

## BOB BLAIR LOOKS BACK TIOGA COUNTY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Posted by Caleb Williams on Aug 01, 2016



**Dick Ford** introduced his guest, Bob Blair. It turns out Bob and Dick are distantly related as cousins, but no one asked for a clarification.... Dick said that Bob was born and raised in Wellsboro, and has spent his whole career in Economic Development, first with Northern Tier Regional Planning and Development Corporation, and the last 25 years with the Tioga County Development Corporation (TCDC).

Bob said that his job is so varied and diverse that he has spent the last 35 years trying to explain to his children exactly what he does. He related a story that has been an emotional anchor his whole career. Early on, he was visiting a sheltered workshop for handicapped people on payday, and he asked one particular individual with special needs what he was going to do with his first pay check. The man replied without hesitation, “Buy a bike, so that I don’t have to walk to work!” Whenever the going got tough for Bob, that story has kept him focused on how his work benefits people by giving under-served people the chance to do business, earn money, and pay for the things they need.

TCDC was started in 1984 with an initial grant of \$34,000. Bob has seen it grow to be self-supporting with income from fees, interest payments, property rentals, corporate sponsorships, and the memberships of local businesses. Since 1998, they have made 62 loans. At a meeting this morning, the board approved loans amounting to five hundred and thirty five thousand dollars.

Among the programs and accomplishments of TCDC, Bob began with the “leadership Tioga” program led by Christie Blackwell. 571 students and adults have gone thru this program. The

establishment of a foundation to funnel money to charitable causes has been an important community resource. The “Buy Tioga” campaign has helped local businesses. The move of TCDC to become a property owner has taken a lot of Bob’s time over the last several years. The old elementary school in Elkland, built in 1957, was the first purchase. It now has 16 suites, of which 10 are occupied, and includes the first art gallery in the Valley, working with local art teachers and artists to display their work. It was in the black by the end of its third year. Another huge project, taking 9 years to gain ownership, is the conversion of the defunct Westfield Tannery grounds into the Westfield Business Park. The project has just received “Act 2 Clearance,” which means that the site is free of pollution hazards, and any business that does locate there would not be found liable if some other source of pollution is discovered down the road. There has been some demolition already, but 4 buildings will remain, with a total of 400,000 sq. ft. of factory space. TCDC has also played a pivotal role in the building of the Northern Tier Welcome Center, and the Mill Cove Environmental Center. The I-99 corridor designation has meant that the 55 miles of old Route 15 thru Tioga County that connects I-86 in New York to I-180 in Williamsport is now eligible for additional federal funding for maintenance, and improvements such as interchange lighting.

Bob will retire at the end of August, and the new CEO, John Bry, will start on August first, so there will be a couple of weeks overlap to bring him up to speed. Bob said he is very satisfied with the end results of the work he has done.



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[CLUB NEWS JULY 28, 2016](#)

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The meeting was led by **President Mike Hummel**

Invocation- **Ardel Thomas**

**Pat Davis** led the club with My Country 'Tis of Thee

Secretary Report /Club Announcements **Jim Tutak:**

The Senior Expo is to be held at the High School next week, and Rotary will have a booth there to raise awareness of our activities. A sign-up sheet for manning the booth was passed around.

Our next years incoming foreign exchange student will arrive from Taiwan on August 14<sup>th</sup>. We will have a get together on September 10<sup>th</sup> at the Cellar Restaurant in Corning as an opportunity for the Club to meet him.

September 13, 14, and 15 will mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rotary Seniors Golf Tournament. Application forms have arrived, and are being sent out.

**Dick Ford** served as Sergeant at Arms today. He heard Bob say that Dick has been retired for more years than Bob has worked, so Dick did some calculations and found that Bob was right! Jim Meade gave 20 Happy bucks for a new grandson, "Oscar." Ardell had a medical procedure and found out everything is "OK!"

The **50/50 Raffle** benefits HAVEN of Tioga County, and was won by **Dick Ford**, who donated his winnings back to the barrel.

On August 11<sup>th</sup>, Brenda Freeman, the new Superintendent of Schools, will visit the Club.