



chambermaster  
membership, marketing & website solutions

# THE BIG BOOK *of* CHAMBER IDEAS

9 Award-Winning & Replicable Ideas  
for **CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE**



2017 CHAMBER  
**INNOVATION AWARDS**  
COMPETITION

# THE BIG BOOK *of* CHAMBER IDEAS

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# INTRODUCTION

The ChamberMaster 4th Annual Chamber Innovation Awards Competition once again yielded extraordinary results with over 100 Chambers from around the world submitting details of their most inventive and forward-thinking programs.

Entries were judged on Creativity, Community Impact, Value to Chamber, Value to Members, and Replicability. Competition judges included Chamber pros Frank Kenny and Shari Pash, as well as ChamberMaster VP of Marketing, John Cook.

The \$1500 Grand Prize was not dependent on Chamber size. Entries from national, regional, and local organizations were considered.

Additionally, there were three \$500 prizes awarded to the first-place winner in each of the following categories: Small Chamber (400 members or fewer), Medium Chamber (401 - 999 members), and Large Chamber (1,000 or more members).

The sheer number of outstanding submissions resulted in Honorable Mention recognition of an additional five programs.

ChamberMaster is honored to showcase these programs, events, and ideas that challenge the status quo.



## 2017 CHAMBER INNOVATION AWARDS COMPETITION

# GRAND PRIZE WINNER

**IDEA:**  
"SmartBusiness Eagle County"

**CHAMBER:**  
Vail Valley Partnership

**LOCATION:**  
Edwards, CO

program website



## CONNECTING BUSINESS WITH RESOURCES FOR SUCCESS

*Linking Businesses to Resources to Unlock Growth.*

While Eagle County is home to many resources that support economic growth, businesses and entrepreneurs lacked awareness of the tools that were available.

Enter SmartBusiness Eagle County – **a retention and expansion program designed to connect businesses and entrepreneurs with local, regional, and state resources.**

SmartBusiness Eagle County identifies needs by industry and geography and compares them with the actual needs of local businesses and entrepreneurs. As a coordinated network of communication and action, **the program is a key component for increasing the number of jobs with livable wages, while promoting the area's business development and retention.**

The program creates a single point of contact for businesses and entrepreneurs and connects them with partners who provide valuable information, available programs, experience, and expertise to help them succeed.

The Vail Valley Partnership schedules one-to-one visits with businesses throughout the region and conducts confidential, data-driven interviews to explore their operations, requirements, and future plans. The data is put into a database and used to identify trends.

Aggregated information is then shared with elected officials, business leaders, and special districts to better understand fundamental business challenges in the community.

As a "listening and response" mechanism between local businesses and public partners, the initial focus of the program has been on businesses and organizations outside the traditional tourism and hospitality segment the area is known for. So far, the results have been tremendous, as **SmartBusiness Eagle County has spurred measurable economic growth throughout the region.**

*"Our region is blessed to be home to a number of high-quality resources for business owners and entrepreneurs. But it's rare that they are familiar with all the resources available to them to support and grow their business. The program creates a single point of contact for all local & regional business needs. The result is a coordinated network of resource partners that will quickly route businesses to valuable information, available programs, experience, and expertise to help them succeed."*

**CHRIS ROMER**

PRESIDENT & CEO | Vail Valley Partnership



# LARGE CHAMBER WINNER

**IDEA:**

“Moving Flint Forward”

**CHAMBER:**

Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce

**LOCATION:**

Flint, MI

[program website](#)



## RISING ABOVE A CRISIS

*The Chamber's Response to the Water Crisis.*

A recent water crisis rocked Flint, Michigan to its core and led to multiple challenges. Businesses saw poor sales as a result of negative publicity and had to endure increased costs to cover equipment damaged by the city's contaminated water supply.

**The Moving Flint Forward Small Business Grant Program was created as a groundbreaking tool to help small businesses whose operations were impacted by the crisis.**

Small businesses such as salons, restaurants, cleaners, day care centers, etc. have used funds for water filtration systems and to repair damaged equipment. Funding has also been used for a marketing campaign to combat the effects of negative press.

As part of the grant program, business applicants are required to complete a business plan with support from the Small Business Development Center (SBDC). They were also required to use other resources such as training and were connected to providers of business loans.

To date, 185 applications have been received and 99 small businesses have shared \$874,890 in grants.

**The Chamber continues to seek further funding to support this program due to overwhelmingly positive feedback from recipients.**

Another silver lining is that the Chamber has had the opportunity to recognize needs and challenges outside of the water crisis. Many small businesses do not regularly interact with the Chamber, and this program provided an opportunity to set the stage for further conversations and interactions, thereby reaching new audiences and enticing them to join.

*“Along with the Community Foundation of Greater Flint, the Chamber created the Moving Flint Forward initiative. Through a strategic partnership with Huntington Bank and FlintNOW, an initiative formed by Detroit Pistons Owner Tom Gores, we were able to provide immediate aid to support small and minority-owned businesses that were impacted by the water emergency.”*

**TIM HERMAN**

CEO | Flint and Genesee Chamber of Commerce



# MEDIUM CHAMBER WINNER

**IDEA:**

“Visalia SOUP”

**CHAMBER:**

Visalia Chamber of Commerce

**LOCATION:**

Visalia, CA

[program website](#)



VISALIA CHAMBER  
OF COMMERCE

## HOW SOUP BUILT A STRONGER COMMUNITY

### *Promoting Community-Based Development.*

Everyone knows soup can be “Mmm mmm, good!” But when a group of community-minded people in Visalia, California gathers to break bread, eat soup, and discuss new ideas, amazing things happen.

Visalia SOUP is a program designed to promote community-based development through crowdfunding, creativity, collaboration, democracy, trust, and fun.

The goal is to collect ideas for programs that will strengthen the community. Starting with a call for proposals, ideas are submitted through the Chamber’s website. Proposals can be about anything from starting or expanding a business to initiating a community project or event. A committee of community partners then narrows the entries to four finalists who are each given four minutes to present their ideas at the SOUP event.

**SOUP provides a venue for area residents and business owners to gather, listen to great ideas, and to help fund projects that will make a lasting impact in the community.**

A suggested donation of \$5 is all it takes to get into the family-friendly event, which includes a bowl of soup, bread, and a chance to vote.

After attendees hear the presentations from the finalists, they get an opportunity to visit, share resources, and vote on the project they think should win. At the end of the evening, the ballots are tallied and the funds raised are awarded to the winner to carry out their project.

**SOUP gives people the opportunity to see the Chamber’s commitment to supporting both the community and entrepreneurial spirit on a grass-roots level.**

Attendees are encouraged to think outside the box, adopt an entrepreneurial mindset, and walk away feeling like they had a stake in the program.

The inaugural winner of the Visalia SOUP program was awarded \$1,500 and has been working hard to utilize the connections and resources provided as part of winning the competition. The winning idea? Martial arts classes for autistic children!

*“Visalia SOUP supports Visalia’s best ideas to make our city stronger by promoting the entrepreneurial spirit. We’ve created a venue for the residents to gather, listen to great ideas, and help fund projects that will make a lasting impact., We’re proud to work with our local business partners to host Visalia SOUP, creating opportunities for individuals to think outside the box.”*

Gail Zurek

PRESIDENT & CEO | Visalia Chamber of Commerce



# SMALL CHAMBER WINNER

## IDEA:

“Strengths Finder Training”

## CHAMBER:

Scottsbluff/Gering United Chamber of Commerce

## LOCATION:

Scottsbluff, NE

[program website](#)



## UNCOVERING TALENTS

*Playing to People's Strengths Pays Huge Dividends.*

Inspired by the book, *Strengths Finder 2.0* by Tim Rath, **the Scottsbluff/Gering United Chamber of Commerce sponsored a workshop to help employees of local member businesses identify their strengths.**

The Gallup-produced, best-selling book has sold millions of copies and provides strategies for individuals to develop their strengths as opposed to fixing their shortcomings.

The book is used in conjunction with the web-based CliftonStrengths online talent assessment. The evaluation measures an individual's natural patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving. The customized assessment results provide insights which allows users to discover what they naturally do best, how to develop their greatest talents, and live their best life.

A certified Strengths Finder facilitator from the local community college facilitated the event. The workshop was offered in a choice of two sessions to allow employers to potentially send their entire staff.

**By helping employees identify their top strengths, companies were able to evaluate how to align those talents in the workplace to maximize efficiency and build leaders.**

**The workshop had over 100 participants from 19 different businesses.** After its introduction to the community, many companies implemented the training program with the college.

In addition to businesses, service organizations, churches, and classrooms have also been inspired by the program after recognizing its value in giving people the opportunity to do what they do best.

*“The relationship of our attorneys and staff is an important part of the culture at the Simmons Olsen Law Firm. The Strengths Finder assessment was a fascinating experience that helped us understand each other and the roles we play in our Firm. More than anything, it helped us understand how we each think and view issues, challenges, and problems that arise in our business. It is an assessment that we revisit each year to continue to build on our relationships.”*

### STEVE OLSEN

BOARD MEMBER | Scottsbluff/Gering United Chamber  
CEO | Simmons Olsen Law Firm





# LARGE CHAMBER HONORABLE MENTION

**IDEA:**

“LegacyTexas Business Center & Chamber Facility”

**CHAMBER:**

Plano Chamber of Commerce

**LOCATION:**

Plano, TX

[program website](#)



## MAXIMIZING BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

*Sometimes Change Is Good.*

In the 1970s, the Plano Chamber office was steps away from downtown Plano, a quiet Dallas suburb of 18,000. The Chamber office was situated near the hip restaurants and shops of Historic Downtown Plano, now a booming urban area of nearly 275,000 people. While it seems like a good problem to have, **the Chamber found itself no longer strategically located in the center of the community.**

Home to five Fortune 1000 companies, Plano is known for its robust and growing business community. While quaint, the Chamber’s aging facility did not project a professional image to match its level of service or the expectations of its corporate partners. The facility had inadequate parking and needed major repairs, which limited its ability to host Chamber functions on-site.

With redevelopment driving property values to an all-time high, the Chamber was in an ideal position to test the market to see if it should remain at the current location or find a new facility to better serve

a growing membership and changing community. Enter the idea of the Business Center. Through its relationship with longstanding member, LegacyTexas Bank, **the Chamber brought to fruition a unique facility that matched the needs of the organization, members, and the community.**

Designed with entrepreneurs, telecommuters, and business professionals in mind, the Business Center has become an ideal space for meetings, training, conducting interviews, collaborating with associates, or working independently. Today the Chamber hosts multiple educational seminars and networking opportunities each month, delivering on its mission to serve its members.

By offering robust business resources in a conveniently located facility, the Business Center serves a legitimate need in Plano. In a city where much attention is paid to large corporations, these services are particularly beneficial to small businesses, entrepreneurs, and nonprofits. *cont...*





# LEGACYTEXAS BUSINESS CENTER LARGE CHAMBER HONORABLE MENTION

CONT.

While the idea was initially met with some trepidation, **the value of the new facility is undeniable. The Business Center has truly become the hub of business activity.** With its modern, multi-use work environment, the space is teeming with activity, and its coffee bar has been home to countless connections and conversations.

Current commercial lease costs in the area can make it prohibitive for small businesses to have their own office space. Use of the LegacyTexas Business Center is an exclusive benefit available at no charge to current LegacyTexas business clients and Plano Chamber of Commerce members. Since implementing weekly attendance reporting in September 2016, the facility has served an average of 800+ visitors and members per month.

*By offering robust business resources in a conveniently-located facility, the newly-developed Business Center serves a legitimate need in our community. These services are particularly beneficial to small businesses, entrepreneurs, and nonprofits. Beyond meeting space and business services, the facility hosts multiple committee meetings, educational seminars, and networking opportunities each month, delivering on our mission to serve our members.*

**JAMEE JOLLY**

PRESIDENT/CEO | Plano Chamber of Commerce



# MEDIUM CHAMBER HONORABLE MENTION

**IDEA:**

"FayettevilleOnDeck.com"

**CHAMBER:**

Greater Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce

**LOCATION:**

Fayetteville, NC

program website



## A WHOLE NEW MEANING TO "PLAY BALL"

*Baseball for Business.*

Fayetteville businesses were facing a lot of unknowns. **The construction of a new baseball stadium and redevelopment of an adjacent historic hotel generated a myriad of questions regarding the project's impact on the area.**

The project (home to a minor league team affiliated with the Houston Astros) represented one of the most significant developments in the city's history. With \$33 million slated for the ballpark and \$65 million for the hotel/housing project, the Chamber wanted to make sure they capitalized on the opportunity while mitigating the effects of construction, thus creating a sustainable model to support the new facilities.

Downtown businesses (both members and non-members) were concerned about such things as store access, utility work, traffic, and parking. Others were interested in how they could increase revenue by conducting business during construction.

As a result, the Chamber launched FayettevilleOnDeck.com, a **web portal linking businesses and residents to information about the project.** The website lists contact information for the Astros, the general contractor, and the developer of a hotel and housing complex

adjacent to the stadium. Bids post in real time, along with street closings and construction schedules.

Rather than searching multiple websites, FayettevilleOnDeck.com provides a central hub where all information is in one location. The Chamber has the cooperation of the Astros, the general contractor, the hotel developer, and the city in making this information available. The site also has renderings of the proposed developments, a comprehensive timeline, a video fly-through of the stadium's design, and minutes from the city's baseball committee meetings.

*"We wanted to help our members, residents, and other local businesses be able to find real-time information on the redevelopment efforts downtown, but also include other initiatives. The portal is a one-stop shop for those who need access to that information, and the best part is, it's all in one place!"*

**CHRISTINE MICHAELS**

PRESIDENT & CEO | Greater Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce



# MEDIUM CHAMBER HONORABLE MENTION

**IDEA:**

"HireMe Shelby County"

**CHAMBER:**

Shelby County Chamber of Commerce

**LOCATION:**

Shelbyville, IN

program website

CHAMBER of  
COMMERCE



SHELBY COUNTY  
Where Business Belongs

## A VALUABLE RESOURCE TO BUSINESSES

*Shelby County. Where Business Belongs.*

The Shelby County Chamber of Commerce provides a valuable service to both chamber members and the community. **Through an online program called HireMe Shelby County, job seekers are connected with employers to simplify the hiring process.**

Through a centralized, easy-to-access online portal, a job seeker can submit a resume or fill out a universal job application. The applicant's information is then forwarded to all participating member businesses.

Participating employers include international manufacturers, regional healthcare systems, financial institutions, government entities, and hospitality providers. **The service is FREE to those submitting their information.**

In addition to an online presence, the Chamber implemented a billboard program that goes hand-in-hand with HireMe Shelby County. Located in strategic locations throughout the region, billboards promote the program website. Sponsoring companies' logos are featured on the signs along

with both the Chamber and local Economic Development Corporation logos. To allow for multiple sponsors, each billboard includes three spots for various logos. The companies that participate on the billboards are also featured on the website. HireMe Shelby County is also promoted via social media.

**Dozens of area businesses participate in the program, and the website has become a popular destination for job seekers.**

*"The Chamber Team recognizes the challenges our businesses face when hiring new talent. This global situation impacts not only our large industries with many positions available but our smaller organizations as well. The HireMeShelbyCounty.com initiative will assist our members as it communicates to job seekers outside of the community that we have good jobs available here in Shelby County."*

**JULIE METZ**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR | Shelby County Chamber of Commerce



# SMALL CHAMBER HONORABLE MENTION

**IDEA:**

"Excelsior Springs Chamber Trolley"

**CHAMBER:**

Excelsior Springs Area Chamber of Commerce

**LOCATION:**

Excelsior Springs, MO



[program website](#)

## HOW TWO TROLLEYS CHANGED A COMMUNITY

### *All Aboard!*

The Excelsior Springs Area Chamber of Commerce made an investment that paid off – big time.

**The Chamber owns and operates two trolleys.** Not only have the trolleys served as a great source of non-dues revenue, but they have also had a positive impact on the community.

The Chamber uses the trolleys for a full schedule of events throughout the year. All-inclusive culinary tours, paranormal Halloween tours, wine tasting excursions, and Christmas light tours have sold out in the first year of operation. The trolleys are also available for private rentals (weddings, birthday parties, family reunions, etc.).

**The trolleys have had a significant economic impact on the Excelsior Springs community,** generating over \$53,000 of revenue in 2016 with a projection of over \$70,000 in revenue in 2017.

**The local economy has also benefitted through the tours.** For example, each of the wine tour venues has seen tremendous growth in their sales. Additionally, revenue from the tours has significantly impacted the Chamber's operating budget, allowing the Chamber to attract and hire two new employees while adding five trolley drivers.

**Tourism has increased dramatically by attracting visitors.** On average, 75% of the wine tourists are from outside Excelsior Springs and many of them stay overnight. Local hotels and bed and breakfasts have experienced such an increase in tourists, they are sold out nearly every weekend. As the tours begin and end in the downtown district, many of the local merchants report an uptick in shoppers on tour days. *cont...*



# EXCELSIOR SPRINGS CHAMBER TROLLEY SMALL CHAMBER HONORABLE MENTION

CONT.

The added funding has allowed the Chamber to wholeheartedly embrace their mission of encouraging, promoting, and providing resources for tourism and economic growth to support a healthy business environment in the City of Excelsior Springs and the surrounding area.

The Chamber trolleys have become a staple at local events and are a source of community pride. They are now an integral part of the Chamber's branding and marketing for the city, both to residents and tourists. **It has been said that the trolleys are the best things the Chamber has done for this community in decades.**

*"We are very pleased with the tremendous success of our trolleys in the two seasons we've operated them. The EStrolley.com program has brought tourism, awareness and measurable economic impact to our city – not to mention increased community pride."*

**TOSHA JACKSON**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR | Excelsior Springs Chamber of Commerce



# SMALL CHAMBER HONORABLE MENTION

**IDEA:**

“New Teacher Welcome”

**CHAMBER:**

Waupaca Area Chamber of Commerce

**LOCATION:**

Waupaca, WI

[program website](#)



## BUSINESS + SCHOOL = COMMUNITY

*Using a Bus Tour to Connect Businesses with Schools.*

The Waupaca Area Chamber of Commerce recognizes the value of a strong relationship between the community and its schools.

**Each year, the Chamber invites the school district’s new teachers and administrators on a guided bus tour of the community and schools, followed by a networking lunch.**

Each new hire is sponsored by a business. As part of the \$50 sponsorship, member investors send someone from their organization to take part in the event.

The morning begins at the district offices where everyone is introduced and boards a school bus.

There are stops at each school building for a brief walk-through. Between stops, there is an ongoing, narrated tour of the community. The tour includes residential areas, parks, the hospital and clinics, retail areas, the industrial/business park, Main Street, and historic areas.

The morning concludes with lunch at a local restaurant. Here, teachers are seated next to their sponsor. Additionally, they receive a bag with gifts and offers

from the sponsors. Included in the bag is a categorized member directory. **Sponsors have an opportunity to talk about their business and how they can help the school staff both in their classrooms and outside of school.**

Through the program, **teachers and administrators learn about how the community can connect with businesses**, which support the schools. As a bonus, the event also serves as an example of the Chamber’s commitment to helping businesses and schools succeed.

*“The Chamber recognizes that much of our future workforce will come from students in our school district. When teachers and administrators understand what drives our community, and how the Chamber and local businesses can help them in their classrooms, it’s a benefit to everyone. The New Teacher Welcome program starts those relationships and is another way our community works to help schools succeed.”*

**TERRI SCHULZ**

PRESIDENT | Waupaca Area Chamber of Commerce





# CONCLUSION

The Annual Chamber Innovation Award Competition is about celebrating and showcasing enterprising chambers. Designed to encourage creativity and resourcefulness, participating chambers have raised the bar each year by bringing fresh, imaginative ideas to the forefront of the chamber world.

## ABOUT CHAMBERMASTER

ChamberMaster helps organizations grow and retain membership, engage and inform members and prospects, and streamline tedious tasks.

The cloud-based system is powerful, easy to use, and designed to manage all the day-to-day operations of your organization. Guaranteed.

## CHAMBERMASTER WEBSITE SERVICES

Whether you simply want to populate your existing website with useful ChamberMaster website modules, edit your own website with a content management system, or launch a new website from scratch, we have an experienced developer and design team who will accommodate your objectives and budget.



### CUSTOM REPORTING

Build, customize, and distribute reports in a few clicks.



### MARKETING

Publicize members and generate non-dues revenue.



### BILLING AND PAYMENT PROCESSING

Integrated process syncs with your accounting software.



### WEBSITE OPTIONS

Integrate ChamberMaster into your existing website or let us build a new one.



### COMMUNICATION AND GROUPS

Sync with your email programs, social media, and apps to easily connect with members.



### SMOOTH TRANSITION, UNLIMITED SUPPORT AND TRAINING

We support you through the transition process and afterwards.



### EVENTS

Navigate every aspect of the event process.

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