

Evergreen Chamber of Commerce Celebrates 50th Anniversary

by Penny Randell

This year 2020 represents the 50th Anniversary of the indispensable Evergreen Area Chamber of Commerce (EACC). Although records prove that this non-profit organization began decades earlier, it officially became what it is today beginning in September of 1970. Years ago, the Chamber welcomed opportunities to promote tourism, trade, and rapid growth after Denver's initial interest and investment penetrated the area. As early as 1927 a pamphlet was circulated throughout the community that brought attention to businesses in effort to support the community, expose needs, or even problems, and provide remedies to solve those issues.

Because the town of Evergreen is unincorporated, the Chamber has often served a number of functions that a municipal government would normally manage. Most important, the Chamber provides a vehicle to encourage patronage of local businesses. In addition, it was organized to promote the general complexion of the community, as well as surrounding trade areas. As far as membership is concerned, any reputable person, business, association, corporation, partnership, or estate is eligible for membership.

This area's mountain beauty has always called to people, paving the way to settlement, and this has remained same to this very day. Early on Evergreen was treasured as a community residing in a rural mountain setting that was primarily residential. Locals in this area are still known for their value and preservation of the ambiance, as they work together to keep it alive. Folks tend to be individualistic, independent and quite sensitive to Evergreen's natural locale. Because there is no local traditional government, schools, fire protection, recreational opportunities and other services are provided by the county, or special districts. In absence of government, a coalition of groups and associations is often the best way to reach the people and get a handle on what needs attention.

Today Evergreen has a vibrant and thriving artist community and is recognized as a center for cultural activities shared with the surrounding areas. Existing consortiums include music, theatre, all forms of art, and historical congregations. One of the most famous historical sites is the Hiwan Homestead Museum, located off Highway 74. A visit to the museum is enlightening and offers a compelling history lesson on this area. Those early days of development reveal facts concerning the Chamber and those who were instrumental in getting it off the ground.

When visiting the area, a stop at the office of the Chamber is an eye-opener. The staff is truly there to introduce you to all that Evergreen and beyond have to offer. Let them light the way to shopping, both downtown and north of town. Besides that, they can tell you about Evergreen's clean water, medical services, accommodations, restaurants, recreation, churches, protective services, and of course, cultural activities. They can help arrange a day's outing to Red Rocks Park, Mount Evans, Echo Lake, the buffalo herd on Genesee Mountain, or Buffalo Bill's grave on Lookout Mountain. Let them tell you about the schools in the area, as well as realtors that can introduce you to the market.

But no particulars, details, or facts can match a human account of how things once were. John Ellis, past president of the Chamber recalls when much of it all began. Ellis can remember when credit cards became popular and the effects they had on the Chamber. Everyone was used to paying with cash or check and it was a hard to trust in a new system. This knowledgeable gentleman can also remember going from business to business about town in hopes of finding a place for a Chamber meeting. He says in the beginning the Chamber was solely built on volunteers. He said, "We met at places like El Rancho or the public service offices. No one was paid and everyone involved pitched in. In the beginning, much like today, it was word-of-mouth advertising and it worked very well."

"The Chamber actually picked up the town," said Ellis. His tales of past Christmases and how the fire department worked with the Chamber to hand out candy is inspiring. He continued by stating that these volunteers, numbering 15 or more, would visit other chambers and learn just how to handle businesses in a close community. Most of all, Ellis knows the scoop on why Evergreen is not incorporated and how incorporation would create high taxes. Instead, he states the Chamber always helped to run the town and that nothing has changed. Indeed, this hometown organization helped the residents save money while connecting in business.

Just as Ellis spoke, others, too, have plenty to say about the Chamber and its success. Gail Riley of Highland Haven Creekside Inn is one of the longer-standing members with the Chamber. She said, "I count myself fortunate with the pleasures and gains of my relationship with the Chamber. I have benefitted not only in making friends, but as a business owner. I respect the community the Chamber fosters and recognize that the Chamber enriches our dear hamlet of Evergreen." Tom Carby of Carby Insurance said, "Over the last 25 years as an insurance agent in Evergreen my membership in the EACC has been invaluable! The incredible connections and relationships created by EACC have enriched my life in so many ways!"

When people talk in this community they are heard. Gary Matson, president of the Chamber in 2004 wrote a piece in the publication *The Voice* describing the value of working partnerships. Again, the Chamber carried the message and even approached Wal-Mart in doing so. It happened that several Chamber members met at the store to discuss the notion that business, non-profits, and the community should work together. Wal-Mart heralded a plan to target needy organizations and service projects within the area for grants provided by the company. In return, the Chamber and all its members expressed keen interest in a closer connection between business and non-profits. Together they welcomed success with three grants: The Literacy Grant to support the Rotary Club of Evergreen Literacy Program for youth; Environmental Grant to support the Mountain Area Land Trust; Matching Grants for the arts, as well as the Senior Resource Center expansion program.

With a board of directors of 15 and 575 members, the Chamber is bursting with excitement. From founding members like the Evergreen Rodeo Association, Cozy Cleaners, and Evergreen National Bank, to name only a few, to the most recent, the flow of involvement is increasing. Rachel Nicks, present Chairman of the Board and owner of Seasonally Yours spoke about the Chamber saying, "Since Evergreen is unincorporated and has no local government the Evergreen Chamber provides a very unique service to the community by meeting regularly with our county commissioners and other government agencies to inform them of our residents' concerns. I'm am truly honored to serve for this organization." Past president of the board and owner of VP Financial Options Vicki

Pender added, “EACC is the heartbeat of the community; where you find what you need to know, what to do, where to go, how to grow and where you meet your forever friends.

A conversation with the current Chamber President and CEO Betsy Hays tells all. Surprisingly she has served twice, beginning her career with the Chamber in 2008 and remaining until 2011. At that time, she was head of membership and advertising. Accessing her MBA, she ventured into other pursuits until 2015 when she returned to the Chamber and was voted in as president by the board of directors. She reports, “I love our business community. Owners care about one another and even mentor and collaborate with each other. The energy of our business community is a way of life. It’s infectious.” In addition to everything else, the Chamber operates the Visitor’s Center. To meet the demands of three audiences: visitors, businesses, and residents, it takes dedicated workers. In addition to Hays, Clair Hicks serves as operations manager and Gwendoline Ryan handles marketing.

Hays gracefully fulfills her presidential role. Her solemn beliefs can be exemplified by her recent interview. She said, “Personal recommendations are a way of life in any small town. Being part of a conversation is how business happens.” She continues by testifying that the Evergreen Chamber, the staff, members, and board of directors all work together to recommend local businesses. Besides meetings, and mixers, the Chamber hosts six major events a year. Without volunteers this ambitious organization would be in trouble. These six events take all hands and happily each year the success tally adds up.

Endorsing basic conversation as a true initiator and tool for opening doors, Hays is always poised for greetings and conversation. When asked she said, “I’ve always had a knack for remembering people’s names and businesses. I feel as though I was made for my job. And, I am pleased that I’ll be allowed to remain president as long as I am able to serve.” After this past year’s six Chamber events, Evergreen remains forever grateful for the overwhelming positive results of each one. This community is greatly blessed, for at its heart is the Evergreen Area Chamber of Commerce. Search as you may, but in this area no other organization is as instrumental in sustained growth, invaluable connections, and gentle guidance. A celebration is at hand.

Thank you, Evergreen Area Chamber of Commerce and Happy Anniversary. For all information call 303-674-3412 or see evergreenchamber.org.