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May, 2026



# *Altoona Proud*

A Monthly Insight into all that is Altoona

## May is Mental Health Awareness Month

Since 1949, Mental Health Awareness Month has been observed in the United States during the month of May. Its purpose is to educate the public about mental illness, raise awareness about research and treatment, reduce the stigma that surrounds mental illness and celebrate those in recovery. While knowledge has increased significantly over the years regarding mental illness, its signs and effects, there are still many negative attitudes and misconceptions around mental health conditions today. This year's theme is "More Good Days, Together".

The National Institute of Mental Health states that roughly 20% of adults in the U.S. are living with a mental health disorder, with anxiety disorder being the most common. This statistic serves to stress the need for accessible, coordinated and effective care. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) website, [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org) provides more information on mental health issues.

This month, in recognition of Mental Health Awareness Month, the lights outside of City Hall will be green, the symbolic color for this month. On May 21<sup>st</sup>, the Altoona Curve will host a Mental Health Awareness Night. Over 25 agencies will be there with information about available community resources. Throughout the month of May, Lunch and Learn trainings will be offered throughout the City to provide even more information and strategies around the issues of mental health. To see the schedule of trainings and to register, call 814-693-3023 or email [cjames@blaircountypa.gov](mailto:cjames@blaircountypa.gov)



### **What can we do?**

- Volunteer for organizations that address the issue of mental health in your community.
- Pay attention to loved ones and those around you. If you think someone is struggling, reach out.
- Don't be afraid to reach out for help, using resources such as the National Suicide and Crisis Hotline, available by dialing or texting **988**.

## Blair Creators Festival

Saturday, May 2, 2026 marks the fifth annual Blair Creators Festival at Heritage Plaza, located at 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 14<sup>th</sup> Street in downtown Altoona. Presented by ArtsAltoona and the Penn State Altoona Sheetz Fellows, this family-friendly festival will be held from 11:00 AM - 7:00 PM

Heritage Plaza will be transformed into a lively hub of art, music, food and creativity, with local artisans and vendors, food trucks and drink booths, activities for the whole family and musical performances throughout the day, including Wanderlost, Jimmy Mowery, Ethan Eckenroad and more.



The festival helps to support ArtsAltoona programs that are offered free to the community, providing creative opportunities that would otherwise not be available. These programs include art classes, after-school arts programs and summer arts programs for area youth, giving them not only positive and productive activities, but developing their confidence, talent and social skills through the arts.

## SAMA Art For Your Heart 5K Run / Walk



The Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art (SAMA) is celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2026. SAMA has 4 locations - Ligonier, Bedford, Johnstown and the Altoona location, on 1210 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue, the former Brett Building. Through donations, memberships and events, the Museum provides free or low-cost educational services, cultural event programming, and regional art exhibits.

SAMA's Art For Your Heart Run / Walk will be held on Saturday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>. The Race begins at 9:00 AM at SAMA Altoona, with the awards ceremony at 10:00 AM in Heritage Plaza on 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue & 14<sup>th</sup> Street. Awards will be given to the top three males and females in each age category.

Pre-registration, which ends May 22<sup>nd</sup>, is \$25 per person for the run or walk. Registration will also be available the day of the Race, beginning at 7:00 AM, for \$35 per person. All proceeds benefit the work of the Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art.

Information, including age groups and race packet pickup information is available at [www.sama-art.org/race](http://www.sama-art.org/race). You can register online at [www.runsignup.com/Race/Register/](http://www.runsignup.com/Race/Register/) or on race day. Run with a purpose and support SAMA's commitment to lace up, and let your heart beat for the arts!

## Blair Go Red For Women

Cardiovascular disease continues to be the number one killer of women, and it does not discriminate by age, race, or economic status. The annual Blair Go Red for Women event, which benefits the American Heart Association, will be held on Thursday, May 21<sup>st</sup> from 5:00 PM – 9:00 PM at the Blair County Convention Center at 1 Convention Drive in Altoona. For more information on the event, auctions or to purchase tickets, visit [www.ahaaltoona.ejoinme.org/MyEvents](http://www.ahaaltoona.ejoinme.org/MyEvents)



## Altoona Farmers Market

The weekly Altoona Farmers Market at Heritage Plaza in downtown Altoona will be opening on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2026! The market has grown to become a highly anticipated and well-attended event, open every Thursday from 11:00 AM – 2:00 PM through October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2026. The market will feature past favorites, as well as new vendors, with local vegetables, fruits, meats, flowers, honey, soaps, syrups, coffees and more. There will also be lots of food choices for hot lunch or a snack! You can also order online by visiting <http://blairmarkets.com>

### ALTOONA FARMERS MARKET

Thurs, May 14th  
First market of the season!



Thursdays 11-2pm  
Heritage Plaza, Altoona

For information about becoming a vendor, or for general information, contact [chersmear@gmail.com](mailto:chersmear@gmail.com). You can also stay up-

to-date on what's happening at the market by visiting their Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/altoonafarmersmarket](http://www.facebook.com/altoonafarmersmarket). Help support our local farmers and craftsmen by making a trip to the market a weekly activity!!

## Deb Stitt Memorial Golf Outing

The Blair Emergency Services Chaplain Platoon (BESCP) has opened registration for the 2026 Deb Stitt Memorial Golf Outing, scheduled for July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2026 at the King Valley Golf Course, located at 132 King Valley Drive in Imler, PA. The event honors Deb Stitt, a police officer for 28 years, who left us too soon.

The outing begins at 8:00 AM, with contests, prizes, great food, and plenty of opportunities to prove that your slice is actually "strategic course management". You don't have to be a good golfer to play, just a good sport!



The cost is \$400 per team (or \$100 per golfer) and includes 18 holes, lunch, a golf cart and bragging rights! Registration will also be available on the day of the outing, at \$125 per golfer. The event is also looking for sponsors. If your business or organization would like to help this important cause, BESCP needs and appreciates your sponsorship. ALL proceeds fund support services for our first responders.

First responders respond quickly to all emergencies, fires, accidents and other community safety concerns. They see trauma and tragedy each and every day and, as a result, these vital workers can experience high levels of anxiety, stress, depression, mental health issues and thoughts of self-harm. During this Mental Health Awareness Month, you can help by supporting important services for these front line workers.

The men and women of BESCP support our local heroes through counseling, pastoring, suicide awareness programs and many other services. Their funding comes entirely from local gifts and fund-raising events. They need the community's help to continue to offer these life-saving services to those who, in turn, work to save the lives of our community.

To register, visit the BESCP Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/BESCP](http://www.facebook.com/BESCP).

**COME OUT AND SUPPORT THE BLAIR EMERGENCY SERVICES CHAPLAIN PLATOON!**

# Memorial Day Parade



The 2026 Memorial Day Parade in Altoona will be held on Monday, May 25<sup>th</sup>, beginning at 10:30 AM. Sponsored by the Blair County War Veterans Council and the City of Altoona, the parade will form at 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 17<sup>th</sup> Street and follow a route to 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue to 12<sup>th</sup> Street to 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue to Robert E. Laws Veterans Mall, for a short service immediately following the parade.

There is also a Memorial Day Parade in the Juniata area of Altoona on May 25<sup>th</sup>, beginning at 9:30 AM. Sponsored by the VFW Unit 25, the parade will commence from North 8<sup>th</sup> Street and North 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue. In this year of our 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a Country, come out to remember the many veterans who have given their lives for the freedoms we enjoy, and to honor those who continue to serve.

On Sunday evening, May 24<sup>th</sup>, Levery Brewing Co. will host a Memorial Day Eve outdoor concert in the lot behind Levery in downtown Altoona, featuring Buster Crow. The concert begins at 6:00 PM and ends at 9:00 PM.



Established in 1994, Leadership Blair County works to identify, educate and motivate the area's promising leaders and prepares them for service to our community in a variety of important roles. Through sessions, often using the community itself as the classroom, future leaders develop the necessary skills to become effective community leaders.

The Leadership Blair County Class of 2026 is proud to present the "Together for 250 Bash" on Saturday, June 6<sup>th</sup> at the Jaffa Shrine in Altoona, with an evening of food, fun, and fundraising. This special event brings residents together to celebrate our shared history while making a meaningful impact close to home.



Proceeds from the Bash will benefit Sweat for Vets and support the launch of its new Homeless Veterans' Program. This initiative is designed to provide critical resources, support, and pathways to stability for veterans in our community who are facing housing insecurity. Funds raised through this event will serve as seed money to help bring the program to life and create lasting change.

The "Together for 250 Bash" will feature live entertainment, yard games, various ways to win, and a spirited atmosphere that reflects the pride and resilience of Blair County. More than just a celebration, the event is an opportunity for the community to come together in support of those who have served our country. Food and Beer are included with your ticket.

Join us on June 6<sup>th</sup> as we celebrate, give back, and take an important step toward supporting local veterans in need. Tickets are available from any class member, Mike Kesslering at [mkesslering@altoonacurve.com](mailto:mkesslering@altoonacurve.com), the Jaffa Shrine office, or at [JaffaShriners.org](http://JaffaShriners.org)

## Know Your City

Our past newsletters have highlighted the departments located within the walls of City Hall. Another department that works equally hard, and may be more visible to the general public than most, is our amazing Altoona Fire Department!

The mission of the Altoona Fire Department (AFD) is to protect the community by responding to traditional fire and rescue hazards. In 2025, that service alone resulted in over 3,000 incidents to which the AFD responded. But that is only one way in which they serve our community.

During Fire Prevention Month in October, members of the AFD visit schools and daycares to talk about fire safety, reaching almost 2,500 students with these important messages. In addition to students, AFD staff provide fire prevention education to almost 2,000 adults annually. In 2025 alone, the AFD taught CPR to 65 individuals, installed smoke detectors in 24 homes and attended community events that impacted an additional 2,500 people, while also completing the 128 training hours required annually for each firefighter. In 2026, this training time will increase to 150 hours per firefighter.

Through grant funding, the AFD has recently been able to enhance fire station security across all four fire stations and replace two engines that reached the end of their service life. This is in line with the AFD's ongoing efforts to have the highest safety and equipment standards possible.

The members of the AFD still manage to find time for charitable work for local organizations, such as the Mountain Lion Backpack Program, Caring Hands and Family Services of Blair County. Through events like their annual golf tournament, the "Guns and Hoses" charity ice hockey game against the Altoona Police Department and community donations of food and winter coats for children in need, they show their compassion for the ongoing needs of our citizens. There is no greater example of this compassion than their participation in the "Because We Care" program, which provides personalized teddy bears to children encountered during emergency calls, to help reduce their trauma.

Thank You to all of the members of our Altoona Fire Department!



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