ELLWOOD CITY – Internal growth, member participation and a focus on young adults are among the top priorities of the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce, according to the organization’s 2018 strategic plan.

The chamber, whose membership has increased 92 percent in the two years that Raymond Santillo has been its executive director, also considers downtown development, local partnerships and continued top 6 goals await 2018

By William V. Foley
For The Chamber

ELLWOOD CITY – A crowd of up to 350 is expected at the second Winter Wine and Brew Fest, which will feature the selections of nearly 18 vendors, a table-visiting magician, tantalizing finger foods and socializing to the backdrop of constant music, said Brad Ovial, president.

Magician TJ Hill entertains a table at the 2017 Ellwood City Winter Wine and Brew Fest.

350 may toast the town on magical afternoon

By William V. Foley
For The Chamber

Jason Gonzales pours a draft and shares a laugh at the 2017 Ellwood City Winter Wine and Brew Fest.

ELLWOOD CITY’S SUCCESS? YOU SAID IT IN 2017!

The Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce in 2017, by the quotes:

“God is amazing. He has put so many people in our lives to help us with information, knowledge, equipment and friendship. Without Him in our lives, we wouldn’t be where we are today.”

— Dave Hunter, who with his wife, Ann, opened Smokin’ Dave’s BBQ, 366 Circle Way, on Feb. 7.

“It’s a one-stop shop for the entire family. It’s super organized. I know what I have or I can try to get it. Very reasonably priced.”

— Rochelle Spagnolo, who opened Konsignment Konnections,

— Dave Hunter, who with his wife, Ann, opened Smokin’ Dave’s BBQ, 366 Circle Way, on Feb. 7.

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of Ellwood City Revitalization. “All for $20,” he said of advance ticket sales.

Another $20 will provide guests a white auction chance to win a $500 gun from Duke’s Sports Shop, New Castle, said Raymond Santillo, executive director of the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce.

Those who purchase tickets at the door of the Sons of Italy Lodge 608 on Jan. 27 will pay $25 to attend the 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. event and taste, among other offerings, Frank Carozza’s “Louisa Limoncello,” Vino De Fratella Santillo’s “Meritage Wine” and Dave Moore’s “White IPA” and “Chilean Syrah.”

Back by popular demand

His syrah was popular at the 2017 Winter Wine and Beer Fest, said Moore, 33, of Ellwood City, who has also been a craft beermaker for five years.

“They really liked it, so that is why I am bringing it back,” he said of the syrah, which he describes as being “in the middle of everything. It is semi-dry and semi-sweet red wine.”

Moore’s wheat-based IPA includes a hint of orange citrus.

“I thought it would be seasonal, a white IPA, sort of like snow,” he said. While dark in color, “It is a lighter IPA, so they call it a white.”

The first Winter Wine and Brew Fest drew 325 guests, Ovial said. It raised $7,800, most of which was applied to Ellwood City Revitalization’s goal of raising $90,000 to create 18-foot high triangular arches upon which lights will hang to provide a longer season for acts performing at the five-year-old, $2.2 million Ellwood City Community Plaza.

Like Moore, Ovial was surprised by the turnout of the 2017 Winter Wine and Brew Fest.

“We were very excited,” Ovial said. "Most of the people who were there last year, if they can make it back, will do so. I believe it is a great time of the year when people want to get out. It will be cold outside. It will be three hours in the afternoon when you can eat, drink and converse."

It was great. I have been looking forward to it for a year.”

The SOI will also staff a cash bar during the event, Ovial said.

The Winter Wine and Brew Fest was the only fundraiser for the arches in 2017, and will likely be the same in 2018, Ovial said. Acts ranging from country and swing music, and brass bands, performed in the complex at 524 Lawrence Ave. during a season that ran from June to August in 2017.

Frank Pezzi, of Ellwood City, has been booked as the DJ and TJ Hill, of Pittsburgh, returns as the magician to the 2018 Winter Wine and Brew Fest, Ovial said.

Mary Jo’s Catering returns to the second Winter Wine and Brew Fest and will provide a wide range of appetizers, including chunked cheese, Italian meats and cheeses, stuffed peppers, sliced pepperoni rolls, antipasto, biscotti and wedding cookies, fresh mozzarella and tomato skewers and polenta squares.

The white auction will also feature up to 12 gift baskets, Santillo said.
success among its 2018 objectives.

“These were our top ideas that we decided to focus on for next year,” said Caroline Golmic, president of the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce.

“They are all intertwined. As we are able to achieve one, it assists the other four or five goals that we have. One is not going to be met without the others being met, which is exciting. Two years ago our major goal was to find an executive director who would go face to face and meet people and be a man of the people and we found Raymond that year.

“Last year our goal was to grow our chamber and I think we doubled in size. Now we need to make sure that Raymond and Jillian (Court, the chamber’s executive assistant), our office, our staff, have all the resources necessary to grow at such a quick pace.”

190 join in two years

The chamber as of Dec. 31 had 396 members, an increase of 190 in two years.

“The growth is really special,” Santillo said. “When you mention it to people, they are like, ‘What?!’ People are calling us now to sign up and come in. It’s just a strong signal to the office that what we are doing is moving in the right direction.”

So successful has been the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce that those holding its part-time positions can be overwhelmed, according to the strategic plan, which calls for the consideration of adding staff or increasing staff hours.

The chamber is also considering a new location to rent or purchase, and preparing for the departure of Santillo, whose three-year commitment expires Dec. 31.

Internal growth will depend on staffing, committees and an office location, according to the strategic plan. Member participation, on invitations, volunteering and networking; and a focus on young adults, on activities, opportunities and involvement.

“Holding on roller coaster”

From people seeing and knowing Raymond and Jillian, there is momentum,” Golmic said. “There are very few no’s anymore. When you ask for something, they know they are doing it for a worthy cause, that it is going to help get something done, and they are saying yes.”

Downtown development will consider streetscapes, storefronts and housing; local partnerships include those with Borough Council, civic groups and schools; and continued success depends on a personal touch, the use of social media and events.

The success of the chamber, Santillo said, reflects “a different approach.”

“It’s like holding on the roller coaster, but we are holding on,” he said. “And we are growing with our committee strength. We are seeing a vibrancy of young adults joining us. This has been a real pleasure.”
ELLWOOD CITY’S SUCCESSES IN 2017: BY THE NUMBERS!

The Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce in 2017, by the numbers:

325: Number of guests to attend the 12th Chef, Wine & Ale Event hosted by the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce on Sept. 11.

800: Number of visitors to attend the Ellwood City Storytelling Festival, held Sept. 16 in Ewing Park.

1,300: Crowd at Ellwood City Christmas parade, held Dec. 2 on Lawrence Ave.

460: Number of fifth- and sixth-graders from the Ellwood City Area and Riverside school districts who May 15-16 attended the Pride in Ellwood program in the borough and in Ewing Park.

270: Number of visitors to the Ellwood City Public Library for the first “Art on the Avenue,” held July 28.

300: Number of ornaments that decorated the Ellwood City’s Christmas tree in the Community Plaza at 524 Lawrence Ave.

76: Degrees Fahrenheit for the first pitch of the Pittsburgh Pirates’ April 26 game against the Chicago Cubs during Ellwood City Community Day at PNC Park.

957: Record number of guests to attend the eighth Ellwood City Oktoberfest, held Oct. 7 in Ewing Park.

120: Number of Italian cheeseburgers prepared by members of the Ellwood City Wolves Club for the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce’s Thank You Picnic, held May 10 in Ewing Park.

30: Exhibits at Lawrence County Earth Day, held April 22 in Ewing Park.

85,732: Pounds of garbage removed from the Connoquenessing Creek on Aug. 19 and on Sept. 9 by volunteers with the Allegheny Aquatic Alliance, an Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce member from Cranberry Township.

17: Number of vendors at the eighth Ellwood City Oktoberfest, held Oct. 7 in Ewing Park.

7: Age of Mikey DeMarco, of Ellwood City, whose father, Mike, seated with him in Section 129, caught the first foul ball hit during the Pittsburgh Pirates’ April 26 game against the Chicago Cubs during Ellwood City Community Day at PNC Park.

28: Number of exhibits in the Ellwood City Public Library for the first “Art on the Avenue,” held July 28.

5,000: Number of lights on the blue spruce that served as Ellwood City’s Christmas tree in the Community Plaza at 524 Lawrence Ave.

4,051: Tires removed from the Connoquenessing Creek on Aug. 19 and on Sept. 9 by volunteers with the Allegheny Aquatic Alliance, an Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce member from Cranberry Township.

206: Number of members of Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce as of Dec. 31, 2015.

396: Number of members of Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce as of Dec. 31, 2017.
Ellwood City's Successes in 2017: By the Quotes!

Said, From Page 1

503 Lawrence Ave., a thrift and consignment store, on Feb. 7.

“It’s the first time I ever touched a foul ball.”
— Mikey DeMarco, 7, of Ellwood City, whose father, Mike, seated with him in Section 129, caught the first foul ball hit during the Pittsburgh Pirates’ April 26 game against the Chicago Cubs during Ellwood City Community Day at PNC Park. The foul ball came off the bat of the Cubs’ Anthony Rizzo on the game’s eighth pitch.

“Being born and raised in Ellwood City, and still a resident of Ellwood City, I always wanted to have a practice based here.”
— John DeCaro, who with law partner Charlie Cusack and attorney Adrienne Langer, opened Cusick & DeCaro P.C. at 510 Park Ave. on Feb. 7.

“I went ahead and joined the chamber so that I could get to know the people in the area. This is one of my favorite (networking) events, but we are really involved in the parades and festivals.”
— Shauna Dorwarth, owner of Diamond Dance Academy on First Street, at the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce’s employee appreciation luncheon April 26 at the Connoquenessing County Club.

“Every year the Lawrence County Earth Day festival gets bigger and bigger and more people come every year.”
— Levi Smith, a Portersville resident and member of Boy Scout Troop 806, of Ellwood City, on the event that drew hundreds to Ewing Park on April 22.

“It’s a great town. It’s a well-maintained town with a lot of good people. It’s a walkable town. It’s got a wonderful park and a nice downtown business district, but the bottom line is the people. They are what make it the town that it is.”
— Dan Vogler, Lawrence County commissioner and former Wampum resident, of Ellwood City.

“They have revamped this store to look modern, but there is still old-looking wood. It’s fun and it’s really warm and welcoming and homey. There’s wooden floors. It’s like beachy almost. Like something you would find on a boardwalk.”
— Callie Steele, 18, of Ellwood City, with friend Garrett Jageman, 19, of Erie, attended the May 19 grand opening of Sweet Caroline’s at 507 Lawrence Ave.

“Usually, this isn’t appreciated, the art scene in Ellwood City. So this will expand a lot of influence around Ellwood City.”
— Alexis McClymonds, 24, of Ellwood City, who showcased her abstract Tiki-and-African-infused neon illustrations during the first “Art on the Avenue,” a July 28 fundraiser for the Ellwood City Public Library.

Students “were outside all day, breathing fresh Ellwood City air, and learning.”
— David DeCaro, a board member of the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce and creator of the Pride in Ellwood program on May 15-16 drew at least 460 fifth- and sixth-graders from the Ellwood City Area and Riverside school districts. The event included Park-A-Palooza in Ewing Park and a walking tour of the borough.

“I didn’t know there were this many artists in Ellwood City.”
— Artist Michelle Dobi, of Ellport, who displayed her ceramics and illustrations at the first “Art on the Avenue,” a July 28 fundraiser for the Ellwood City Public Library.

“Different. Very different from what they have today. It’s nostalgic, and reminds me of my grandparents. This is fun and exciting.”
— Jackie Rivas, of Ellwood City, who attended the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce’s third Stars and Stripes USO Dance on July 22 at the Sons of Italy Lodge 608 on Lawrence Avenue.

“When we pulled into the parking lot, I was like ‘Wow! This is packed! A lot of people.’”
— John Elms, of Brighton Township, Beaver County, who with his wife, Diane, were among the 325 guests Sept. 11 at the 12th Chef, Wine & Ale Event hosted by the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce.

“This project wouldn’t be as successful if it wasn’t for the support of the entire community.”
— Christina Handley, president of the nonprofit Allegheny Aquatic Alliance, an Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce member in Cranberry Township which on Aug. 19 cleaned an 18-mile stretch of the Connoquenessing Creek.

“I just walked past a woman who said, ‘This is fabulous. I didn’t think it was going to be this fabulous.’”
— Caroline Golmic, president of the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce, on Sept. 11.

“Ellwood City has a vibe, that it is alive. All the businesses, the small businesses, the restaurants. A lot of family owned businesses that have been here a long time. It is a very strong feeling of community here.”
— Curt Savage, of New Castle, who with his wife, Sharon, participated as storytellers in the Ellwood City Storytelling Festival, which drew 800 people to Ewing Park on Sept. 16.

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“A lot of my friends now are $30,000 in debt. I could not imagine trying to start my career with all of that debt in front of me.” — Janelle Fox, of Ellwood City, a sophomore at Butler County Community College who, like 75 percent of BC3 students, may graduate debt-free. BC3, an Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce member, was selected in October as the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania in a second consecutive survey conducted by Schools.com.

“I absolutely love it. I like the small businesses. I like the community feel of Ellwood City. I like to live in a community that is a little more tight-knit than what it was in Cranberry. That’s for sure.” — Josh Marshall, a visitor to the ninth Ellwood City Oktoberfest, which drew a record 957 guests to Ewing Park on Oct. 7.

“It’s a good place to come and raise your kids when you are starting a family. It is a tight community. Everyone knows each other. It’s a small place where you know where kids are.” — Caitlyn Razzani, 25, of Ellwood City, a visitor to the ninth Ellwood City Oktoberfest, which drew a record 957 guests to Ewing Park on Oct. 7.

“My family is here. I grew up here. We have been down there for a while and we kind of want to come back. The small town. People. Family. You know everybody. Down there you don’t really know anybody. I come here and see everybody I know. That is what I miss.” — Stephanie DeJohn, 27, a native of Ellwood City who has lived three years in North Carolina, and a visitor to the ninth Ellwood City Oktoberfest, which drew a record 957 guests to Ewing Park on Oct. 7.

“This also speaks to the commitment from the entire BC3 team to provide affordable, accessible and above all, quality education to the students we serve.” — Dr. Nick Neupauer, an Ellwood City native, 1985 graduate of Lincoln High School and president of Butler County Community College, an Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce member that in October was named the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania in a second consecutive survey conducted by Schools.com.

“Many other places, people are very closed off. They are not as welcoming and inviting. Everybody here has been over the top. Just awesome.” — Christine Confer, a native of Chicago, who with her husband, Pascal, has lived in Connecticut, New York, Maryland and Florida, and moved to Ellwood City from Miami three years ago.

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“I have many people come in and think that my shop is named for Los Angeles because of the relaxed yet glamorous vibe and the artwork that features Hollywood and music icons. I tell them that while that is the atmosphere I have created, it was named after Lawrence Avenue, which is truly the heart of Ellwood City and I thought it was the perfect name.” — Stacy Houk, owner of L.A. Cuts, which on April 2 marked its first anniversary at 726 Lawrence Ave.

“We wanted to open a business that could achieve three goals. Night-time hours, with a family-friendly atmosphere and one that would draw people to Lawrence Avenue. Ice cream fit the bill.” — Caroline Golmic, who with husband, Scott, opened Sweet Caroline’s at 507 Lawrence Ave. on May 19.

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“We have seen so many businesses just in the past six months coming to downtown Ellwood City. We’re hoping that it turns into a place where everyone wants to be.” — Kristen Campbell, who with Katie Weisz opened The Sweet Shop at 526 Lawrence Ave. in June.

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