

## ***Building Connections, Building Community***

*Monte Giddings, December 2, 2009*

I want to thank this community and members of the Leawood Chamber for allowing me to serve as the Chair of the board for this 2009 year. I also want to publicly thank my colleagues at CBIZ and my wife, Jill, for loaning me to all the causes I believe in.

Serving as the 2009 Chair has been an enjoyable task due to the support that makes up your Chamber. That solid foundation is set on four pillars-First, and above all, is this fertile community of Leawood and all the people who live and work here. This community is gifted with a great talent pool from which we draw our members. The second pillar is the diversely successful body of Leawood businesses committed to achieving success. Thirdly, our chamber members-You are simply the best around. It has been my pleasure to describe our chamber to new and prospective members as the “funnest chamber around.” I still mean that. And finally, your membership has produced a dedicated board and hard working committees composed of quality individuals that take all these resources very seriously. And this current board is very aware that our successes are achieved because we stand on the shoulders of all those who have served on the board and in positions of leadership since our inception in 1996. So it is really you, the Leawood community, Leawood businesses, the chamber members and its boards and committees that continue to forge the success of this chamber. Thanks to all of you.

But really, all of this talk of pillars makes the chamber sound like a building, a structure that is tied to the ground. Nothing could be more untrue. Not when you are ***Building Connections, Building Community***.

A Chamber of Commerce, by definition, is an association of businesses to promote their interests in a community. There is no inertia in that definition. This success requires action, dynamics, and movement forward. So in reality, the pillars I mentioned before are

more like wheels. Toynbee once said that history is cyclical, but the cycle turns like a wheel, always moving forward.

Our Chamber has always been and continues to be an organization that is moving forward. We are not a static structure, but we are rather a dynamic means of transportation with room for every business in this community to hop on and ride with success. So when I speak of four pillars, perhaps a better analogy might be four wheels on which we are traveling to greater places.

Now we may not be the biggest Chamber in the area, but I like to think of us as being a small vehicle with a big engine.

Every day we hear that this last year has presented American business with one of the most challenging landscapes in the last 100 years.

That does not mean we stop **Building Connections and Building Community**.

Even in this challenging landscape, over 100 new members have joined our chamber this year and overall membership is up almost 9%. We now have over 460 member businesses that employ over 35,000 people in the metro area. I believe this is evidence that in harder times people recognize, perhaps intuitively, the need to draw closer to community. Our growth is hard data that illustrates our chamber is an organization perceived by the business community as a genuine enhancer of success.

Although our community has shared in economic hardship, we have also celebrated some tremendous successes:

- Leawood saw the opening of its first hotel, Aloft Leawood in Park Place. Aloft has 156 spacious rooms for the modern business traveler causing us as a chamber to ponder the potential future need for a Convention & Visitors Bureau.
- Leawood dedicated a new park at 133<sup>rd</sup> and Mission Rd. The park is called Gezer Park to accentuate our sister city relationship with the Gezer Region of Israel. You really have to visit this park to see what people are talking about.

As for the Chamber, well we have cause for celebration too. I mean, how can you go wrong when your mission is ***Building Connections, Building Community?*** Here are some things that happened:

- Membership Achievement Award: 2008-2009 Top Ten Ranking for New Member Dollars for the \$450,000 and Under Total Revenue Category presented to Leawood Chamber of Commerce by the American Chamber of Commerce Executives
- Kevin Jeffries, Chamber President and CEO, was recognized by the City Council for his for 10 years with the chamber
- Launched the Leawood Young Professionals group
- Event participation is up 9%, meaning there are more people attending events and networking
- A Taste of Leawood event was a sell out in 2009
- An upgrade to the Chamber database to make it easier for Chamber members to register online.
- Received recognition in the local press for our continued growth and upbeat networking environment

Now you may have noticed that as I was talking about the four secrets to the Chamber success, I did not mention our intrepid Chamber staff. We definitely owe much of our success to them, but I got a little carried away with the rolling wheel analogy and after I mentioned four, I didn't want to you to think I was referring to our staff as the fifth wheel. But really, every hot rod needs a fifth wheel-It's called a steering wheel.

And this chamber staff has steered us successfully through this exciting year.

Pamela Noyce, our Office Administrator, and Angela Davidson, our Communications and Retention Manager, epitomize the positive attitude of people who can get anything done.

Linda Murray, our Director of Membership and former board member and Ambassador's chair, has been a large factor in our growth.

Stephanie Scholfield, our Director of Events and Communication, just keeps doing an excellent job day after day.

And then there is Kevin who is dedicated, hard-working, and really cheap-I meant to say frugal. Actually, Kevin is a wonderful steward of the financial resources the Chamber is given.

I would really be remiss if I did not express our thanks to the City of Leawood. We are fortunate to have such tremendous support from our city government, and especially our noble Mayor and City Council who can (almost always) be seen attending our events. Thank you.

And thanks again to all the members here today. And if you're not in the Leawood Chamber join us as a member or even a sponsor. Come and see why we are growing, what the buzz is, and why we think we're the funnest chamber around. Come, **Build Connections**, help us continue to **Build Community**.