



Our Mission

*"To be the voice of business dedicated
to the promotion of economic development
and prosperity for the enrichment of the
community"*

2007 World Chambers Competition
Submission for
Best New Membership
Recruitment Project
April 5, 2007

2007 World Chambers Competition

Executive Summary

This submission describes how our rural-based Chamber of Commerce managed to grow our membership by nearly threefold from 54 members in 2004 to 156 members by the end of 2006.

Goderich, with its 7,200 people and 650 businesses, is the largest municipality in Huron County where 60,000 people live. It sits on the banks of Lake Huron in South Western Ontario, Canada and has a thriving commercial port, North America's largest salt mine - Sifto Salt Mine and the largest employer of Huron County - Volvo Construction Equipment.

The Goderich & District Chamber of Commerce was created in 1991 by a volunteer group of concerned business owners and managers. It stayed a volunteer-based organization until 2004 when the board made the decision to appoint a business manager on a part-time basis to boost the energy levels of the chamber.

Early in 2004 the board initiated a plan to address the sustainability of the Chamber by increasing membership and seeking opportunities where additional funding could be obtained for specific projects relating to the Chamber's mandate. We now have 156 members (a nearly threefold growth). We also managed to secure funding partners for Economic Development initiatives in our community that enables us to have a permanent presence in the community.

Goderich & District Chamber of Commerce is now a well-respected organization in the community, fulfilling its mission of being the voice of business dedicated to the promotion of economic development and prosperity for the enrichment of the community.

Prologue

Whether a business is large or small it needs support from fellow business owners, managers, business organizations, friends, family members to help smooth out the bumpy road of life.

In the scheme of things Goderich and District is a very small entity but extremely important to the economy of our corner of the world. We have businesses that deal only with customers down the street and businesses that sell to more than 90 countries around the world.

The Goderich and District Chamber of Commerce is needed in our community to help our businesses work together, to help solve problems, to provide a voice for their concerns, to promote economic development and to help each other be successful. We need to be there when answers are hard to find, to make the small business owner know they are not alone and to unite our businesses into a cohesive business network.

In order to achieve this, we need some vital components to our Chamber such as members, workers, money, time, energy, ideas and a belief that what we are trying to achieve is for the betterment of everyone.

We came up with a plan to make all of the above achievable, measurable, challenging, exciting, successful and worthwhile.

And so beganThe Plan.....

Background

The Goderich & District Chamber of Commerce was created in 1991 by a volunteer group of concerned business owners and managers who understood the necessity of having an organization to speak as one voice. Up to this time there were splinter business groups but nothing that represented the entire community. For over 100 years, Chambers of Commerce has been fulfilling this role, therefore, it was obvious to the organizers, and this is what they needed to do.



Goderich – *Canada's Prettiest Town* – is the County Seat and the largest municipality in Huron County with 7200 people and 650 businesses. It sits on the banks of Lake Huron and has a thriving

commercial port with the largest salt mine in North America and home to the largest employer of Huron County – Volvo Motor Graders (680 employees) where they manufacture road graders.



Even though we have some large employers, the vast majority of businesses are considered micro businesses with limited resources. Sixty-three percent of businesses in our community have less than 10 employees. Of this amount, thirty-six percent have less than five employees. It is imperative that this business community have a unifying voice for support and success.

The Original Board of Directors

The Volunteer Board encouraged businesses to join and help make their community a better place and they did an admirable

job but it was very difficult for these Business Owners and Managers. Their main focus needed to be directed towards the success of their businesses but they understood the importance of this new organization. They worked tirelessly to make the Goderich & District Chamber of Commerce succeed with the few available hours they could provide. Over the next 13 years, they provided training sessions, support to fellow businesses, attended and provided business functions and held open houses. They even promoted Corporate Challenges and Winterfest Celebrations. But, in the end, energy levels, time commitments and lack of additional volunteers seemed to doom the Chamber. Amazingly though, 54 members stayed the course and continued each year to pay their membership even though they were not receiving many reasons to continue as members.

In January of 2004, the Board of Directors had a very difficult decision ahead of them. They either had to disband or take the money they had in reserve and hire someone to turn the Chamber around.

Part-time Business Manager for the Chamber

The Chamber could not really afford this position but they felt that without a dedicated paid employee in place, nothing else would be achievable. As luck would have it, the person who was the Charter President in 1991, Judy Crawford had just sold her business of 23 years and was looking for something challenging to apply her energy toward. This seemed to be an excellent fit. She had lots of office equipment left over from her business and she was not looking for a real salary. Judy *was hired with a small honorarium* as the Business Manager on a part time basis of 20-25 hours per week.

During the next 12 months, Judy reviewed what had and had not been done. She put a plan together and presented it to the Board of Directors. It was obvious to everyone, that without a sustainable membership, this Chamber was doomed to fail. It was imperative to develop an organized plan with measurable

goals to increase membership, define its role in the community and to provide quality substance to the businesses. It was solely due to Judy's dedication and belief in the Chamber succeeding, that she applied as many hours necessary to achieve the objectives outlined in the plan.

Implementing the Plan

The Board of Directors initiated the plan .

1. Rebuild the Board of Directors

The same volunteers had been on the board since the beginning in 1991. Now they needed to find people in the community who could bring new energy and new ideas to the table. Elect a new President at the AGM.

2. Create a presence in the community.

This would be achieved by creating a website with valuable information for members. The website would build interest in the Chamber and hopefully encourage membership growth. It was decided to take over the many lists existing in the community – none of which was up to date.

3. Personal visits to all existing members

Show a commitment to the loyal membership. Receive feedback from these members and direction for the future. Encourage these members to invite their fellow owners and managers to join or rejoin. Create a membership kit for each of these members and for future members.

4. Create a Quarterly Newsletter

Provide a vehicle for information to the membership. Provide them with the advantages to being a part of this organization. As new initiatives develop, advertise them in the newsletter. Provide new members with free advertising by announcing their membership. Encourage interesting articles from the membership to appear in the newsletter.

5. Produce a Business Directory

This would be the first of its kind in our community. Each Chamber member would have a 50-word write-up plus all contact information about their business included in their membership. Non-Chamber members would get their name and phone number listed only.

6. Start a Biz After 5 Program

Once per month a member would spotlight their business by hosting their fellow members to a reception. The Chamber would provide the advertising free of charge. The business would provide light refreshments and a door prize.

7. Bi-Monthly Articles in the Weekly Newspaper

Create a presence in the community with timely articles about business and the challenges facing business today.

8. Create the Spirit of Success Awards

Recognition of community nominated recipients of The Business of the Year and the Entrepreneur of the Year.

9. Review Membership Fees

Create a reduced membership price for the downtown core businesses that were already charged an additional tax due to location of their businesses.

10. Update Governance

Review and update the outdated bylaws. Create a new mission statement. Formalize goals, objectives, roles or executive members, board of directors and create realistic budgets.

11. Seek Partners for Projects

Actively search for opportunities where additional funding could be obtained by working in partnerships for specific projects relating to the Chamber's mandate and activities.

Results

Since the commencement of the plan, we have increased our membership from 54 members to 156. Although each one of the plan initiatives have had an influence on the success of our membership increase, by far the single most financially successful item from the plan has been the business directory. This business directory has been completely funded by the sale



of display ads. In its inaugural year (2006) the directory provided the Chamber with net revenues of \$5,000.00. This year we hope to achieve net revenues of \$10,000.00 with an increased number of copies and larger distribution area. We attribute a direct membership growth of 50 new members last year due to this new initiative. This year we hope to see another 50 new members. Since February 2007, we have already received 10 new members due to this year's edition.

Due to the successful increase in membership, The Chamber has gained credibility in the community and is now viewed as the voice of business. Over the last year, The Chamber became the lead organization to create a partnership with 5 other funding partners – The Town of Goderich, The Goderich Business Improvement Area, The County of Huron, The Huron Business Development Corporation and the Ontario Government. With the six funding partners, a complete review of our business community was completed a business retention and expansion strategy called **STRONG – Strategy to Revitalize Our New Goderich**. This was a \$56,000 project that involved interviewing 100 businesses with a very extensive 70 page survey. The final report was presented to the community in February 2007 to a record crowd of 150 people. This report has allowed us to improve our plan and further increase our membership goals for 2007. The Business Retention and Expansion strategy has also

given our business community the opportunity to participate in the future of our community.

Conclusion

The investment in the position of Business Manager and the appointment of the particular individual for this position is truly, what has made The Goderich & District Chamber of Commerce the successful organization it is today. Without her dedication to the task at hand, and the many, many hours of unpaid work that has been completed over the last two years, it is quite possible our Chamber would no longer be in existence.

Instead, Goderich & District Chamber of Commerce is now a well-recognized body and the voice of business. Our nearly threefold growth in membership proves this point. Our business community is eager to get involved and build on what has been established. Providing value to our members through the activities listed above, help us build the momentum we needed.

Having a business manager who can put in more than just volunteer time into projects was crucial for this success. The risky decision to appoint a part-time business manager turned out the best decision for the business community of Goderich & District!

By actively seeking partnerships for projects and services that our Chamber can take on or provide, we are able to secure funds that make it possible to sustain our Business Manager position on a fulltime basis. This, in turn, ensures the success of our Chamber. We see it as a winning model rural community such as Goderich & District.





The Goderich & District Chamber of Commerce



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Owner
Huron Solutions

Past President: Betty Southgate

Directors: Doug Fines
Rosemary Davis
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Lori Patterson
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Gary Muxlow
Garry LaRose



Business Manager:
Judy Crawford

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