

Evergreen Stronger and Better than Ever

by Penny Randell

As the year 2020 rolled around the Evergreen Area Chamber of Commerce (EACC) was primed and ready to support and lead the community as they have done for the past 50 years. The celebration of the Chamber's 50th anniversary brought a refreshing look at all their accomplishments since their beginning, and promised another year of Chamber support and events. But, this was before the COVID-19 virus hit, which changed everyone's lives and the way they conduct business. However, this didn't slow the Chamber or their overwhelming commitment to servicing the community, for they were able to comply with demands brought on by the disease while maintaining some of their functions as well as creating new ones.

Once the virus was confirmed in the area, the Evergreen Chamber, Conifer Chamber, and Platte Canyon Chamber created The Mountain Economic Task Force, or the Cares Act. These folks worked together with the Jefferson County Commissioners to safeguard funding for Evergreen businesses that were forced to shut. From the start EACC sent out surveys in effort to find out how COVID-19 was affecting mountain area businesses. This act was implemented and information was swiftly gathered and broadcast on the Chamber website. The data provided the trusted details needed to request assistance from the county as well as the federal government. This act of giving was successful, and we have the Chamber to thank for it.

As said, some Chamber programs were canceled, but new ones were created to mitigate the devastation of the beginning stages of shutdowns. One such plan of action was called Take Out/Take Over. This was a stratagem to encourage folks to purchase carry out food from local restaurants. Reaching out to all Chamber members, a quick email to the Chamber about a member's take-out business afforded a place on their website that provided information. Advice was given, too, such as suggesting that delivery warranted proper insurance coverage. On this site the Chamber listed restaurants as well as caterers. Restaurants outside the mountain area, such as Golden, Denver, Wheat Ridge, Lakewood, Littleton, and Arvada were even included.

The months of April, May, and June were particularly tough with so many closures. To offset the havoc created by the predicament, the Chamber created the \$25 gift card. This was named the Shop Only Local Gift Card Program. You could purchase one gift card or many through the Chamber website. There were over 45 businesses who received these cards. The dollar amount began at \$25 and went all the way up to \$775. In total, the amount given to businesses reached \$10,075. As far as redeeming an investment, there was no time limit and a buyer could access given amounts at their discretion.

Of all the clever ideas that the Chamber came up with, finding the fox was one of their best. The name of the game was Summer Scavenger Hunt. This was a contest shared with the Conifer Chamber that involved visiting businesses throughout the area and searching each one for the picture of the fox, which was periodically moved from business to business. Once the fox was found, special deals came with it. Again, the Chamber website was accessed to advertise these special deals along with clues to the fox's current location.

While businesses were shut, some scheduled Chamber events were switched over to a virtual format. In the beginning, even mixers were virtual. Other programs, such as the Evergreen Chamber breakfast took on the same format and continue in this way today. The Young Professional Program is also virtual, with some onsite activities. Too, more marketing meetings were scheduled to go over benefits with the members. Recently a quarterly Lunch and Learn went virtual. This is a service allotted to business level members. In addition, the Chamber is continuing their one-on-one executive level member meetings which point out benefits within the Chamber.

In response to COVID, Jefferson County (Jeffco) aided every Chamber in the county with a \$1000 contribution. The decision was made for EACC to donate the entire \$1000 back to the community. In the spirit of what would be best for business, brainstorming delivered a great idea based on a “50/50” service that proved to be successful.

In honor of their 50 years, the Chamber originally had every desire to produce a community party repaying citizens for all their support. Word has it that it was to be big...**really big**. But COVID changed the venue. Instead, *Fabulous at Fifty, or Shop Local Only* was born and paid for by the Jeffco contribution. Throughout the entire month of August, the Chamber recognized and supported local establishments by giving \$50 each business day to an individual business, whether they were Chamber members or not. Therefore the \$1000 would go directly to the community through the program. With economic recovery in mind, the Chamber would post daily pictures on social media featuring the items available for \$50 and the businesses that provided them. You could even shop online.

Former EACC President Betsy Hays said, “The \$1000 worth of items and gift cards we purchase will be given away to anyone showing a receipt for \$50 previously spent in the community – in essence doubling the value of their purchase. It is our birthday and our gift is to pay it forward.” By the way, first to come with a receipt equaled first served. The chamber and our local businesses greatly appreciated the support and enthusiasm for this innovative program. Products and services ran the gamut of offerings from a variety of local merchants. The drawings were held live on Facebook with Betsy Hayes and Nancy Judge participating.

While the Chamber was busy fulfilling the needs of members and the community in general, a huge change took place. Betsy Hays made the decision to move to another place of employment. Giving up her job at the Chamber, she took on the position of Director of Resource Development and Fundraising at Mount Evans Home Health Care & Hospice. Hays stated, “COVID has brought about all kinds of changes and it is up to all of us to adapt. This may be an opportunity to re-invent oneself into something totally new.” Still dedicated to the Chamber, Hays says she plans to stay involved as a constant member.

On September 18th of this year Nancy Judge took on the position of Chamber President. After spending 20 years as a salesperson for a company who made system engineering software tools, she realized she loved business and the regimen that goes with it. From there she moved onto Evergreen Christian Outreach (EChO) and managed their food bank in 2017. Two years later she moved within the organization to Development Director. When the Chamber President position opened, she was one of the first in line to apply for the job. When asked why she made the change

she said, “I welcome the challenge of helping businesses through these hard times. I not only want to see businesses survive, but thrive.”

Looking ahead to a new year turns out to be quite the challenge, but Judge is ready to take it on. She says, “We will continue to advocate for new members and most of all, new opportunities to grow our businesses in general.” In addition, the Chamber looks forward to working with county commissioners as they have in the past. Together our mountain community will continue to blossom. Events, contests and programs will be adapted as necessary to meet ongoing needs and safety requirements. Some will be subject to cancellation, and some dates will just be changed such as Sparkle & Shine Business Awards and Holiday Gala, Mountain Area Women in Business Luncheon, and Skate the Lake New Year’s Eve Celebration. As always, visit the Chamber website evergreenchamber.org for the latest information.

As a community we are thankful for our most dedicated Chamber. Despite the fact that we are all struggling now, it is believed the future will be brighter than ever. Some even claim that COVID may turn out to be a valuable learning experience, for finding new ways to exist are on the horizon. What Betsy Hays began will be carried on by Nancy Judge. In terms of leadership, there could be no better examples.