

Chambers of Commerce and Small Business

by
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Valley News Dispatch 1/22/98 - Community Columnist

"Ok, give me one good reason why I should join your Chamber of Commerce," the caller impishly asked. "Well we don't want to lose customers to big businesses outside our area now do we?" I began. "We little guys have to stick together particularly in our beautiful, small towns. Almost everyone goes to the malls to shop. Why does it have to be that way?" I continued.

"Well that may be true but the Chamber can't identify with the specific problems I have in my small tool & die business," the caller emphatically stated. "Oh yeah, let me rattle off a few things that you and I have in common. First, everyone is extremely busy. Down-sizing, right-sizing and even new processes have given many of us much to do to keep up in this global marketplace. Competition has become so fierce that we are all hustling more than ever to stay one step ahead. Second, the cost of doing business keeps increasing, particularly the onerous cost of never-ending regulations. Third, keeping up with technology has forced us all to be adapters in a constantly changing environment, making ongoing education a requirement for job survival," I said.

"Very true but I guess I still don't see how my business would benefit by joining the Chamber," the caller stubbornly insisted. "Hmmm... does the new area code change and the year 2000 have an impact on your business," I asked. "It certainly does," the caller responded. "Well our Chamber is presenting a seminar on things small businesses should consider so they don't get caught wondering what the heck happened when their outdated phone numbers on stationary becomes a lost order or their in-house core computer program won't open up on January 2nd, 2000," I declared. "Ok, let me think about it," the caller said as he hung up.

Over the last 8 years, I have had many conversations with prospective StrongLand Chamber members such as that one. In some cases, I get a new member and in other cases I don't. The bottom line is that time and money are tight for most small businesses. In addition, it seems like there are over a hundred worthwhile non-profit groups asking the same pool of businesses for money.

However, a good Chamber of Commerce should not be quickly dismissed. At the heart of the US economy is not General Motors but small businesses. Most new US jobs will be created by small businesses this year. Today, a chamber is more important than ever for the survival of the little guy whether a business owner or laborer. A chamber can be a very effective voice for the little mom & pop shops that no one pays attention to by itself.

Still not sure what a Chamber of Commerce does? How about an arena where businesses and the general public come together to promote the quality of life in our area. Ever hear of the StrongLand bicycle race, fishing tournament, student quiz bowl, chess tournament

or collaboration 2000? I thought you might. Still not convinced? How about a forum where businesses got the message through to the Governor that the former DER was hurting and not helping Pennsylvania. How about spearheading the impetus to bring workers compensation rates to an acceptable level so business people could afford to hire people in our great state.

As the new Chairman of the StrongLand Chamber of Commerce, I inherit a tradition that is big on promoting positive action. My philosophy is simply to listen to our members and act upon their needs. My only promise is to work hard for the businesses that put our valley to work.

I would like to invite any business owner or manager to attend our Board meetings throughout the year at the Allegheny Township Municipal Building. Our Board members are dedicated and hard-working. My role as Chairman is to move the meeting along smoothly. If interested simply call our chamber office in advance at 724-845-5426 if you wish to attend so we can roll out the red carpet.



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