

## **Executive Director, Chris McDonald, Speech Jan 23, 2024 AGM**

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen and welcome to the Parry Sound Area Chamber of Commerce 126<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting here at the beautiful Best Western Plus. Thank you to our hosts Biren and Devang and their staff, for supplying the refreshments here this morning as well as this meeting room.

I'd like to acknowledge that we are on the on the traditional territory of the Anishnawbe people and live and work along the waterways travelled by the Metis of this region. The Parry Sound Area Chamber of Commerce is committed to learning and listening to indigenous voices.

I'm Chris McDonald, your Executive Director at the Parry Sound Area Chamber of Commerce.

Parry Sound and our surrounding municipalities, have been a hotspot of activity over the past year, and we've been fortunate at the Chamber of Commerce to be on the frontlines to help welcome new businesses, celebrate milestone and achievements for existing businesses and provide support in whatever way we can to our Members and the general public alike.

We've helped our Members learn technology tools such as the Metasuite in Facebook, find grant and funding opportunities, address staff housing and recruitment strategies, and introduce new business owners to fellow business owners in the area.

We hosted a variety of networking events, learning sessions, business over breakfasts and special events such as our charity cruise for The Drop, Lunch with MPP Graydon Smith and of course our Business Excellence Awards Gala aboard the Island Queen cruise ship.

This past year, we also achieved many goals such as launching a new website that offers Members the opportunity to self manage their directory listings, renew their membership and update info and photos as they choose. This has also helped streamline our work at the office into a more efficient way to interact with our Membership. We were also successful in migrating all event registrations and payments to our own website and eliminate the associated fees that a third party host such as Eventbrite charges. This will save us hundreds of dollars every year and give us more control over our own events.

We addressed strategies on how to better communicate with the cruise ship industry and their clientele as well as provide print information for tourists at the Town Dock that promote local places to stay, eat, shop, and explore.

Our Membership saw a significant increase over the past 12 months from 194 paying members to 238 which represented a 23% increase from the previous year. This was in large part due to the visibility and presence the Chamber has had on social media, word of mouth, networking events that welcomed non-members, and our monthly newsletter which has been one of the most valuable resources to our subscribers.

With this growth, we were presented new opportunities and we decided to pursue a new location to better serve the growing demand for our operations and management.

I'm pleased to announce that we have found a new office space at 1 College Drive inside Canadore College! This new location will have more parking, be more accessible, have higher foot traffic and

visibility and offer us tools and resources for events and learning such as Venture Bay Studio and the large lounge for our monthly Board meetings.

Our goal is to be relocated there on June 1<sup>st</sup> and we can't wait to set up shop. This location will create a business hub with a lot of additional resources at hand and feels like the next logical step for the Chamber as we continue to grow.

We have also been working with the Town of Parry Sound to have a greater presence at the Town Dock. We are happy to announce that this spring, we will once again have an information kiosk located at the Town dock which will be located in the Harbour Walk Shops! Even more amazing is that this opportunity for the Chamber comes at no cost to our organization since the Town will be providing the space and the hut. So a big thank you to the Town of Parry Sound for this opportunity. We will focus on providing print material, event poster space, QR codes, maps, digital information displays and much more. This will also give local businesses the opportunity to come and do guest appearances to showcase their products, services, and experiences they provide. This will be a great addition to the Town Dock for this spring and will operate from mid April until late October which is fantastic.

Our latest strategic plan focuses on putting more of a focus on our members and we've achieved a lot of success this past year executing that mission. Our social media business of the week feature, certificates acknowledging milestones and achievements, and our new monthly Chamber Chat video piece in collaboration with Yourtv Muskoka have all been extremely well received and appreciated by our Members. Going forward, we find great value and high interaction rates with short video pieces and social media interaction with our followers. We will continue to engage the public with more of these in the coming months.

In conclusion, 2023 was a very successful year for the Parry Sound Area Chamber of Commerce. In 2024 we will continue to build a stronger and more resilient Membership, provide quality support to our local businesses, offer a wide variety of networking opportunities and learning seminars, and continue to be a leader in economic development and growth

I'd like to thank our Board of Directors and Advisory Board for all their work and input this past year as well as your Manager of Membership Services Catherine Lapierre for an exemplary job both in the office and at our events! I'd like to welcome Laurie de Fleuriot as our new President and thank outgoing President Gail Burrows for her many years of service on the Chamber Board.

I'd also like to thank our MP Scott Aitcheson and Town of Parry Sound Mayor Jamie McGarvey for attending today.

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Thank you all for joining us here at our 126<sup>th</sup> AGM, safe travels and thank you for your support!