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America250PA officially kicks off in Armstrong County

Patriotic throng of individuals including county's elected leaders and other political dignitaries gather for the kickoff

By KIERAN WOYNICZ Staff Reporter
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Members of the community on Wednesday packed into the conference room of Armstrong County's board of commissioners to kick off America250PA in the county. Photos: Kieran Woynicz | Leader Times

Members of the community on Wednesday packed into the conference room of Armstrong County's board of commissioners to kick off America250PA in the county. America250PA is an effort to encourage, develop and coordinate the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States, Pennsylvania's integral role in that event, and the impact of its people on the nation's past, present and future. Kicking off the event was county Commissioner Anthony Shea, who led those in attendance in saying the Pledge of Allegiance.

Shea was introduced as veteran Major – U.S. Air Force, Retired, in addition to his acknowledged status as commissioner. America250PA Director of Branding and Design Bri Farrand followed, saying: "We're excited to mark the beginning of the America 250 anniversary celebration here in Armstrong County. The place where determination and innovation have long shaped Pennsylvania's story. On the frontier of the early colony Armstrong County played a critical role during the French and Indian War over the Battle of Kittanning.

Led by John Armstrong Sr., local forces demonstrated courage and resolve in defending the western settlements. Establishing a legacy of resilience that still defines the region.”

She continued: “Armstrong County also fueled America’s industrial growth when coal rich hills the power steel mills in Pittsburgh to world leading glass production Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company (present day PPG Industries, Inc.) which supplied materials for buildings automobiles and mirrors across the nation. Together these contributions reflect the community built on resourcefulness and hard work in a lasting spirit of enterprise. That story continues today through the America250PA work in Armstrong County, through partnerships with local schools, nonprofits, municipalities and volunteers the county has played an active role leading up to this centennial year.”

Farrand highlighted a few of the America250 activities that have occurred in Armstrong County, including the planting of a Liberty Tree in Ford City park and the ‘Echoes of Armstrong’ which was the county’s addition to the Bells Across PA initiative.

“Together these efforts connect Armstrong County’s past to the people shaping its future, reflecting the creativity, resilience and civic pride that define this community. Today’s kickoff recognizes Armstrong County as both steward of its history and an active participant in America’s 250th anniversary,” Farrand concluded.

Next to speak was State Rep. Josh Bashline (R-63), who reflected on the nation.

“A lot of us know people who are maybe in their 80s, 90s, or even 100s and they’ve lived almost half the time the country’s been around. I can only trace back to two great grandparents until the founding. If you reflect on where we were when we first started, colonies and log cabins and and moving West and the revolution and Civil War everything, to where we are now we’re such a young country still, but we can be proud of where we started to where we are now in this you know logical and economic powerhouse that is the United States of America.”

Bashline concluded with the hope that the 250 anniversary will unite the nation.

“I just want to also say you know we’re such a divided country right now with politics and other things, but I think we can really take this year to remember that better who we are where we come from or what our political beliefs are that we are all American, and we can celebrate united states 250 birthday together.”

Next to speak was county Commissioner Chairman John Strate, who expressed his pride in what Armstrong was doing for the 250th anniversary.

“Recently, I was away for a few days, and (while away) I always try to meet the government wherever I’m visiting. So, I met with the county officials and I asked, ‘What are you doing for the American 250?’ They couldn’t come up with an answer for me,” Strate said. “This (area he was visiting) was a big place; they really didn’t have any plans for America 250. Be proud of where you’re at today and be proud of representing Armstrong County.”

He continued: "As (Bashline) mentioned the divisions that are in the country, I don't see those same divisions here in Armstrong County and I'm proud of that. I'm proud of where we're from, I'm proud of all of you that came today."

County Commissioner Pat Fabian spoke next, buttressing what Strate said.

"(Strate's) absolutely right; in county government we're a unified front," he said.

Jokingly, Fabian offered the following quip: "As the lone Democrat here in the county, they've welcomed me with open arms, but we truly are a team pulling the wagon in one direction. I always say, in county government, it's either you have it or don't have it."

Shea didn't have any additional comments, saying that his colleagues had covered everything.

Farrand again spoke, saying, "America250PA is and always has been committed to one mission, and that is reaching every Pennsylvanian. As we look ahead we're bringing people together through signature events and statewide initiatives designed to meet communities where they are and create lasting connections for this historic moment."

She concluded with the following message: "(America250PA) is part of a shared effort, one that reaches into every town and every community. No matter where you live in Pennsylvania there's a place for you in this milestone. A place to learn, to serve, to reflect, and to celebrate together."

Armstrong County Advisor of America250PA Donna Weckerly then spoke about what the the celebration meant to her, saying, "Celebrating today we do look back, but we also look forward. We are making history today. (Speaking with others today) got me thinking, everything we do today ... is what people are going to look back on in the future. (People will) look back and say that this group of wonderful people met together and came together to celebrate this event."

She ended by saying that people could look forward to plenty of events leading up to the July 4th anniversary in Armstrong County.

The event concluded with Farrand presenting a ceremonial America250PA flag to Strate.

Farrand stated that the flag represents the partnership between the Commonwealth and its counties, and the shared commitment to honor America's 250 anniversary with purpose and care in mind.

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