaders of Centre County knew, and have successfully recruited a global leader in materials science and application engineering, Morgan Advanced Materials, to build right in our backyard.

We spent a portion of the afternoon in Bellefonte in the newly renovated Cadillac Building. It's been repurposed into affordable housing and is part of a scattered site development which also includes the Garman Building. At the beginning of our class year, members shared the biggest concerns they felt were facing Centre County; lack of affordable housing was the unmatched top choice. It turns out we weren't the only ones worried. There is a lot of attention being paid to alleviating that problem. The developers of affordable housing like we saw in downtown Bellefonte face significant challenges. Of course finances are always a concern, but so is the NIMBY response. I could write many more than my requested 600 words on that particular challenge, so I'll just say that I was truly impressed by their concern for the well-being of the communities in which they develop.

When lunch time rolled around, I didn't expect anything more than our standard fare, but was once again pleasantly surprised. Lunch was made by Taproot Kitchen, a shared-use community kitchen that focuses on underserved community members, including young adults with autism and intellectual disabilities. We ate delicious quiche with a crust technique we're told was perfected with the help of the folks at Gemelli Bakers. I said hello to one of our PAWS cat side volunteers and she couldn't hide how pleased she was that we were all enjoying a meal she and her teammates had worked hard to create.

I didn't know that businesses could be employee owned until we walked into our afternoon appointment at Restek. And you know those people who tell you to follow your dreams and do what you love so don't work a day in your life? Turns out we have some of that too. You'll find those successful dreamers running Seven Mountains Winery. They poured us all a generous glass of wine and told us their story to end our day. I took away a lot from the day, but overall I was once again, as I am after every day spent in Leadership Centre County, blown away by the depth of resources, community pride, creativity, industry, and (of course) economy in our little county. We have a community filled with leaders striving to make it an incredible place. I'm gratified that I get to meet more of these leaders and find out what they're working toward every month.

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