

2008 Annual Report

LEADING BUSINESSES. LEADING COMMUNITIES. FOR 92 YEARS.



Over the past 36 months, the Blue Water Area Chamber of Commerce has gone through an amazing transformation.

In 2006, the Blue Water Ambassadors group was created and our advocacy arm, the Public Affairs Committee began the successful annual State of the County Address and Candidate Rating system and we completed a makeover of the website and invested in a state-of-the-art membership database system called WebLink.

In 2007, we celebrated our 90th anniversary and received the Chamber of Commerce of the Year Award from the Michigan Association of Chamber Professionals. The Economic Task Force and Site Relocation Task Forces were created to provide a concentrated effort on business development and our relocation efforts.

In 2008, the Greater Port Huron Area Chamber changed its name to Blue Water Area Chamber of Commerce to coincide with other community organizations' work to strengthen our regional brand. We changed the name of our 501c3 fund to the Community Benefit Fund with a broader focus to support education programs, preserving natural and historic interests, and community redevelopment activities.

The Board of Directors has established five prioritized goals for 2009, and the staff in partnership with our members will keep a determined focus on meeting the needs of small business as we work through these challenging times.

Thank you for continuing to support the Blue Water Area Chamber of Commerce.

2009 GOALS



Membership Retention
Financial Stability
Advocacy
Member Involvement

2008

Accomplishments

Goal: Relocate office

- New office downtown
- Sale pending on former building

Goal: Advocacy

- State of the County
- Public Affairs legislative trip to Lansing
- MDOT meetings on bridge plaza
- Candidate Ratings
- 8 Member surveys
- Downtown Parking

Goal: Collaborations

- Discover the Blue regional marketing campaign
- Discover *Business* in the Blue regional business directory
- Shop, Dine & Win Weekends in July
- Small Business Incentives Committee
- Business Entrepreneurial Assistance Team (BEAT)
- Leadership Blue Water
- Junior Achievement business program at PHN
- Regional speed networking
- Emergency Management Guidelines

Goal: Membership

- Member Retention: 77% (2007 = 60%)
- Investment Retention: 86% (2007 = 61%)
- 70 new members
- E-newsletter redesign
- 3 Leadership Blue Water member scholarships
- Bi-monthly mixers
- Business Beat on 102.3FM
- 13 Ribbon Cuttings

Mission: To partner with our membership to create a sustainable business environment.

Site Relocation Task Force

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The Site Relocation Task Force was made up of Board members focused on the Chamber's long term goal of relocating its office.

Members of the Site Relocation Task Force were:

Michele Myrick, Treasurer
E&A Credit Union

Scott Beedon, Director
Commonwealth Realty

Michael Kimmerly, Member
Precision Computer Solutions

The Task Force was mandated to find a location that would support our growth in staff and offer our members easier accessibility, a wireless conference meeting space, and a more professional image.

After visiting potential sites near the bridge plaza, downtown and in Port Huron Township, the Chamber found a home in the central hub of downtown Port Huron.

The move into a totally redesigned and refreshing new office space next door to Downtown Port Huron Inc. and the Community Foundation of St. Clair County had engaged a spirit of collaboration never seen before among our community groups.

The space boasts a custom built membership display, wireless conference room and e-business station, and access to the Acheson Community Resource Room. With high visibility on the corner of McMorran and Huron Avenues, and plenty of access to parking, the move has generated a significant increase in foot traffic.



The office located at 920 Pine Grove Avenue was the home of the Chamber for over 50 years. A purchase agreement was signed in December 2008 and the sale is expected to close by March 1, 2009.



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Advocacy: PAC speaks up for small biz

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The Public Affairs Committee kicked off 2008 with its most popular event for area business professionals, the 2nd annual State of the County Address, a collaboration of countywide Chambers that hosted over 200 area professionals for an informational luncheon.



Business owners attend the Michigan Business Tax workshop hosted by Rep. Phil Pavlov and Dan Acciavatti.

In June, the Public Affairs Committee along with the Directors of the Marysville and Anchor Bay Chambers, coordinated a legislative day in Lansing—spending about an hour with Representative Pavlov, Espinoza, Acciavatti and Senator Gilbert—discussing critical issues affecting our area. AT&T held a luncheon for the group which was attended by Richard Studley, President of the Michigan Chamber of Commerce who spoke about the MBT, Film Tax Credits and ballot proposals.



The Public Affairs Committee poses in front of the state capitol in Lansing during their Legislative Day visit in June.

In the fall of 2008, the group conducted candidate ratings for local candidates running for public office.

The Public Affairs Committee conducted eight membership surveys and as a result distributed several press releases and articles based on information gathered. Speaking on behalf of the business community is what the Chamber is known for and we will continue to strengthen this voice with your participation in 2009.

The Public Affairs Committee is comprised of the following members:

Rick Dionne, Chairperson
 Michael Glenn, Oppenheimer
 Mike Kelley, Frohm, Kelley, Butler & Ryan
 Donna Kalmeta, IKON
 Ann Schultz, Schultz Legal Services
 John Adair, Hill Devendorf PC

The PAC meets monthly on the first Wednesday, 7:30 a.m. at Bob Evans.



A BBC News crew interviews President Vickie Ledsworth regarding the hard hit Michigan economy in April.

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Accomplishments

Working together. Accomplishing more.

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There were many initiatives that the Blue Water Area Chamber of Commerce partnered with other community organizations on in an effort to support small business in 2008.

In May, the Chamber contributed \$5,000 toward the regional Discover the Blue tourism marketing campaign which led to the July downtown marketing and common hours "Shop, Dine & Win" campaign as eight lucky winners were awarded \$500 each to spend in participating stores and restaurants. These programs were facilitated in collaboration with the **Community Foundation of St. Clair County, Blue Water Area Convention & Visitors Bureau and Port Huron DDA.**

The Chamber helped distribute \$50,000 in small business incentive funding for expansions or new development in the downtown in partnership with the Community Foundation and other downtown businesses.

The Chamber's Economic Task Force developed a new sub-committee, **Business Entrepreneurial Assistance Team (BEAT)** was formed to mentor and guide small business entrepreneurs in the pre-business and early stages of development.

A new Junior Achievement program to help business and accounting students at Port Huron Northern High School learn how to open, manage and close a business was facilitated through the Chamber. **E&A Credit Union** sponsored the program by providing support through their marketing department.

The **Chamber Leaders Circle of St. Clair County** held its first successful Speed Networking event in April with over 100 participants and worked together later in the year to create the area's first regional business directory, *Discover Business* in the Blue.



St. Clair County Emergency Management with the help of the Chamber created a custom guide for area businesses to use if a disaster or emergency occurred. The color coded guides may be downloaded on the Chamber's website, www.bluewaterchamber.com



The Chamber, EDA, SC4, and MSU Extension presented a "Grow Your Business Series" in May for Small Business Month. Kicking off the series was "The Disney Way" customer service and leadership presentation above.

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Our mission is your success.

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With as difficult as 2008 was economically, the Chamber increased its annual member retention rate to 77% and its member investment retention to 86%.

Almost half of our lost members in 2008 were home-based or sole proprietors who are no longer in business mainly due to the economy.

The Chamber welcomed 70 new members to our network in 2008 and the Blue Water Ambassadors celebrated 13 businesses with ribbon cuttings and anniversary events.

Several Blue Water Ambassadors also attended the statewide Ambassador Conference held this year in Sterling Heights.

Bi-monthly Wine & Cheese Mixers were held at various member locations and were free to members thanks to beverage and food sponsors.

The Chamber partnered with Port Huron Hospital Foundation's Business & Professional Committee, MSU Extension, and St. Clair County Community College to develop a custom community leadership program called *Leadership Blue Water*. The Chamber provided three (3) scholarships to members with potential to become future leaders within the Chamber.

The Chamber continued its weekly radio address on Tuesdays at 8AM on 102.3FM called Business Beat, when the Chamber recognizes our members, speaks on critical issues affecting our business community, or announcing upcoming Chamber events.



Ribbon cuttings and anniversary events

The Chamber Leaders Circle hosted their first Speed networking at the HAC in April with over 70 participants and a social mixer afterward.

Several sponsors and donations were received for prizes. The event was a great success.



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The Year Ahead: 2009

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The Board of Directors has established aggressive goals for 2009 at our annual fall retreat and we eagerly began working on them before the new year started.

Our first priority is to meet with each of our 400 business members and discuss one-to-one the value of their membership and how they can effectively capitalize on the network of referrals, resources and services the Chamber can provide.

Marty Doorn, WGRT
Chamber Chairperson

Second, financial stability including generating alternative sources of revenue, tiered dues restructure, voluntary contributions to the Community Benefit Fund, and investing the proceeds from the sale of the former Chamber building to sustain the Chamber's strong cash position will be developed between the staff, Financial Oversight and Fund Development Committees.

Advocacy will continue to be a leading priority as member surveys have indicated over the past few years that the Chamber's ability to speak on behalf of our business membership is a top reason for maintaining membership. The PAC will continue to host informational meetings, develop a stronger relationship and access to local legislators with quarterly coffee hours and work with the Michigan Chamber of Commerce on issues such as Term Limits.

The Chamber is only as strong as the members who participate whether its connecting through networking, completing brief surveys, supporting other members by attending their special events, volunteering for committees, or demonstrating active leadership as a board member, member involvement is critical to the growth and evolution of our Chamber. We will work to ensure all members are involved at some level.

Collaboration will always be a goal of the Chamber. We value the relationships we have made with government and other non-profit community leaders and we look forward to being an influential partner in our shared mission of working to make our community a better place.

Martin Doorn, Chairperson

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2009

Board of Directors

Executive Board Officers:

Martin Doorn, Chairperson
Douglas Dolph, Chair Elect
Michele Myrick, Treasurer
Richard Seim, Officer
Edward Brooks, Officer
Rick Dionne, Officer
Vickie Ledsworth, Secretary

Board Members:

Ernie Albert
Ker Albert Office Supply

Dan Degrow
St. Clair County RESA

Tim Dowd
Times Herald

Chris Fulks
Trinity Mercy Hospital

Mike Glenn
Oppenheimer & Co.

Dr. Connie Harrison
Baker College of Port Huron

Albert Jones
Comfort Keepers Home Care

Norm Krol
GNK Enterprises

John Liston
Port Huron Hospital

Paul Lydy
Eastern Michigan Bank

Michelle Mueller
St. Clair Co. Community College

Rob Patterson
Midwest Appraisal

Marc Reno
Bauer-Reno Real Estate

Katherine Walker, Ex-Officio
Sarnia Lambton Chamber