

A photograph of five hands of different skin tones clasped together in a circle, symbolizing unity and teamwork. The hands are positioned in the center of the page, with the fingers interlocking. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

# WORKING TOGETHER

## 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

A Partnership That Works - Berks County Businesses + The Education Community

## 2. Berks Business Education Coalition | A Partnership That Works



My 2022 annual report comments noted that the Berks Business Education Coalition was at an inflection point in our then thirty-year history. This proved an accurate observation. Looking at activities in 2023, of significance, we ushered in our fourth Executive Director, Teresa (Terri) Hill. Additionally, with the help and input from many, we complete our Strategic plan working with Al Weber from the consulting firm of Tweed Weber Danks.

Terri Hill has proved to be a wonderful and resourceful Executive Director. She has quickly integrated herself in both education and business communities. A highly effective communicator and self-starter, Terri has added new discipline and insight to our key programs including: Inside Berks Business, teachers pursuing summer internships in Berks businesses; Students Interacting with Business, students visiting Berks Businesses in small groups to explore career paths; and, Higher Education Visits, students visiting local colleges and universities to understand what a prospective college experience might entail. Our Executive Director has been asked to join a number of community committees related to education advancement, a testimony to how quickly she has assimilated. Thanks to Terri's efforts we have ramped up the quality and content of our programs.

Looking forward, we completed our strategic plan. The plan will guide our actions and tactics going forward. Five key strategies for the future are included in the plan. We will:

- Develop and launch programs the Berks community needs to provide employment opportunities for graduating students and workforce solutions for employers
- Inform and engage the families of students regarding career-related activities
- Promote and support early childhood learning
- Assess our current membership model and redesign it
- Raise additional funds to support current and future work

We added new directors to our board during 2023 and said farewell to retiring directors. We thank them all for their service to BBEC.

The BBEC is at the dawn of a new era. We have all the key ingredients needed for success: a dynamic Executive Director, a sound achievable, strategic plan and a community highly supportive of our activities. Our future is quite bright. Many thanks to all supporting and influencing our efforts.

**John P. Weidenhammer**



With any new adventure, the first year is consumed with understanding where you are now and the requirements for maintaining the programs. It also provides an opportunity to set the course for a new direction.

We knew that it would take a lot of collaboration and cooperation to make progress. So, our theme for the 2023 report is Working Together. It's only through our combined efforts that the BBEC impact can improve.

- We worked with our board of directors to create a strategic plan.
- We worked with our school districts, especially our internship coordinators, to improve and expand the programs and experiences we provide to students.
- We worked with community organizations to understand how we each support business and education and how we can work together to better serve our constituents.

Our annual report highlights some of the unexpected partnerships created through internships; a business perspective on why they participate in Students Interacting with Business as well as a school's viewpoint on why they continue to send students on tours.

In addition, I am excited to share the initiatives identified in our strategic plan. I am grateful for the BBEC's Board of Directors. Without their support and especially the guidance of John Weidenhammer, BBEC Board Chair, I would not have been able to step in and rise up to the challenges and opportunities for the organization.

Lastly, this year's report was designed by a student from the Berks Career and Technology Center. We felt that this opportunity exemplified the mission of the organization. I want to thank Ms. Beth Ireland, instructor, and Hailey Lupold, student designer, for their work. I also want to thank Ms. Julie Bunnick from BCIU who shared her knowledge regarding the design process and created the previous annual reports.

**Terri Hill**

**“ We are focused on facilitating and supporting member schools' efforts to improve career planning, academic performance, and higher education enrollment of students in Berks County. ”**



## Membership & Support

Albright College	Deitsch Eck Restaurant	Muhlenberg Greene Architects
Alvernia University	Diocese of Allentown	Muhlenberg School District
Alvernia University O' Pake Center	DoubleTree by Hilton, Reading	NeoPangea
American Crane	East Penn Manufacturing Company, Inc.	New Castle Lawn & Landscaping
Animal Rescue League	Electro Space Fabricators	Oley Valley School District
Antietam School District	EnerSys	Opportunity House
Bally Ribbon	Entech Engineering	PA Americana
Berks Arts Council	Exeter Township School District	Penn State Berks
Berks Career & Technology Center	Family Guidance Center	Penn State Health St. Joseph Medical Center
Berks County Agricultural Center	Fleetwood Area School District	Penske Truck Leasing Co.
Berks County Intermediate Unit	Fraser Advanced Information Systems	Reading Area Community College
Berks County Dept of Aging	Fulton Bank	Reading Muhlenberg Career & Technology Center
Berks County Dept of Mental Health	Gage Personnel	Reading Public Museum
Berks County Workforce Development Board	Governor Mifflin School District	Reading School District
Berks Fire Water Restoration	Greater Reading Chamber Alliance	Riverfront Federal Credit Union
Berks Nature	Hamburg Area School District	Santander Arena
Brentwood Industries	Herbein+Company, Inc.	Schuylkill Valley School District
Brandywine Heights Area School District	IBEW Local 743	Sealstrip Co[rporation
Cambridge Lee	Jerlyn Foundation	Tompkins Community Bank
Carpenter Technology Corporation	Kutztown Area School District	Tower Health
Catherine V. & Martin W. Hofmann Foundation	Kutztown University	Tulpehocken Area School District
CMC Milling	LJ's Fitness	Twin Valley School District
Conrad Weiser Area School District	Lords & Ladies Salon & Medical Spa	UGI Energy Services
Crownstone Equipment/Bobcat of Reading	M&T Bank	UGI Utilities, Inc.
Customers Bank	Marlin Miller, Jr. Family Foundation	Weidenhammer
Daniel Boone Area School District	Met-Ed, A First Energy Company	Wilson School District
	Mitsubishi Chemical Advanced Materials	WORLD electronics
		Wyomissing Area School District

# 2023 STRATEGIC PLAN

## GOALS

1. Promote career awareness and development programs for students in Berks County.
2. Support member schools in the effort to improve basic academic performance.
3. Promote appropriate, differentiated interest in pursuit of post-secondary education.
4. Facilitate continuing dialogue between, with, and among Pre-K, K-12, and higher-ed.
5. Support initiatives to assure quality Pre-K education is available for all 3-5 year-olds in Berks, particularly those who are disadvantaged or at-risk.
6. Provide for the viability and sustainability of Coalition programs and services.

## MISSION

*The mission of the Berks Business Education Coalition is to develop and to coordinate programs within the business and education communities which improve the competencies of students and ensure that they have the aspirations, skills, and knowledge to plan appropriately for their lives after high school.*

The BBEC used the recent leadership change as an opportunity to review our body of work and its impact; and set the focus for the future. Strategic planning was led by **Al Weber** at Tweed Weber Danks. A big thank you goes to the board of directors and especially **John Weidenhammer**, Chairman of the board, for their time and input on the initiatives.

**Long-Range Strategies (2023-2026):** Over the next three years, BBEC will focus on strategies to align programs with the needs of the Berks community. This includes the development of tailored employment opportunities for graduating students and workforce solutions for employers.

A key aspect of this strategy involves reshaping the Students Interacting with Business (SIWB) and Higher Education Campus Visits programs for enhanced student engagement.

### 2023 – 2024 Objectives:

- Assess and address the career development needs of Berks County students, leveraging their 339 Plans.
- Collaborate with district superintendents to identify specific needs, interests, and solutions.
- Enhance SIWB and Higher Education programs through a comprehensive assessment and adjustment.
- Collaborate with local businesses to support BBEC’s programmatic initiatives, starting with select school districts as a pilot program.
- Develop a method to help districts identify potential business partners within their districts.
- Inform and engage the families of students involved in career-related activities. Key objectives for 2023-2024 include defining best practices and implementing them across Berks County school districts.
- Be a leading advocate for early childhood learning. Objectives for the next year involve assessing current activities, identifying gaps, and supporting organizations like BCIU and ELIC to address these gaps.

**Critical Measures of Success:** To gauge the success of its strategic plan, BBEC will monitor critical measures, including the number of programs launched or redesigned, student participation, stakeholder satisfaction, family engagement, early childhood initiatives’ impact, engagement levels of school-based career counselors, and financial contributions from members and supporters. These metrics will be regularly reviewed by the leadership and board to ensure progress towards the organization’s goals.

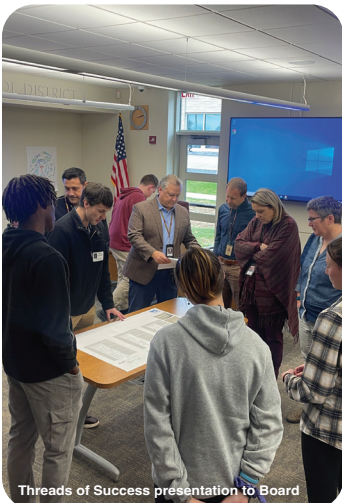
If you’d like to see the entire report, please visit [www.berksbec.org](http://www.berksbec.org).

# INTERNSHIP PLACEMENTS

## FALL

## SPRING

Seniors	External	Internal	School	Seniors	External	Internal
546	36	38	Boyertown Area SD	512	36	38
110	11	3	Brandywine Heights HS	126	12	4
196	19	9	Conrad Weiser Area SD	175	28	7
274	37	16	Daniel Boone Area HS	269	10	21
333	22	39	Exeter HS	322	14	56
191	9	5	Fleetwood HS	226	9	1
360	67	15	Governor Mifflin HS	383	60	19
176	8	9	Hamburg Area HS	165	7	2
120	9	9	Kutztown Area SD	92	4	3
376	33	18	Muhlenberg SD	368	1	4
122	5	14	Oley Valley SD	134	6	17
855	162	21	Reading SD	1227	224	36
159	5	37	Schuylkill Valley SD	151	4	28
109	29	5	Tulpehocken HS	104	21	7
247	47	11	Twin Valley HS	245	78	29
499	99	59	Wilson SD	493	131	42
135	8	20	Wyomissing Area HS	141	9	17
<b>4808</b>	<b>606</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>4713</b>	<b>654</b>	<b>331</b>



# INTERNSHIPS

## The Impact of Internships on Local Business

Five years ago, Suzanne Cody discussed her firm's internship program with the leadership team. MG Architects had longstanding relationships with schools that taught technical skills for the architectural industry, but these connections had evolved. Reinvigorating local partnerships became a new priority.

Suzanne's strategy was to contact business education coordinators at Berks County schools in search of students interested in pursuing architectural degrees. She knew that MG Architects could augment their education while fostering long-term talent acquisition. This strategy often resulted in additional engagement with Principals, Facilities Management, and Board Members who were directly involved in campus planning for the future.

The internship program at the firm provides students with real-world projects, assistance with LinkedIn profile development, and industry-based software skills. In preparation for networking, students practice their elevator speeches, trade business cards, and participate in mock events. When ready, they attend networking events organized by the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance, the American Businesswomen's Association, and other local or regional clubs, societies, and groups. These experiences provide students an opportunity to practice sharing information about their professional selves, to discuss their professional interests, and to connect with others in the community.

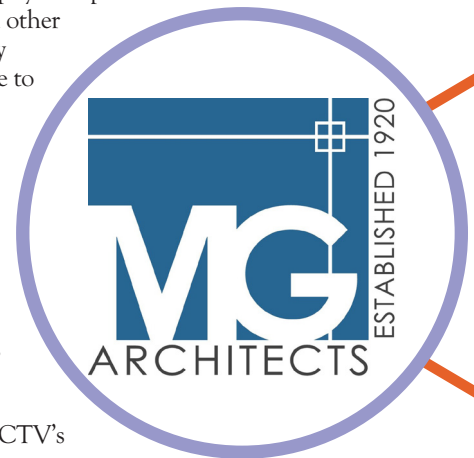
Participating in the firm's real-world projects allows students to build their portfolio, and take part in client-facing experiences. **Ryan Oxenreider**, a 2023 intern and Conrad Weiser High School senior, is currently working on a collaborative project with Governor Mifflin Area School District that is addressing the needs of students experiencing homelessness. A student-led start up nonprofit group called **Threads of Success** on the GMASD campus is working



Threads of Success students and teacher supervisors

with Ryan to design a physical space for food, clothing, and other resources students may need in order continue to attend school.

Ryan's presentation and public relations skills were also boosted when he was interviewed for an article in the *Reading Eagle*, presented to the Board of Directors for the BBEC, and most recently spoke about his project on BCTV's community television program *County Kids*, *City Kids*, *All the Kids that Make a Difference*.



**Breckyn Donate**, another MG Architects intern, and a senior at Exeter High School is currently working on a design for local nonprofit *Opportunity House*. The organization is planning their 40th *Souper Bowl* fundraiser and is moving it to the Penn State Berks campus for the first time. Breckyn is using her design skills to lay out the event furnishings, vendor tables, attendee flow, and pottery bowl displays. During this process, she has participated in the committee's monthly meetings, presented drafts of floor plans, and revised plans based on recommendations by the committee. She will see her plans become reality at the event on February 5th.

The internship program has resulted in new hires, summer interns, plus visibility and community building opportunities that contribute to attracting and retaining new talent and clients. Contact **Suzanne Cody**, Firm Associate and Director of Business Development at Muhlenberg Greene Architects, to learn more about the internship program at [suzannec@mg-architects.com](mailto:suzannec@mg-architects.com) or via LinkedIn.



Ryan Oxenreider, Conrad Weiser High School Senior, at a GRCA networking event with former intern and new hire, Jacob Sockel, who interned with the firm for two years and graduated from Marywood University last spring with a Bachelor of Architecture. Jacob is a graduate of Berks Catholic.

## Threads of Success

There are two phrases that are associated with our educational experience at Mustang Nation. “Total Experience Learning®” is the motto associated with Governor Mifflin School District’s learning model, and “Your Passion is our Purpose” is the slogan embraced by every educator in the district. This is especially well represented by the internship

program in which around 100 Junior and Senior students participate and gain invaluable experiences that will stick with them for the entirety of their lives.

My name is **Emma Strunk**, and I am one of these students. As a junior, I began to take an interest in psychology and embarked on a journey to provide service to others. During my pursuit, I struggled to find an initiative that was willing to take on a high school intern. Undeterred, I chose to view these rejections as an inspirational blessing and take this opportunity to build something from the ground up. Threads of Success is a passion project born from the dedication and desire of a small group of students who aim to change the mindset of those around them and erase the stigma surrounding mental health, poverty, and education.

Our organization began with months of brainstorming, research, and planning, and with the support of Governor Mifflin’s Internship Coordinator **Ms. Bonanno**, and Social Worker **Ashley Berg**, we slowly added interns and built connections to our team. Each member of our team comes from a different background and provides a diverse and insightful perspective on the issue we are tackling. Together we have formulated a complete business plan

detailing the visions, goals, and aspirations of Threads of Success and presented numerous formal pitches to councils and organizations in our community. We described our plan for creating a space in our high school where students in need can access resources to help them thrive, this includes clothing items, food, school supplies, job and internship opportunities, and mental health resources.



Ryan visiting Threads of Success site

This project will not only aid in providing a solid foundation for the lives of many students but has also fostered connections between interns at Governor Mifflin and Conrad Weiser. Student **Ryan Oxenreider**, an intern with Muhlenberg Greene Architects, along with his mentors **Brad Blankenbiller** and **Suzanne Cody**, have collaborated with us and drawn up plans for the future home of Threads of Success. Their assistance on this project has been a wonderful learning experience for everyone involved and together we hope to continue to make an impact in our community and in the lives of students everywhere. Thanks to the support of the internship program, the vision of Threads of Success is able to become a reality and provide students with the means to build a successful life.

**By Emma Strunk, Governor Mifflin HS Junior and co-founder of Threads of Success**



TOS 3D perspective



# STUDENTS INTERACTING WITH BUSINESS

## New Castle Lawn & Landscape Inc.: Our Partnership with BBEC

At New Castle Lawn & Landscape, we believe that a strong workforce is key to a strong community. This mindset is what drives our participation in the Berks Business Education Coalition's "Students Interacting with Business" program where we invite students to our facility to give them real-world insights into our business.

Why would we do this? Very simply put, we recognize that today's students are tomorrow's workforce. By providing a practical, in person look into our company, we're not only contributing to their perspective of the workforce but also investing in the future of our own industry. Having a young, fresh perspective about our company also provides us with feedback about what the next wave of labor is looking for in a career and what they value in an employer.

Moreover, this program allows us to give back to the community that has supported us over the years. By helping local students, we help build a stronger, more skilled future workforce for Berks County. It's a way for us to show our gratitude and influence our future workforce.

A key aspect of our student visits is to show the diverse range of opportunities at New Castle. Landscaping is not just about

working outdoors; it encompasses a variety of roles such as sales, business administration, and mechanics. We try to open students' eyes to these unexpected career paths, showing them that a company like New Castle provides multiple ways to build a fulfilling career other than the obvious. We believe this perspective is vital, helping students realize that their future can take many forms and that there is a wealth of options beyond their initial thoughts.

Partnering with BBEC makes New Castle more than just a business in Berks County. We are an active participant in shaping its future. That's a responsibility we take on with pride.

**Dan Marshall, VP Operations**  
New Castle Lawn & Landscape Inc.



Andy Auchenbach demonstrating safe climbing.



Mark Swartley discussing design and installation.

## Students Interacting with Business

has been an important way that we support the schools in career exploration. Typically, students in 9th grade or who are undecided upperclassmen are invited to visit a business to learn about the industry and careers, as well as the company itself.

I asked **Mark Ricketts**, internship coordinator from Exeter School District, to share why his students participate each year. This year Mark chaperoned the student tour of Mitsubishi Chemical.

**Mark Ricketts:** "The value of these visits was twofold. Students were able to hear about and see a business and its workers in action. This allowed our students to find out about many varied jobs and positions needed to allow a business to succeed. More importantly, it was a chance to begin the thought process of what the students are looking for in a future career. The students and I looked at what types of work

and activities at this site were appealing and unappealing, what impressions of the business' culture we had, and how people were able to grow their careers and move up through the company. Students learned they didn't necessarily need a college degree to be successful."



Exeter, as well as most schools, requires the students to reflect on their visit.

- What types of work/activities appealed to you?
- What types of work/activities "turned you off"?
- Do you like the culture or feeling on site? Provide 2 examples that were positive or negative.
- How do people grow in their careers and move to what they want?

Answers varied, but quite a few of the students were interested in the actual manufacturing of the plastics. Some were "turned off" by the sales job because they didn't want to sit at a desk. Most felt that the culture of the company was positive and that the company helped their people grow by offering programs and rewarding their hard work.

Overall, the visit seemed to have the impact that we were looking for: an opportunity for students to explore careers in local industries and to understand what education, skills and talents were needed for success.



Sample of products made at Mitsubishi Chemical.



Ruben Cruz sharing his story from temp employee to supervisor.

# STUDENTS INTERACTING WITH BUSINESSES

Spring and Fall Programs

SPRING DATES: APRIL 24-28

**2,090 STUDENTS**  
FROM 14 SCHOOLS

FALL DATES: NOV. 1-16

**700 STUDENTS**  
FROM 3 SCHOOLS

## THANK YOU TO THE BUSINESSES THAT PARTICIPATED IN OUR 2023 PROGRAM

Bally Ribbon, New Castle Landscaping, American Crane, Lords and Ladies Salon, CMC Milling, Sunsweet, SealStrip, Crownstone Equipment/Bobcat of Reading, UGI Utilities, UGI Energy Services, East Penn Mfg., Alvernia O'Pake Institute, Animal Rescue League, Berks Fire Water Restorations, Berks Nature, Brentwood Ind., Cambridge Lee, County of Berks Ag Center, Doubletree of Reading, EnerSys, First Energy, Mitsubishi Chemical, Opportunity House, Penn State St. Joseph, World Electronics, IBEW Local 743, ElectroSpace Fabricators, Tower Health, LJ's Fitness, Customers Bank, Riverfront Federal Credit Union



## HIGHER EDUCATION VISITS

Spring Programs - Feb. - April

Each year, BBEC coordinates campus visits to our local universities for our county's 9th grade students. Teachers have said that 9th grade encourages students to begin applying themselves now to their studies. They understand the impact and importance of working now rather than later in order to get accepted to the school of their choice.

**3,448 STUDENTS**  
FROM 16 SCHOOLS

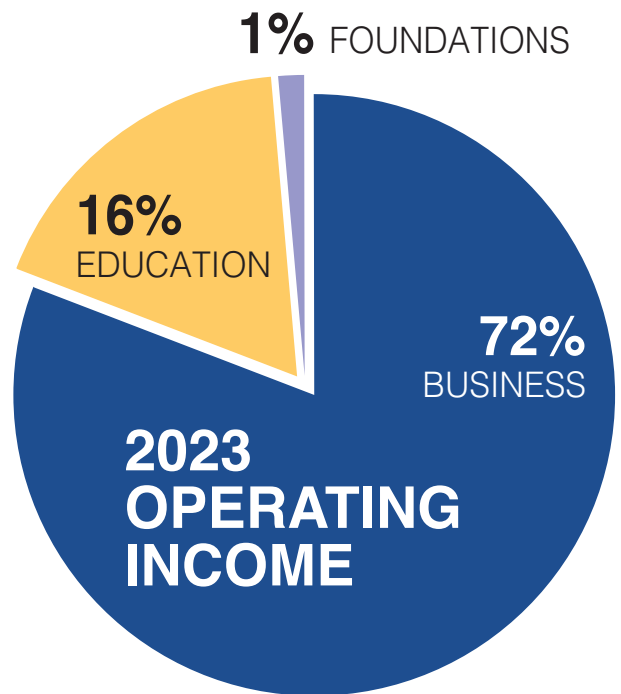
Antietam, Brandywine Heights, Daniel Boone Area, Exeter Township, Fleetwood Area, Governor Mifflin, Hamburg Area, Kutztown Area, Muhlenberg, Oley Valley, Reading, Schuylkill Valley, Tulpehocken Area, Twin Valley, Wyomissing, BCIU's Thomas Ford Academy.

## PARTICIPATING HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS



# 2023 FINANCIAL REPORT

Operations	2022	2023
<b>Operating Income:</b>		
Business	\$82,500	\$86,275
Education	\$18,900	\$19,500
Foundations	\$3,000	\$11,200
Grants	\$0	\$0
Interest on Savings	\$305	\$2,896
<b>Total Operating Income</b>	<b>\$104,705</b>	<b>\$119,871</b>
<b>Operating Expenses:</b>		
Salaries and Benefits	\$55,569	\$86,387
Other Operating Supplies & Expenses	\$45,662	\$37,221
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>\$101,251</b>	<b>\$123,608</b>
Operating Gain (Loss)	\$3,454	(\$3,737)



## INSIDE BERKS BUSINESS

Program Dates - August 3-5, 2023

**36** Educators Registered

**15** Businesses Participated

### OUR THANKS TO THE BUSINESSES THAT PARTICIPATED IN OUR 2023 PROGRAM:

- |  |                                 |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Berks Arts Council                     | NeoPangea                       |
| County of Berks                        | Opportunity House               |
| DoubleTree by Hilton & Santander Arena | Reading Public Musuem           |
| Gage Personnel                         | Riverfront Federal Credit Union |
| Met-Ed, A First Energy Company         | Tower Health                    |
| Muhlenberg Greene Architects           | Workforce Development Board     |

**Future:** A tract focusing on small business/entrepreneurship will be considered for future tours. Tours would be conducted with the help of the West Reading merchants.



# BERKS BUSINESS EDUCATION COALITION

[www.berksbec.org](http://www.berksbec.org)

## BOARD MEMBERS

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Manufacturers  
Resource Center

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Daniel Boone Area  
School District

**Phillip J. Fromuth, Ph.D. \*\***  
Diocese of Allentown

**Andrea J. Funk**  
EnerSys

**Kristi Gage-Linderman**  
Gage Personnel

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Conrad Weiser Area  
School District

**Jill M. Hackman, Ed.D.**  
Berks County  
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**Robert Harrop**  
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**Susan Looney, Ed.D.**  
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**Kim McConnell**  
Family Guidance Center

**Marlin Miller, Jr.**  
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Commercial Market Executive  
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SECRETARY  
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BBEC

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**Michael Toledo**  
Centro Hispano  
Daniel Torres

**John P. Weidenhammer**  
Weidenhammer

**Tammy White**  
United Way of  
Berks County

**Chester Winters**  
Reading Area  
Community College

\* Retired

\*\* Resigned from Board



[www.berksbec.org](http://www.berksbec.org)

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Designed by Hailey Lupold at  
Berks Career & Technology Center