



# 2017 STATE OF THE CHAMBER A DECADE OF PROGRESS

## A DECADE OF PROGRESS

2017 is the Chamber's 10th anniversary of its inception as a corporation formed as the Saguache Chamber of Commerce. This is a notable milestone because in 2007, when a small group of individuals first began the Chamber, the Town of Saguache was struggling. The grocery store had been closed for over a year, 4th Street was nearly abandoned, the enrollment at Mountain Valley School was in severe decline, and only one restaurant remained in town.

But the resilience of Saguache and its citizens should not be underestimated. Newcomers found charm and affordable property, non-profit associations such as ScSEED saw a town with needs that matched its mission, the county commissioners, the town trustees, and the citizens rallied to move forward. These combined efforts have allowed the Chamber to exist, grow, and define itself. Today the Saguache Chamber of Commerce is the largest community organization in Saguache County with membership levels hovering at 70 members.

## THE CHAMBER REACHES NEW HEIGHTS

The Chamber year begins each year in April with the annual State of the Chamber General Membership meeting and goes through March 31st of next year, ending with the annual election of new Officers to the Board of Directors. In 2016, the Chamber had the highest levels of revenue ever achieved by the Chamber in its 10-year history, enabling the Chamber to spend over \$17,000 on events and activities to benefit our county, community and citizens.

In 2016, the Chamber's year began with the successful award of a Sales Tax Grant from the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) to help fund the three primary Chamber events that include the Hollyhock Festival, the Art Festival, and the Fall Festival & Quilt Show. Thanks to the Saguache County Commissioners, these additional funds helped the Chamber have the most successful event season in its history accounting for over 1,000 event-goers and an estimated \$140,000 in monies inserted into the economy.

## NEW PROGRAMS FOR 2016

### THE CHAMBER GIFTING PROGRAM

During 2016, the Chamber instituted a new Gifting Program to help individuals, businesses and organizations in need. The Gifting Program was funded by membership dues, event income, product sales, and event sponsors. The Chamber gifted to 12 different individuals or organizations a total amount of \$445. This year the Chamber has set its sights to gift over \$800 to various businesses, clubs, charities, and individuals to help lend a hand in time of need.

Various beneficiaries included the Girl Scouts, the Saguache County Museum, the Friends of the Library, the Sheriff's Office/Volunteer Fire Departments Christmas fund and more.

### THE CHAMBER SPEAKER PROGRAM

2016 was also the first full year of the new Chamber Speaker Program. The Chamber and guests heard from more than a dozen different member-speakers during the year. The goal of the speaker program is

to learn more about our members and their businesses. Many agree that it takes a special person to live and work in Saguache and Saguache County, and hearing from our fellow members offers insight into the commonalities of our members and the methods used to make-a-go-of-it in an area of low income and population. Our many speakers included: Barry Van Sant, The Orchard House, Marge Hoglin, Saguache Works, Jeri Trujillo, Rancho de Animales, Tom MacCracken, Green Earth Farms, Gregory Mills, Aventa Credit Union, Terry Gillette, Gillette's Trading Post, Deanna Bartee, Future Business Leaders of America, Stephanie Buechler, Two Colorado, Michael Hornback, Eagle Insurance Agency, Cathy Archuleta, Genealogist, Darryl Reinsel, Reinsel Home Improvements and Remodeling, Elaine Blumenhein and Theo Boudreaux, Joyful Journey Hot Springs, and Mike and Karen Cowan, Accent USA Inc.

## THE CHAMBER SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

2016 also saw the introduction of the new Chamber Sponsorship Program. This program was developed for five primary reasons.

1. Raise funds for Chamber-led and Chamber-supported events and activities
2. Provide opportunities for businesses and organizations to materially participate in Chamber-led events without putting their own resources on the ground.
3. Provide advertising exposure for sponsors to promote their businesses or causes to increase sales or participation with their entity.
4. Provide a public relations vehicle for businesses or causes to enhance their public image within the community.
5. And, provide a new revenue source for the Chamber to help fund more activities and to reduce the need to raise funding through traditional means such as; membership dues, public funding through grants, and through Chamber product sales.

The results of the first year of operation were very encouraging. The Chamber raised over \$720 in support of its mission. The goal for 2017 is \$1,000.

The Chamber would like to recognize the many businesses that contributed to this program last year.

- Accent USA
- Cozy Castle Cinema
- Blue Earth Properties
- Joyful Journey
- Legacy Media
- Saguache Works
- Smith Market Gallery
- The Orchard House
- The Village Pub
- Two Colorado
- Valley Care Center

## SEMINARS

During the 2016 Chamber year, the Chamber organized and sponsored two seminars; 1) The 2017 Annual Planning Conference and 2) The Basic Food Safety Program.

The Annual Planning Conference was moved up to November this year in the hopes of adding additional months to the Chamber's Saguache Community Calendar and to increase attendance. It was a full day of planning including three presentations. First Mr. Ken Anderson, Saguache County Commissioner discussed the Saguache County Airports, then Ms. Pam Fye, Town of Saguache Town Administrator discussed the Water Augmentation & Sewer Replacement Projects. And lastly Ms. Shannon Sisco, Business Relations Manager, Aventa Credit Union, discussed how to stay safe this Holiday Season from Identity Theft, Fraud, and Internet Scams. There was also a fun exercise on creating "The Perfect Town Mall".

To wrap up the Chamber year, the Chamber was fortunate to have Mrs. Carol Keith and Ms. Lynnea Rappold, both of the Alamosa County Public Health Department, come and give a free class to a full house at the County Road & Bridge Building on Basic Food Safety. This important class explained the basics of safe food handling by both food preparation professionals and part time food servers. Each participant received a Basic Food Safety certificate and learned "correct and safe" methods of serving food to the public.

## RECOGNITION

The Saguache Chamber of Commerce executes each year entirely on the shoulders of volunteers. As such, the Board of Directors would like to recognize the many volunteers who helped make 2016 the most successful year ever for the Chamber. The Chamber is truly a community-driven and a community-run organization. Our members include businesses, government, non-profits, and citizens who are all committed to the Chambers stated purpose,

*"... 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."*

In 2016 over 35 Chamber volunteers contributed more than 1,400 hours to conduct Chamber business, to organize and put on 5 Chamber events, and to participate, sponsor, and donate to other Saguache events and causes. It would take up too much space in this report to list all our 2016 volunteers. The Chamber will be placing an ad in the Saguache Crescent to recognize the entire group.

The Chamber would also like to recognize the contributions from the Saguache Board of County Commissioners for two Sales Tax Grants, the Saguache Tourism Council for additional grant monies, and the Town of Saguache for grant funds contributed to help with the Chamber-presented festivals.

## OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

Another change in 2016 related to the monthly Chamber meetings was the focus on short, 10 minute presentations, by guest speakers sharing items of interest to the community. Various guest speakers included: Dee & Lee Bates the new owners Mill Creek Ranch (formerly known as Old Cow Town), Jeffrey Scott, entrepreneur, seeking opportunities for an organic fertilizer business, Del & Gwen Groen of Valley Haven Lodge, Eve Braden sharing a vision for a new Senior Care Center here in Saguache, Arthur Vigil, offering a business opportunity with U-Haul Rentals of Southern Colorado, and David Mixon, GIS Consultant discussing the ongoing town mapping project.

## LOOKING AHEAD

2016 was a busy year for the Chamber. Looking ahead the Chamber is planning on two overarching activities: 1) Continue to make the Chamber Events bigger and better and, 2) Continue to expand the outreach and services provided by the Chamber.

### BIGGER AND BETTER EVENTS

This year the Chamber is engaging with the Colorado Tourism Office (CTO) to implement an on-line marketing campaign at Colorado.com targeting each of our three primary events; the Hollyhock Festival, the Art Festival, and the Fall Festival & Quilt Show. As such the Chamber, has created three event pages on Colorado.com and has signed a contract with the CTO to produce nearly 14,000 “impressions”<sup>1</sup> for each event on this website, one month prior to each event. This will result in a measureable marketing effort with the objective to drive more tourists to Saguache as well as providing needed data on the effectiveness of the investment made by the Chamber on this effort.

The Chamber has also worked closely with Valley Publication Company to update and expand our advertising and marketing with the annual Summer on the Rio Grande publication.

The Chamber has increased its budget for the three marquee events to \$6,500 in 2017. Included in this increase are more funds for entertainment, prizes, advertising, manpower, and security.

### EXPANDED OUTREACH & COMMUNITY SERVICES

#### GIFTING PROGRAM

As mentioned earlier, in 2016 the Chamber started the Gifting Program. In 2017 the Chamber is planning to increase the size of the program by 50% increasing the total funds dedicated to gifting to \$800. These gifts are entirely paid for with Chamber memberships, Chamber sponsors, and Chamber product sales.

#### CHAMBER SEMINARS

In 2017 the Chamber is looking to expand its seminar offerings to the community. While these seminars are still under review, the Chamber is looking once again at putting on another Annual Planning Conference for 2018. The Chamber is also looking at the possibility of working with Alamosa Public Health again to put on a Cottage Foods Industry seminar as well as a seminar on website development including the use of popular social media tools to promote a company’s business.

#### CHAMBER PRODUCT REFRESH PROJECT

The Chamber is also looking at refreshing and adding to our Chamber product line. After several years of selling Chamber products aimed at promoting the Town of Saguache and Saguache County, a team of members have reviewed sales to determine the most popular products. The team also has taken into account feedback from the customer base on how to improve the product line. As such, in 2017, the Chamber will be restocking its most popular products and adding some new products to our line.

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<sup>1</sup> An “impression” is a pop-up ad that appears strategically on the CTO website as users are moving through the site looking for tourist related information

## WEBSITE REFRESH AND UPDATE PROJECT

In concert with the updated pages for the Chamber and the Chamber events on Colorado.com the Chamber is also looking at a better integration of our current website with Colorado.com, social media sites such as our Facebook page, and a further evaluation of our online store and its effectiveness.

## CONCLUSION

2016 was a banner year for the Saguache Chamber of Commerce. Revenues were up, membership totals were up, product sales were up, and several new programs brought new sources of income and larger expenditures back out into the community and citizens.

The Chamber members and other community members donated over 1400 hours of effort into our community putting on events, seminars, and donating time and monies to needy individuals, businesses, and organizations.

The Chamber is entirely run by volunteers. The level of effort contributed by volunteers in 2016 is a testament to the community. However, in order to achieve our goals of 2017 to get bigger and better and to expand our outreach and services, the need and importance of volunteers continues to grow. There are current openings in several areas identified in the Chamber Roles Matrix where more help is needed. Please consider becoming a volunteer and assuming one of more of these roles. The Chamber volunteer is the real hero for this organization and we simply cannot do it without you!

Thank you for another great Chamber year and we, the Board, look forward to working with you to make 2017 another great year, and the beginning of another great decade!

Sincerely,

Barry Van Sant, President

J Bryon Williams, Vice President

Carita Ginn, Secretary

Jean Collier, Treasurer

Caroline Irwin, Member-at-Large