

The Chamber Executive Network

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Innovative management, membership and project ideas for progressive Chambers

September, 2010



How one exec did it: Organizing 1,000 people for spectacular photo

Dear Subscriber,

When it comes to the Hall of Fame for Well-Organized Chamber Execs, we'll nominate Pat Decker of Butler (Missouri) Chamber.

One warm July evening this summer, Decker was able to position 1,000 of her local citizens, flashlights in hand, on the chalked outlines of 14 gigantic letters on two streets of the courthouse square – just in time for a professional photographer in a plane to fly over at twilight for the spectacular photo you see at left.

The message BUTLER SHINE ON! will help commemorate 130 years of Butler having the oldest continuously-operated municipal power plant in the U.S. Besides generating terrific artwork for Chamber postcards and other promotional publications, Decker is hopeful the project will make the *Guinness Book of World Records* for “most simultaneously lit flashlights.”

“It was a pretty cool deal and a big deal for a town of five thousand people,” says Decker. “We saw it as a positive, community-wide event that everybody could do. We had folks with strollers and walkers. All people had to do was show up with a flashlight and shine on!”

But it was not quite as simple as it sounds. Here's the logistics breakdown of this clever Chamber publicity event:

■ **First order of business: Rally the troops.** The Chamber board, city council, newspaper and radio station quickly embraced Decker's idea. She also mailed letters to civic groups and presented the concept in person to the local Ministerial Association. Everybody agreed to donate time and effort to make it work, so the Chamber had almost no cost. The event was then scheduled to piggyback on a band concert and ice cream social at the courthouse gazebo. Churches offered to serve free hot dogs to the participants and shuttle them in vans from their church parking lots, since parking downtown would be difficult.

■ **Securing the plane; marking the street.** Decker found a local flight instructor and a professional photographer willing to volunteer their services. She also found a sponsor to cover the \$136 cost to rent a “special night camera” for the task. “The hardest part was painting the letters in spray chalk on our brick streets,” says the exec. “Some were 35 feet tall by 18 feet wide and it took five of us two full hours to

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complete.” The letters were designed for two or three people to stand abreast on the narrow sections. “We had no idea how many people would finally show up,” says Decker. “I just wanted enough to make the letters visible when they pointed their flashlights skyward.”

■ **Getting people to show up and be counted.** The Chamber hung a huge vinyl banner over a downtown street for ten days prior to the event which read “Butler Shine On! July 19, 8 p.m. Bring flashlight. World Record!” T-shirts were sold to promote the event and Decker placed three mobile signs announcing it at strategic spots around town. To comply with official Guinness rules, a staging area was blocked off and special witnesses were assigned to number hands as people entered through gates beginning at 8 p.m.. A second count was taken after they lined up on the letters. Amazingly, the count was exactly 1,000.

■ **Moving the crowd to their proper places.** Decker provided a half page of instructions for each participant telling them things such as to “line up two abreast, face the courthouse and be patient and save your batteries for the plane.” As the plane circled, she used a bullhorn to advance people to the letters and await her “lights on” signal. After the plane completed several passes at 1,300 feet, the crowd was dismissed and the entire line-up process had taken only one hour. The Guinness counters retired to a law office to fill out extensive paperwork, which has now been submitted.

■ **Other details.** An ambulance was on hand and the city provided portable toilets, plus extra water was available since it was a hot night. Decker collected more than 100 donated flashlights but says most people brought their own. Her only regrets were that she didn’t organize more “cheering by letter” from the crowd and was unable to play patriotic music during the staging. “Still, it was an awesome thing and great for our town,” she says. “Am I well organized? Well, if you looked at my desk, you’d say no. But I like to pay attention to details.” [660-679-3380] executivedirector@butlermochochamber.org



Battling art vandals

Vandals into “cow tipping” have damaged six of the 38 artistically-decorated, life-sized fiberglass cows first positioned in May around Burlington, Vermont streets as part of the Lake Champlain Chamber’s “Cows Come Home” public art project. That has prompted the Chamber and a downtown group to pass out 500 “Cow Tender” buttons which are worn by downtown bartenders, wait staff and other business people as a fresh reminder to protect the cows by watching for vandals. Is it working? Chamber tourism director Matt McMahon says after three weeks of the anti-vandalism campaign, there were no incidents. The test will come as college students return to the books and bars and are asked to leave the cows alone. [Shown here is artist Amy Huntington, a children’s book illustrator, with her creation.]

Want to find a Chamber member business? There’s an app for that. About 50 U.S. and Canadian Chambers have joined MyChamberApp since the company first started selling Chambers the special application program two months ago. It allows users of mobile devices such as iPhone, Droid and Blackberry to download the app for free and get quick access to Chamber-member information, including phone numbers, addresses, directions, member-to-member discounts and Chamber events. The app is GPS driven, so users can simply select a category of business and are then directed to a listing of those nearby. “It’s faster than going to our Chamber website, plus it’s handy when traveling,” says RaDonna Hessel, president/CEO of Grapevine (Texas) Chamber which provides the service as a member benefit. “People trust Chamber members, so it’s a good service to the public as well.” Hessel says her Chamber is promoting use of the application



and says many of her members have downloaded it. She sees it as another membership recruitment tool for the Chamber. “It helps to be able to tell people we’re on the cutting edge with this kind of technology, rather than saying things like ‘we’ll fax you an invoice’,” Hessel adds. [817-481-1522] radonna@grapevinechamber.org

Vendor notes: Nancy Hammerman of The Chamber App Co. says her firm’s goal is to eventually sign 1,000 Chambers and list 500,000 business members. Chamber Master and Target Marketing are its strategic partners. The basic rate for Chambers is \$5 per member to cover the first two-year period, however an introductory rate is available upon request. Find more info and downloading instructions at www.mychamberapp.com or contact her at nancy@mychamberapp.com.

Chamber sells “humorous, tasteful” calendar of undressed businessmen!

Greater York Region (Maine) Chamber set its community abuzz last year by holding a November unveiling party for its “Men of York” calendar. The calendar featured humorous photos of a diverse group of local businessmen, ages 20 to 70+, in various stages of undress, often with a prop which related to their business. “These men were really great sports in the interest of raising funds for local non-profits,” says President Cathy Goodwin. “We raised funds and raised eyebrows, but it was all done in good taste. In reality, the photos show no more than you would see on a sunny summer day at the beach.” Tickets to the “Men of York Revealed” unveiling party at a local club were \$35 each but included the \$20 value calendar, plus refreshments and a chance to meet and get autographs from the models. The men featured were introduced on stage in a humorous show that included themed music as their photos were revealed by calendar month. Four professional photographers donated talent to the project, which netted about \$5,000. Proceeds were split among



the Chamber’s scholarship fund and four other local non-profits. The Chamber printed 1,500 calendars and encouraged their purchase as holiday gifts. “This was the most hilarious and fun project we have ever done,” says Goodwin. “By keeping the names of the participants a secret, it became a region-wide quest to find out who was involved. The unveiling party was sold out because everyone who was anyone had to be there to find out who the models were.” A second calendar is planned for 2012 under the same format, but will be unveiled earlier in the year for better marketing. “We’ll probably keep doing them for the next few years until the novelty wears off – or we run out of handsome models,” quips the exec. [207-363-4422] cathy@yorkme.org

Photo: Steve Dunne, Brown’s Old Fashioned Ice Cream, was photographed in this pose by Shane Corcoran of Shane’s Maine Photography. “I scream, you scream, we all scream for HIS ice cream” was the tag line.

Solid, three-pronged marketing keeps this Chamber lottery a sell out. In this age of state-run lotteries and casinos everywhere, exec Bob Hastings of Cape Ann (Massachusetts) Chamber is still able to sell 500 tickets each year at \$100 each for his Chamber’s fall lottery – netting a steady \$18,000 to \$20,000. Besides the nicely-designed artwork shown here, Hastings pushes three main points in his campaign to sell tickets. **First, the odds:** Ticket holders have a one in 500 chance to win the \$10,000 top prize and a 12 in 500 chance of winning \$500 or more -- phenomenally better than state lottery odds. “I tell people that the state lottery is a tax on the mathematically impaired,” says Hastings. **Second, the local benefit:** Funds retained by the

Chamber benefit activities and programs at home, a more efficient choice than shipping money off to the state bureaucracy.

Third, the party: Each \$100 ticket secures admission for two to the Chamber’s “Game Party,” which features free food, a cash bar, more games, entertainment and the grand prize drawing. Bottom line: Better chances to win, plus you’re doing something good for the town and having more fun than scratching tickets or picking numbers. “I sometimes get nervous about sales,” says Hastings, “but we’ve been doing this for a long time. People always race in here at the last minute and we sell out.” [978-283-1601] h@capeannchamber.com

The Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce
presents

THE \$25,000 GAME

Wednesday, September 22, 2010, 5:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.
The Gloucester House, 63 Rogers St., Gloucester
\$100 per Ticket (only 500 tickets to be sold)

Appetizers • Door Prizes • Cash Bar

Tickets Available at the Chamber 978-283-1601

\$25,000 Jackpot!
1st Prize: \$10,000
Odds of Winning:
12 in 500!

BEST ODDS IN TOWN! Buy Your Ticket Today!

Editor's Notebook:

Lively Chamber golf tourney: Four projects in one.

Mount Vernon (Washington) Chamber keeps things exciting at its annual golf tournament it co-sponsors with Burlington Chamber. This year, exec Kristen Whitener had four big drawing cards which helped net \$14,000 from what it now calls its Million Dollar Golf & Trade Show:

(1) One stroke, one ball, one hole-in-one for \$1 million.

Each admission ticket automatically puts each golfer in a drawing for a shot at \$1 million. This year, one ticket was drawn from the 124 golfers entered and the winner had one chance to stroke a hole-in-one on a 155-yard par three hole. "He missed, but in other years, people have come close," says Whitener. The cost of insurance for this was \$194.

(2) Trade show element popular with sponsors.

Each hole sponsor is encouraged to set up a trade show booth and/or games at their tee box. Golfers then vote on the "best marketed booth" which is announced at the awards ceremony.

(3) Putts & Pints Brewfest added this year.

Four local breweries set up a stand, donated kegs of their best beers and allowed golfers to sample their products by buying a \$10 ticket.

(4) Helicopter golf ball drop is a perennial favorite.

Three hundred numbered golf balls are dropped from a helicopter hovering 20 feet over a green. The ball which lands closest to the pin without going in usually pays out about \$600. Golfers purchase their number for \$5 each. A charter air service provides the helicopter to the Chamber at no charge. [360-428-8547] kristenw@mountvernonchamber.com



Chamber's "Great Race" creates fun, business exposure.

Kearney Area (Nebraska) Chamber last month sponsored its first Kearney's Great Race which Events Director Jennie Nollette says was a hit. Here's how it worked: Through advance publicity, the Chamber was able to pre-register 30 two-person teams which gathered in a parking lot at 1 p.m. on Friday the 13th for the race. Teams paid \$50 to register, but received T-shirts for both teammates, plus a goodie bag and a chance to win \$500, \$250 or \$100 if they finished in the top three places. The race was similar to a

scavenger hunt in that the teams were presented with 20 clues which were to guide them to 20 local sponsoring businesses, each of which paid the Chamber a \$100 fee to be included. For example, the clue for Anytime Fitness read like this: "24 hours a day, seven days a week, walk, jog, lift or run, we'll work you hard, but you'll have fun."

Teams brought their own digital cameras and were required to take their own photo in each business with a sign placed there by the Chamber to prove they were there. The first five returning teams got all the clues correct, with the winning team returning in 75 minutes. "It was fun, attracted attention and got people into stores they may not have heard of before," says Nollette. She planned to put some team photos online soon. [308-237-3101] jnollette@kearneycoc.org

CHAMBER MEMBER CHECKLIST

- Do you have your Chamber directory?
- Did you receive your Chamber plaque?
- Have you submitted your Chamber profile form?
- Have you attended a membership meeting?
- Have you submitted your business card for three months of FREE newsletter advertising?
- Are you getting our Weekly Email Update?
- Are you receiving the Chamber newsletter?
- Have you thought of joining a committee?
- Attended a Chamber Business After Hours?
- Attended a Chamber special event?
- Attended a Chamber Round Table Discussion?

This checklist is provided to help make sure you are taking full advantage of your membership. Please call the Chamber office at 314-831-3500 if you have any questions. Visit our website at www.greaternorthcountychamber.com for more information.

— Adapted from a full page notice in the Greater North County (Missouri) Chamber newsletter.

Keep digitizing!

Dick Hakes
Editor/Publisher
hakesd@iw.net



Organize a ‘Shop Without the Kids Day’

Give parents more productive shopping time in your community this Christmas by promoting a “Shop Without the Kids Day.” Find a youth club or perhaps a high school or college sports team or other organization willing to provide experienced or certified babysitters for the day. Provide fun/learning activities for various age groups, include a healthy lunch and locate the service in a convenient area near shopping districts. Set up reasonable hourly rates or ask for a free will offering for the service. Be sure to comply with child care laws and secure liability insurance coverage.

Plan early to jump-start your holiday promotions this year

Dear Subscriber,

The recession lingers and economic numbers are a mixed bag, but one truth is evident: Local businesses will depend upon your Chamber once again to help deliver the Christmas and holiday shoppers to their stores which can keep them in business.

This special report offers some fresh ideas that have worked for other Chambers which might help you jump-start planning for your year-end holiday promotions.

Do pre-emptive hit on out-of-town shopping.

They called it “Black Wednesday” in Monticello, Indiana last year, a way for the community to showcase local shopping the week before Thanksgiving Day and the traditional “Black Friday” the day after. “The idea was to have shoppers see all our community offers for the holidays before they might head out of town to shop on Black Friday,” says Chamber exec Janet Dold. You might call it a pre-emptive strike. Media support was considerable and the Chamber and Wal-Mart partnered in a drawing for shoppers to win an expensive flat-screen TV if they registered during the week prior to Thanksgiving. Clerks and others wore Black Wednesday shirts with the logo shown here.

Shoppers

were also reminded that nearly 70 percent of their dollar spent locally returns to support the community, compared to zero percent when they shop online or out of town. Did it work? “It was very successful,” says Dold. “Main Street was bustling. Families came downtown to eat and stores offered special prices and stayed open late so people could shop. Merchants reported great sales and we’re going to repeat it this year and make it an annual event.” [574-583-7220 Ext. 202] janeto@sugardog.com



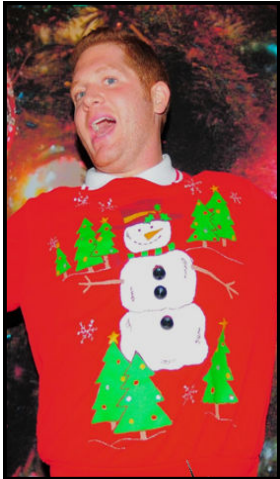
Create your own unique Santa or holiday character -- with school colors?

The Santa shown here has a purple and gold robe, the school colors and adopted town colors at Oak Harbor, Washington. Chamber exec Jill Johnson says their Santa roams the town during the Christmas season, passing out candy canes with shop local messages on them such as "Shopping local is sweet." His thing is also to bellow "OH, OH, OH" (signifying Oak Harbor) instead of "HO, HO, HO." Says Johnson: "It's been fun and the merchants love it. It may be cheesy, but that's what Chambers do." Creating your own customized holiday characters can add some interest and excitement to your hometown shopping atmosphere. [360-675-3755] jill@oakharborchamber.com



Feature "hot holiday items" from your members.

Each year near the holidays, Mount Pleasant Area (Michigan) Chamber prints in its newsletter two pages of great color photos and clever responses from several local merchants who describe the "hot" holiday shopping items they offer. The items included things like Miche handbags, indoor bike trainers, diamond bracelets and even power tools and weather vanes. "The merchants we feature write their own articles, with some editing by us," says President Lisa Hadden. "We open it up to all members, but we try to collect submissions from a good cross section of businesses each year. People like it because it gives them some good shopping ideas, plus it promotes shopping at home." [989-772-2396] lhadden@mt-pleasant.net



Spice up BAH with Ugliest Holiday Sweater Contest.

Our own Storm Lake United (the Chamber) here in Storm Lake, Iowa had big plans for an Ugliest Holiday Sweater Contest at last December's holiday BAH – but one of several winter blizzards cancelled the event. Marketing and Activities Director Kelli Berg says Chamber board and staff members had dug out their best entries from moth-balled sweater drawers to wear to this mixer, but may have another chance when the contest is resurrected this December. Entrants will be lined up to model their sweaters, introduced and then judged, with food and drink tickets for the winners. Sounds like a great holiday ice breaker theme for a BAH. [712-732-3780] kberg@stormlakeunited.com

Challenge a neighboring Chamber to do something good.

This will be the third holiday season that Lafayette and Louisville (Colorado) Chambers will compete to see which Chamber can generate the most food for a local food bank. "It's mostly for bragging rights and to encourage our members to support a worthy cause," says Lafayette exec Vicki Trumbo. "We usually collect

5,000 to 6,000 pounds of food during a month." The Chambers publish a list of items needed – from canned fruit to toothbrushes – and members can drop donations off at the Chamber or directly to the food bank. "I would encourage any Chambers in close proximity to work together on issues than can benefit both," adds Trumbo. "It's a feel-good, positive publicity event for everyone involved." [303-666-9555] info@lafayettecolorado.com

Kick your gingerbread house artisans into high gear.

Hunterdon County (New Jersey) Chamber was happy to draw more than 20 entries (example shown here) last December in its first gingerbread house building contest, which encouraged work that depicted local historic sites and buildings. "People used kits or made their entries from scratch," says Rebecca Abbate, director of events for the Chamber. "Some kids used graham crackers. Everybody was very creative." When displayed in an empty retail store, the houses attracted the attention of shoppers and visitors. "People are always looking for something different during the holidays," says Abbate. "We also got a lot of great press. We even had front page photos in our local paper." She hopes for a bigger contest this year and will start publicity this month seeking entries from Chamber members and the public. To improve exposure, the display will be moved from year to year to different locations around the community. "Last year, we gave certificates to everybody who entered," she says. "This year, we may actually judge the entries and award prizes." [908-782-7115] rabbate@hunterdon-chamber.org

