



STATE OF THE CHAMBER
2016 REPORT

2015 was another year of progress and Important changes for the Saguache Chamber of Commerce.

THE CHAMBER'S 2015 ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS

1. Printed and distributed the 2015 Community Calendars throughout Saguache
2. Created a new design for memberships (item8)
3. Created classified ads section on the website
4. Supported five annual Town events
 - a. Memorial Day Parade – Our truck “float” helped spread candy and fun
 - b. Hollyhock Festival – Sponsored two garden contests and an art contest
 - c. Saguache Art Festival – Sponsored marketing and map for the event
 - d. Intertribal Pow Wow – Helped the organizers find support
 - e. Fall Festival – Chamber member Carita Ginn was coordinator and planner
5. Submitted one successful Sales Tax Grant application
6. Developed, sponsored and presented Third Annual Saguache Planning Conference
7. Increased the Chamber membership
8. New Premium Memberships were offered to new and existing members
9. New youth shirt designs were introduced to sell as fundraiser chamber products
10. Popular new Speaker Program introduced in concert with monthly chamber meetings
11. Proposal for a sign directing Hwy 285 traffic to downtown Saguache

CONTINUATION OF THE TOURISM PORTION OF OUR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

As one part its economic development strategy in 2011, the Chamber became involved in the effort to increase the number of visitors to Saguache. Initially called the “Marketing Plan,” the Chamber effort to publicize Saguache has become one important part of the Chamber’s Economic Development plan for Saguache. The plan is on-going and recognizes the importance of bringing tourism dollars to and increased public awareness of Saguache. The plan includes sponsoring local events that showcase Saguache and looking for opportunities to use a variety of media to publicize Saguache.

Chamber Events

The Chamber has been the sole sponsor for the Hollyhock Festival since 2012. In 2015, Byron and Becky Williams provided the leadership for the festival which included two garden contests and a Hollyhock art contest. Qualified outside judges were recruited and prizes were awarded. Both are important to the success of the contests. The Hollyhock Festival is showing steady growth each year both in participation and attendance. The Art Festival is also a Chamber project. The Art Festival was held on August 22nd. Reports from the Saguache artisan community and gallery owners were that both visitors and revenues from art purchases were down somewhat but still strong. Conflicting events such as the highly touted concert in Salida were cited as reasons for the reduction in attendance. Sales at restaurants and our other shops continued to benefit.

Chamber members were again able to help the Intertribal Pow Wow organizers. This event celebrates an important part of Saguache history as well as its current Native American residents. It is also important as a time for Native Americans to come together. Pow Wow organizers Ruth Horn and CrowFox continued the traditions of holding an evening feast for the elders following a day of traditional dancing, drumming and singing in Otto Mears Park.

The Chamber began to assist with the traditional Fall Festival in 2011. Our commitment to and participation in the Fall Festival has increased to the point where the Chamber is the major sponsor, planner and coordinator of the festival. Carita Ginn, an active individual Chamber member, is the lead organizer for the festival. She has pulled together a strong organizing committee. The Fall Festival is combined with a quilt show featuring colorful quilts made by local residents. Quilts were displayed in the Community Building. Vendors and entertainers drew a crowd in the Community Building and Otto Mears Park.

For 2015, rather than having a live auction, it was decided that a silent auction may be the wiser choice. Our experience from the live auction last year was that it did not render the expected results from the amount of effort required to effectively run a live auction. The decision to go to a silent auction was the right one for our size chamber and the auction was a solid success.

OTHER PORTIONS OF THE CHAMBER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Effort to Increase the Visibility of Saguache and the Chamber

In 2015, the Chamber invested in street banners to display on the downtown light posts. The attractive banners, featuring the same imagery as the rack cards from the previous year, were very well received by the town. The Chamber logo was very visible and a credit to the Saguache Chamber appeared discretely at the bottom.

A new initiative to direct attention to our growing downtown business district was the proposal of a sign to re-direct traffic to an area of our town that is largely missed by the vast flow of traffic on Hwy 285 throughout the year. Discussion began early in 2015 and a final proof of the art for the sign and a location was approved in the late fall of 2015. As this is being written the sign is in place and functional thanks to Mr. & Mrs. Brian Miller of Saguache for their kindness in providing a spot just off of Hwy 285 on the north side between Denver and San Juan Avenues in Saguache. The sign is quite visible from Hwy 285 and is expected to capture the attention of visitors to the area who may otherwise have missed our unique downtown district.

Bringing the Saguache Community Together

For the last three years, the Chamber has been involved in an effort to bring the Community of Saguache together. We noted that if people don't regularly interact with each other and make a real effort to develop trust and coordination, the result is that rumor, jealousy and suspicion can undermine community cohesiveness. In 2013, the Chamber worked with the Town of Saguache to create liaison relationship. Beginning in 2014 and continuing throughout 2015, the Chamber's liaison designee, our intrepid volunteer Carita Ginn, took the part of liaison and attended Town Board Meetings. Carita promptly reports back to the Chamber. In this way Chamber members are kept abreast of town decisions and issues. The town then followed suit in 2015 and designated their own representative who attended Chamber meetings and similarly advised the Town about Chamber projects and perspectives.

Discussion began in 2014 with the Saguache County Board of Commissioners in an effort to establish an ongoing dialog with the chamber concerning economic development in Saguache County. Early in 2015, the Chamber initiated a joint meeting with the Saguache County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). The meeting was held on the 7th of April and was focused on Economic Development; an important issue to both the BOCC and the Chamber. The meeting was well attended and all three commissioners came away from the meeting with optimism toward the possibility of substantive progress. Both sides were in agreement that dialog had to continue and that talk was not enough. We had to go beyond the meetings to getting something done to truly stimulate economic growth. Many ideas were brought into the discussion not the least of which had to do with reaching out to businesses by offering incentives to come to Saguache County to expand established businesses or start a new business. Suggestions were made about how we could mount an advertising campaign to attract potential business prospects and how the county could assist in funding such an exercise.

Saguache Chamber Speaker Program

New for 2016, approved by the board and initiated by chamber board member and local business owner Barry Van Sant, is the new speaker program which was introduced in February of 2016 in concert with the monthly scheduled chamber meetings. Saguache and the surrounding area are

full of interesting businesses and home grown enterprises few people know much about. The idea is to demonstrate how individuals or partnerships have accomplished sometimes unlikely but successful outcomes by simply using their imaginations to live out a dream of theirs in an effort to become financially independent by being involved in a unique entrepreneurial endeavor. The speaker program to date has been extremely well received and has resulted in an increase in member and non-member attendance at the meetings.

Saguache Chamber Planning Conference

The chamber again decided to invest its resources in a community coordinating and planning conference. This was the third annual meeting for the event and as in the first two conferences the primary purpose is to gather information from the community to create a yearly calendar to post throughout the area and on the chamber website. The conference is also an opportunity for the community to come together to discuss ideas for economic growth, planning new ways to attract attention to Saguache County and of course increase flow of tourist activity in the area.

Once again, and back by popular demand, Laurie Vigil catered the lunch for the meeting. The meeting was well attended, although attendance was down slightly from last year. The meeting was no less productive, however, as speakers from First Southwest Bank in Pagosa Springs talked about programs being offered to encourage and assist businesses in their efforts to become successful. Kathy Bedell gave an inspiring presentation on Saguache Today which is a community news and information website. She was followed by the Mayor of Crestone Kairina Danforth and Faith O'Reilly from the Saguache County Tourism Council, along with Bill Case and other contributors from the SLV Tourism Association. They made a presentation about upcoming events and Kairina showed an interesting film made in Crestone.

Involvement with Mountain Valley Business Students

The Saguache Chamber continues to be a strong supporter of the Mountain Valley School FBLA class. New for 2016 is the plan to extend a standing invitation for FBLA students to attend chamber meetings and take advantage of the experiences shared by members in attendance and learn from our new speaker program featuring business owners who have a story to tell about their own business experience and how it works for them. There is much to learn for young business students from people who have actually lived the experience.

CHAMBER MEETINGS & BUSINESS

Chamber Meetings

The Chamber continued to hold its regular meetings on the second Tuesday of every month. Most of the meetings this past year were held in the Road & Bridge Conference Room. Hospitality for the meetings was provided by the regular membership committee with Carita

taking the lead. The Board of Directors continued to meet between the General Membership meetings. To allow membership to attend meetings scheduled on the same date as Chamber meetings, a change was made to the general meeting date. General Meetings now being held on first Tuesday of each month. The Chamber will again reserve the Conference Room at Road & Bridge for the 2016 general membership meetings. As always, everyone is welcome to attend!

Our treasurer, Jennifer Davidson, has organized our books and our budget. Jennifer produces a budget report at each meeting that shows both the planned budget expense for each budget line and the actual expenditures.

The Membership Task Force and the new Membership Design

The Membership Task Force has completed its goal of re-designing the membership structure by offering three levels of membership. The highest level is known as a Premium Membership. This consists of paying an extra \$25 to have an increased presence with an ad on the website twice as large as a standard ad and having the premium ad appear exclusively on the Index page as well as the Members page and all applicable category pages. Up to this point, individual members were asked to pay the same dues as businesses and all businesses were treated the same regardless of size or needs. This task force went forward with great energy and creativity.

The new design created two other levels of business membership. Individual members can still join for \$25 or they can join for free by volunteering at least 10 hours per year to participate in Chamber activities. All members are eligible to vote, participate in meetings, contribute to Chamber projects and hold elective offices. To adopt the new membership structure, the board made some changes to the bylaws.

OTHER CHAMBER ACTIVITIES

Local Business Promotion:

The Chamber continued its practice supporting a weekly feature in the Crescent recognizing a Chamber member. Our website features all the businesses that are members of the Chamber. This year with a growing number of members, a decision was made to create topical pages (accommodations, restaurants, etc.) so that web visitors could quickly find what they need.

Help from the Saguache County Board of County Commissioners: Saguache County Board of Commissioners through the Sales tax grant program continued to provide invaluable support for the Chamber. The Sales Tax Grants enabled the Chamber to continue supporting civic activities and events. The Chamber is grateful for the grant support. The Chamber thanks the County for its continued support.

2015 SUMMARY

2015 was a year in which the Chamber was able to consolidate the progress of the last few years and move forward. Membership increased, our events continue to draw more visitors. The Chamber members supported many other civic events. In early 2016 the Planning Conference was again well attended and featured new speakers. The Chamber was able to fulfill its on-going plan to increase membership, create a strong business and community oriented website, and build successful events that draw visitors and enhance the visibility of Saguache.

THE CHAMBER VISION FOR 2016

Looking forward to the year 2016 the Chamber is anticipating even more progress. As always, we welcome new members. The Chamber needs your energy and enthusiasm for this great little town. If you enjoy small town events the Chamber applauds your participation in any of our sponsored events, school activities and activities undertaken by other Saguache groups.

Economic Development: Economic Development is still the number one priority of the Chamber. This has to be a long range strategy. Members of the Chamber board members attend meetings, make contacts and do research focused on the goal of bringing or developing one or two small job-producing businesses to Saguache. This effort is slower and more intense than our other activities but if any members have a passion for seeing more economic growth in Saguache we would welcome your active participation making it happen here.

The Saguache business community is growing and everyone plays a role in its progress. The Chamber would like to stress that we all contribute as much as possible by shopping at home and supporting local businesses as much as we can.

Economic Development: The Education Component.

We have exciting opportunities to expand our joint activities with Mountain Valley business classes and students. Entrepreneurial skills can be taught to our young people by those of us who are living the experience of owning our own business and give them the incentive to venture into areas of independent thinking and endeavor. The fundamentals of owning your own business and the freedom and rewards that business ownership renders, unfortunately is rarely taught in our schools today. However, with the development of the new Speaker Program associated with our monthly meetings, our young people have a great opportunity to tap in on valuable information which could help them in the pursuit of their own careers.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the Chamber is “to promote the business community, to organize civic functions, to provide community services and to encourage tourism and economic development within and for the Town of Saguache, Colorado and the surrounding community, and help promote Saguache County.”

Membership in the Chamber is not limited to those affiliated with a business, or just to Saguache residents. Anyone with a connection to this valley who wants to see Saguache strengthen its economic base and build a stronger family-oriented community is welcome to become a member. All the Chamber efforts require planning and execution by volunteers. Volunteer hours and contributions are critical to maintaining a strong Chamber and making continued progress. Whether each member has one free hour a year or several hours a week, participation is key to continued Chamber success. Volunteer for your Chamber and your community

2016 should be another great year for the Saguache Chamber of Commerce. With hard work and increased volunteer participation by members, the Chamber can create exciting new programs and community involvement. Respectfully submitted on this date, March 30, 2016

Board of Directors: Anne Nielsen, President
Mike Cowan, Vice President
Jennifer Davidson, Treasurer
Byron Williams, Secretary
Barry Van Sant, Member at Large