

What's Happening?

...in Belleville



Scenes from various Greater Belleville Area Chamber of Commerce events, including the Chili Cook-off and Movies With Santa.

Greater Belleville Area Chamber enjoys return to a busier routine

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

After a crazy 18 months of being buttoned up, the Greater Belleville Area Chamber of Commerce is ready to burst out of its shell.

"We are moving forward, trying to get back to as much business as usual as we can," said Chamber President and CEO Wendy Pfeil.

Hottest on the horizon is the Belleville Chili Cook-off, which is slated Oct. 8 and 9. It is the organization's biggest fund-raiser of the year and a major catalyst for the nonprofit groups that participate or benefit.

Also back in the mix are the regular Business after Hours and Coffee Cup Connections get-togethers.

All involved are mindful of the ongoing health guidelines surrounding the pandemic, Pfeil said.

"It's been a challenge to plan for things. Everyone keeps waiting for the other shoe to drop. But ev-

ery time we've checked in with the state, they've assured us that no new restrictions are coming down."

The Chili Cook-off is an outside event "and as long as everything follows the guidelines set up by the state, we should be good to go," she said.

The event was not held last year. But most vendors from the previous year are coming back and a few spots have been eliminated so things could be spread out more. At capacity, the event this year can accommodate 50 vendors.

The event is held in downtown around the fountain at Illinois and Main streets, with people fanning out for blocks. People come from miles away.

"We have one family that flies in from California; it's their homecoming week," Pfeil said. "They checked to make sure we were having it."

The event could raise as much as \$100,000, which goes back to the community. If a vendor raises, say, \$10,000, that money eventually goes back to that vendor for charitable purposes.



Belleville Firefighters Local 53, for instance, raises money for its union's benevolent fund. Beckett's Kick Chili raises money for the Children's Dyslexia Center in Collinsville. Ellis Grove firefighters raise money for their fire department equipment fund. Boy Scout Troops 53 and 553 in Belleville also participate. The list goes on.

The event will be from 11 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. both days.

The Chamber's business networking is also coming back in earnest, Pfeil said.

"We had our Annual Dinner in July; it is normally in January. We had it in The Edge, where there is only so many people allowed. By the time we had it all the restrictions had been lifted. We wanted to have 100 to 150 people. We actually had 320. It was a great evening."

The first Business After Hours in July had about 100 people. The session was the first one since things shut down in March 2020.

Leadership Belleville, a training program coordinated for the community through the Chamber, is also getting underway. This year's full class will have more than 20 participants.

"It's been a challenging 20 months, I'm not going to lie," Pfeil said. "Do we do it? Do we not do it? Do we hold off? It seems we've been waiting until the last moment to get things done that we would plan for months in advance."

What's Happening In ...?

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