



Mission: "The Chamber works to improve our area's business climate, thereby enhancing the quality of life of all residents."

2017 ANNUAL REPORT PROMOTE – CONNECT – ADVOCATE

The Board of Directors sets the direction of Chamber work and our priorities. We had a great year in 2017 attaining these goals, and present the results below to all members.

Workforce Development. Our No. 1 Priority.

A skilled and reliable workforce is essential for business development and growth. Member businesses have noted that it is increasingly difficult to recruit and retain key employees to our area. We have initiated programs that help recruit and assimilate new employees and their families into our community.

- **AustinWorks** served over 200 families in 2017, nearly 80% of whom ultimately chose Austin as their new home. Our Community Concierge personally connects the entire family to their areas of interest, assists in locating housing, day care, employment opportunities for the trailing spouse and more.
- **Nine Awesome Austin** events were organized to further connect newcomers to the community and to each other. Over 300 new residents participated in these events.
- **Welcome to Austin** relocation folders were redesigned and distributed to new residents and prospective new residents alike. The folders contain a wide variety of information new residents need to know about our community and our members. The 4th edition of our community profile magazine, *Someplace Special*, is being revised by our Community Receptionist Committee and will be released in Spring 2018.
- **Mower County CEO** (Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities) was developed to provide students with the chance to develop business skills and connect to business opportunities in Austin. CEO is business-led and business-driven in cooperation with Austin schools. A 15-member Board of Directors has been established and the 9-month program will be offered to students, beginning in September 2018.
- **Nearly \$11,000 in Scholarships** were provided to students through our Business Education and Ladies Night Out committees.
- **Our Summer Youth Job** Fair provided member businesses and students the opportunity to quickly connect for summer employment.
- **Employment Opportunities** can be posted on the Chamber's website, free of charge.

Promoting Members & Community.

The Chamber organizes programs and events that connect and showcase our members, enhance our quality of life and improve our area economy.

- **Buy Mower/Grow Mower** continues as the Chamber's top marketing priority. The Board set aside \$16,000 for promoting the "shop local" message, and offered individual, business members up to \$500 in rebates for including that message in their advertising.
- **Christmas in the City.** The Chamber assembled a calendar of holiday events and coordinated major events in four sectors of the business community: Christmas in the City Kickoff downtown,

Christmas in the NW, Christmas in the SW and Christmas in the East. Over 90 businesses participated. The Chamber paid for print and major media advertising.

- **Freedom Fest.** The Chamber organized Austin's largest community celebration, Freedom Fest, for the 32nd consecutive year. Over 20,000 people attend events.
- **Ag Appreciation Summer Cookout.** The Chamber served over 1400 people at this annual customer appreciation event. Revenues helped support a variety of ag-related organizations, strengthening the bond between business and agriculture.
- **Buy Mower Coupon Books** were published in the Spring and Fall by the Austin Daily Herald. The Chamber paid one-third of member advertising costs, discounting advertising to \$99 each. More than 80 businesses participated.
- **Chamber Bucks** keep sales in town. Over \$100,000 were re-invested back into member businesses in 2017.

Business Advocacy

The Chamber will provide a strong, effective voice for its business members in government affairs. We worked with chambers from across the state in the 2017 Legislative Session to effect positive change in our state's business climate.

- **Business Tax Relief** was provided through the statewide property tax. The automatic annual inflator was eliminated and the first \$100,000 in property value was made exempt from the state levy.
- **Transportation.** Funds from existing sales tax from auto parts and rental vehicles were direct to roads and bridges, proving \$2 billion in additional funding over 10 years. Also \$934 million bonding, \$634 million for state roads. DOT required to meet 15% efficiency standard for 2018-19. Real ID compliance also passed and takes effect in 2018.
- **We supported uniform labor standards**, including minimum wage and paid leave requirements. The bill passed both the Senate and House, but was vetoed by the Governor. This legislation remains our top priority in the 2018 Session.
- **Lawsuit Reform.** We supported strengthening ADA lawsuit reform to require mandatory notice and additional time for businesses to address alleged violations. Plaintiffs must now give businesses 60 days to respond to alleged accessibility violation before a lawsuit can be filed.

Membership

The Chamber will work to grow its membership base, thereby raising the value for all members and increasing the volume of our voice for business.

- **Survey.** Board members conducted personal member visits with 50 members. Survey found 96% satisfaction rate. Top 3 concerns were property taxes, workforce and housing. Most important areas of programming were Buy Mower and community events.
- **Added** 20 new members in 2017 and maintained a 95% retention rate.

COMMITTEES

The Chamber represents the interests of business and works on projects that will improve our area business climate. Over 200 volunteers from member businesses and organizations share their talents and expertise on 14 Chamber committees. Each committee is unique and focuses on a different area of service. Thanks to all who serve our Chamber and business community!

100 CLUB

Organizes a social fundraiser to raise funds for downtown Christmas decorations and Freedom Fest Fireworks.

AGRI-BUSINESS

This committee exists to promote agri-business in the Austin area and establish links between agriculture and the business community. Activities include organization of the Ag Appreciation Cookout, which is held annually the third Tuesday in July, in the Plager Building, at the Mower County Fairgrounds. The committee also supports the National Barrow Show, 4-H Ribbon auction, Mower County Corn Growers, Dairy Princess, FFA, Pork Ambassador and similar programs. *Committee Chair: Darrell Ingvaldson, Farm Bureau Financial Services*

AMBASSADORS

The public relations arm of the Chamber, our "Red Coats" Ambassadors work to create an atmosphere of goodwill within our community as the official representatives of the Chamber and our business community. Ambassadors conduct ribbon cutting ceremonies, host Business After Hours, organize the Chamber's annual golf outing, AMIGO Day, our Annual Winter Banquet and Awards Program, fundraise for fireworks, and volunteer during Christmas in the City and Freedom Fest events. *Ambassador President: Brenda Landherr, Austin Daily Herald*

AUSTINWORKS

This is an economic development initiative designed to help attract, develop and sustain a quality workforce with skills that align with current and future career opportunities in Austin and the surrounding area. Services include ongoing help with relocating, finding a home, connecting to schools and organizations and more. Over 200 families are served each year. An advisory committee works directly with the coordinator of the program, Austin's Community Concierge.

BUSINESS EDUCATION

This committee was formed to raise the visibility of business within our schools and the community. This committee raises funds and awards scholarships to Austin students in grades 8 & 12. They also support the pathway programs, such as Step Up Austin and collaborate with established school-to-work initiatives. *Committee Chair: Amy Baskin, Austin Public Schools*

COMMUNITY RECEPTIONIST

This committee was formed to promote Austin as a great place to live and work, and to provide new and prospective residents with information they need to quickly assimilate to the community. Members of this committee also work closely with the Community Concierge. *Committee Chair: Jerry Wolesky, Fawver Agency*

CHRISTMAS IN THE CITY

This committee organizes a calendar of events that promotes shopping in Austin during the holiday season, including Christmas in the City Kick-Off, Christmas in the NW, Christmas in the SW, and Christmas in the East.

Committee Chairs: Marie Fryer, Kick-Off; Jackie Bumgardner, Christmas in the NW; Abby Wangen, Christmas in the SW; and Judy Enright, Christmas in the East

DOWNTOWN RETAILERS

The downtown committee organizes events and activities that showcase the downtown area, including Christmas in the City Kick-Off, Downtown Rummage Sale, and Crazy Days. The committee also collaborates with the Vision 2020 Downtown Destination Committee on additional events and projects.

FREEDOM FESTIVAL

A multi-day event, held annually in conjunction with the 4th of July, this committee organizes events and activities celebrating community Independence Day, including entertainment, parade, concessions, crafts, and fireworks.

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

The public policy arm of the Chamber, this committee works to provide Chamber business members with a strong voice in government affairs, particularly at the local level. This committee studies issues that affect business, develops policies to improve the business climate, and advocates for business interests. Partners with the Minnesota Chamber and other local chambers throughout the state as part of the Minnesota Chamber Federation.

Committee Chair: Taggert Medgaarden, Cedar Valley Services, Inc.

GROW MINNESOTA!

A statewide private sector business retention and expansion program led by the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce in partnership with 70 local Chambers. Locally, the Austin Chamber partners on this project with the DCA. The purpose is to recognize and thank businesses for being here, identify their concerns and opportunities, and offer the Chamber's assistance in resolving problems and/or achieving goals.

HUMAN RESOURCES

This committee provides a networking opportunity for professionals working in the HR industry. Best practices and issues are discussed. The committee serves as an important link to AustinWorks and Community Concierge services. Related advisory group works closely with concierge services.

LADIES NIGHT OUT

This committee was organized as a social fundraiser for women in business with a portion of the proceeds dedicated to a Riverland scholarship, for non-traditional female students.

Committee Chair: Jana Gray, Austin Daily Herald

LEADERSHIP AUSTIN

A community-based education and development program designed to provide an ongoing source of motivated leaders informed about the community, its challenges and opportunities and connected to people and resources that can help effect positive change.

Year Leaders: Taggert Medgaarden, Cedar Valley Services, Inc.; Doug Nuckolls, First Farmers & Merchants Bank; Coby Cost, Hormel Foods Corporation

