

GREATER WILKES-BARRE CHAMBER 2009 ANNUAL REPORT

CONQUERING CHALLENGES MOVING FORWARD

Letter from the Chair

Dear Members,

To say that 2009 was a year of change would be an understatement. The Chamber, like many of you, has made some difficult choices in order to assure our sustainability. I am happy to report we have “turned the corner” and are now looking to the future and all of its potential.

We have set a new strategic direction with the goal of “Bringing Home the American Dream” and making our community one of the Top 75 Places to live and work in the United States. The American Dream is defined by each of us in different ways, but as an organization we are focusing on four key strategies to achieve our lofty goals:

- Promoting a culture of Entrepreneurial Development and Innovation
- Enhancing the skills of our current and future workforce
- Retaining and recruiting businesses that provide family sustaining jobs; and
- Building on our community’s strengths and regional amenities

This 2009 Annual Report touches upon some of the first steps we have taken in this new direction. The foundation is set. The challenge has been presented. With your input and assistance, our goal is attainable. You are the heart and soul of our community, and this organization. You’ll be hearing from us about new programs for members and new ways to collaborate. We expect to hear from you too.

Thank you for being a member. Without you, we do not exist. We look forward to working with you in 2010 as we all strive to “Bring the American Dream Home” for our community.

Terrence W. Casey, *Chairman*
Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber
of Business and Industry



Photos courtesy of Mike Burnside

MEMBERS IN MOTION

The Numbers

Membership total at year-end was 1,126. The Chamber's retention rate is 84.4% (national average is 83.3%). The staff to membership ratio is 329 to 1 (national average is 141 to 1).

TRC (Total Resource Campaign) Success

The goal for the 2009 TRC was \$200,000. Member volunteers raised \$201,590. There were 30 new sponsors this year (out of 138 total) and 36 memberships were brought in during the campaign by 51 volunteers. The effort was co-chaired by Bill Goldsworthy of Golden Business Machines and Jack Jones of Luzerne Bank. Campaign meetings were held at seven area businesses.



Major Events

125th Annual Dinner - "River of Dreams" was held at Genetti's in Wilkes-Barre, sponsored by M&T Bank. Attendance was 379.

The following awards were presented:

Distinguished Citizen: Jim Brozena, Executive Director of the Luzerne County Flood Protection Authority.

The award was sponsored by Luzerne Bank.

Small Business of the Year: Mountain Productions of Wilkes-Barre.

The award was sponsored by PNC Bank.

The Annual Awards Luncheon, sponsored by PNC Bank, was held at Genetti's in Wilkes-Barre. The event was attended by 251.

Individuals and Companies honored included:

ATHENA Award recipients: Marilyn Millington of Berkshire Asset Management and Elizabeth Graham of Riggs Asset Management.

The award was sponsored by MotorWorld Automotive Group.

I BELIEVE Award recipient: Sartorio Brothers: The Barber Shop.

This award, presented to a Downtown Wilkes-Barre business that has continually invested in the area, was sponsored by First Liberty Bank.

Pride of Place Awards for enhancing business, environment and the community were sponsored by Geisinger and Geisinger Health Plan and were presented to:

Shazam Realty/Selingo Law for Environmental Enhancement

Dental Office of Dr. Loren Grossman for Interior Design

Insalaco Hall at Misericordia University for New Construction

Sundance Vacations for Restoration/Renovation

Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs and Luzerne County Community College's Public Safety Training Institute for overall Community Enhancement

MEMBERS IN MOTION

All Sorts of Activities

Ten monthly Women in Business luncheon sessions were held, presented by Citizens Bank. Topics ranged from a session about the new Commonwealth Medical College by Dr. Paul Katz and Ida Castro to a presentation by NEPA Academy of Dance owner/former Rockette/author of *The Girl Next Store* - Barbara Anzalone.

The Chamber assisted at 21 ribbon cuttings/special events for area businesses (North Penn Manor, Luna, Blue Chip Gourmet, Sonic, The Woodlands, the River Commons, the Victims' Resource Center, Cellular Connection, Verizon, Fairfield Inn, Osterhout Library, Tilburys Knob, Gateway Energy, Revere Films, Dollar Basket Plus, Frozen Ropes, Walmart, Gage, TimberRidge, KNBT and the Arts SEEN Gallery).

Two Commerce Club Luncheons - one with Mayor Tom Leighton on Downtown Wilkes-Barre and one with M&T Economist Jim Thorne, Ph.D. – were held with a total of 101 in attendance at the events.

Four CEO-to-CEO networking breakfasts were held at the Westmoreland Club in Downtown Wilkes-Barre, presented by Rosenn, Jenkins and Greenwald. Speakers were Bill Geary of Carlsberg Management, Kristen Rose of the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Yankees and Al Santisiere of the New York Yankees, Kathy Pape from Pennsylvania American Water Company, and Cor Catena from Wyoming Valley Health Care System. Attendance totaled 284.

A session on the new Economic Stimulus Package with U.S Congressmen Paul Kanjorski and Chris Carney, and Senators Arlen Specter and Robert P. Casey, Jr. was held, along with an Economic Outlook event sponsored by Wachovia Bank. The latter event featured presentations by Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell and Wachovia's Global Economist Dr. Jay Bryson.

The Chamber hosted eight networking events at area businesses (Frozen Ropes, Luna, Ruth Chris, Lucky's, AAA, Robert M. Sides Family Music Center, Eagle Rock and Bo Brothers) and a golf outing at the Blue Ridge Golf Club sponsored by Mohegan Sun.

The Annual Walk/Run for Business along the River Commons in Downtown Wilkes-Barre featured the presentation of the Chamber's Healthy Work Place Awards, co-sponsored by Blue Cross of NEPA and ChamberChoice, to Penn Millers and the City of Wilkes-Barre.



Ribbon Cutting Event at the Woodlands Inn & Resort

MEMBERS IN MOTION

Advocacy in Action

The Government Affairs Committee hosted the Annual Legislative Breakfast with our PA State delegation. The 250 who attended were able to hear directly from their representatives, ask questions and raise issues of concern. The Government Affairs Committee also took positions on behalf of our members on the following:



Legislative Breakfast
Photo courtesy of
Earl & Sedor Photography

- Opposed: Closure/consolidation of the Wilkes-Barre Postal Processing and Distribution Facility
- Supported: Act 64: The Water and Sewer Improvement Referendum
- Supported: Stronger High School Graduation Requirements in PA
- Opposed: Proposed Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2009 which would impact job creation at Sallie Mae and hurt the region
- Opposed: Employee Free Choice Act

The committee also surveyed members on a variety of topics, from health care to the economic impact of the Employee Free Choice Act. Results of those surveys were sent to legislators.

Member-Driven Communications

An upgraded electronic communication system was introduced to provide members with information in a way that is user friendly, current and easily identifiable.

The new e-mailers are color-coded as a key to the type of information being sent: E-Blasts, Member Benefits, Government Affairs, Entrepreneurial News, Surveys, Hot Topics, a weekly events e-mailer, and a monthly eNewsletter. In addition, the e-mailers have links to the Chamber Directory, a *Join Now* button, Events and the Chamber calendar and a *Forward to a Friend* button. Links were added to the newly-created Chamber LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter pages. The new Chamber E-Blast – a member-to-member electronic marketing piece – was increased from quarterly to monthly due to increased demand from the membership.

Ambassadors

Membership outreach continued throughout the year through the *Ambassador Program*. Volunteer Ambassadors held monthly meetings at member businesses inviting Chamber members, especially new members, to join them for networking and to learn about Chamber benefits.

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Entrepreneurial Development:

The Innovation Center @ Wilkes-Barre (“ICWB”) assisted and placed four new tenants into its entrepreneurial assistance program -- Rinish Media, Data Makes the Difference, Bright Smile, Inc. and Breaker Boy Drums.

The ICWB’s marketing efforts were nationally recognized when they were featured in a new National Business Incubator Association publication entitled “*A Practical Guide to Business Incubator Marketing.*”

2009 saw the Chamber’s co-sponsorship of a new regional collaboration: the Northeast Venture Partnership, as well as the Chamber’s investment in the Mid-Atlantic Angel Group II (“MAAG II”).

Business Recruitment and Retention:

Business Assistance: Despite the difficult economy, the Chamber’s Economic Development Team assisted in the relocation and expansion of multiple manufacturing, distribution, technology and financial services companies, resulting in the creation of more than 630 new jobs, the retention of 580 existing jobs, and the leveraging of more than \$6 million in new investment into the Greater Wilkes-Barre area. The companies supported by the Chamber’s team were: Sallie Mae, Coates Toners, Kraft Foods, Inc., the former HPG and Gateway Energy Services.

Business Retention and Expansion Program (“BREP”): During 2009, Chamber staff completed 90 surveys with area businesses as part of our ongoing effort to take the pulse of our local business community. BREP survey results are reported to the PA Department of Community and Economic Development. Primary findings confirmed that work ethic and employee retention continue to receive high ratings and job readiness remains an area of opportunity.

Workforce Development:

Industry Partnerships: The Chamber continues to be an active participant in the Logistics & Transportation and Food Processing Industry Partnerships, which are now managed by the Luzerne/Schuylkill Workforce Investment Board. Additionally, the Chamber partnered with Penn State Wilkes-Barre and local businesses to form the new Northeast PA Customer Service Consortium (NEPACSC). The group meets with special interest groups in the areas of technology, customer service for internal customers, customer service for external customers, and training and development.

Luzerne County Community College Tech Prep: The Chamber facilitated outreach to employers to coordinate job shadowing in the Hanover and Crestwood Industrial Parks for high school students from schools within Luzerne Intermediate Unit 18.

2010 Census Partnership: The Chamber spearheaded a partnership with Luzerne County Commissioners, Luzerne

County Diversity Commission and Northeast PA Diversity Education Consortium to provide outreach and education to underserved and undercounted segments of the population, and to promote a “complete count” of our community during the 2010 US Census.

Wall Street West: 2009 was the final year of the three-year Wall Street West regional industry partnership. This ten-county collaborative initiative invested in workforce educational and training projects and programs to support the positioning of Northeastern Pennsylvania as a total back-up solution for companies in financial services, information technology and related industries. The Chamber is also participating in planning for one of the outgrowths of Wall Street West – the establishment of a collaborative, National Center for Organization Continuity, to be administered by the NEPA Technology Institute.

Community Development:

Elevations Lofts on Main: The first phase of residential condominium construction began at the University Corners development in Downtown Wilkes-Barre. As of this publication, ten of the twenty-one lofts developed by the Chamber and Susquehanna Real Estate have been reserved or sold.

River Common: In June of 2009, fifteen years of work by Chamber staff and committees to ensure a world-class riverfront culminated in the opening of the redesigned River Common in Downtown Wilkes-Barre. Chamber staff immediately began working with the Luzerne County Flood Protection Authority, the City of Wilkes-Barre, Diamond City Partnership, and other partners to develop a management and programming plan for the River Common.

Downtown Action Plan: The Chamber began work, together with the City of Wilkes-Barre and the Diamond City Partnership, on an update to the Downtown Wilkes-Barre Action Plan.

Real Estate Development:

Crestwood Industrial Park Poseidon Pools Property

Redevelopment: The Greater Wilkes-Barre Industrial Fund (GWBIF) has been working with the state to complete the necessary testing, develop a remediation plan, and secure funds needed to reuse the former Poseidon Pools property. In 2010, the building will be demolished, the site will be prepared for sale and industrial development.

Innovation Center @ Wilkes-Barre Expansion: Funding applications have been submitted and site evaluations are underway; so far, four different downtown properties have been evaluated as potential sites for the ICWB expansion.

Keystone Opportunity Zone Extensions: The Chamber worked with area municipalities, school districts and Luzerne County which resulted in the passage of new Keystone Opportunity Zone extension designations for targeted properties in the Crestwood Industrial Park (127 acres) and the City of Wilkes-Barre (65 acres).

BRINGING HOME THE AMERICAN DREAM



A \$2.5 Million Campaign

Photo courtesy of Mike Burnside

The American Dream is defined by each of us according to our hopes, beliefs and history. But all can agree it includes the freedom to live and work in a place of our choosing; to provide for our families and those less fortunate; and to have pride in our community. *The Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry* has set a goal of making our community one of the top 75 places to live and work in the United States by 2020.

The Chamber has identified four core initiatives and will raise \$2.5 million over the next five years to accomplish strategies designed to advance the four initiatives:

- ***Promote Entrepreneurial Development and a Culture of Innovation***
- ***Recruit and Retain Businesses***
- ***Link Businesses to a Skilled Workforce***
- ***Build Our Community's Strengths***

The potential return on investment for these work areas is enormous. A vibrant community, growing businesses, a workforce trained and ready for the future — these are just some of the tangible results. Having a place where everyone can build their own American Dream is the ultimate goal.

In 2009, the *Campaign Leadership Team* was recruited and the “quiet” phase of the Campaign began. An initial reception was held in November to introduce the Campaign to area business leaders. Since that time, additional events have been hosted, and dozens of solicitations have been completed.

As the Campaign moves into 2010, almost half of the goal has been either committed or is pending final commitment. The Campaign intends to apply for appropriate grants and reach out to foundations to secure additional funding.

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