



STATE OF THE CHAMBER
2014 REPORT

2013 was a Year of Dynamic Progress for the Saguache Chamber of Commerce.

THE CHAMBER'S 2013 ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS

1. Developed the website in new and important ways
 - a. Economic Growth and Recruitment Page
 - b. Creative Arts page
 - c. Service and product breakout pages
 - d. Created the on-line store for Chamber goods
2. Supported several important programs and events in Town including
 - a. Hollyhock Festival – Sponsor
 - b. Saguache Art Festival - Sponsor
 - c. Wacipi Pow Wow – Co-sponsor
 - d. Fall Festival – Coordinator and participant
3. Created liaison relationship with the Town of Saguache
4. Submitted two successful Sales Tax Grant applications
5. Applied for Creative District Status with Colorado Tourism Office
6. Developed, sponsored and presented First Annual Saguache Planning Conference
7. Exceeded the Chamber membership goal.
8. Increased the visibility of Saguache through strategic placement of advertisements

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOURISM PLAN

The Chamber began its efforts toward increasing the number of visitors in 2011. Initially called the “Marketing Plan,” the Chamber effort to publicize Saguache, has now become a major part of the Chamber’s Economic Development Plan for Saguache. This plan recognizes the importance of bringing tourism dollars to and increased public awareness of Saguache. The plan includes sponsoring local events that showcase Saguache and looking for opportunities to use a variety of media to publicize Saguache.

Chamber Events

The Chamber took on full sponsorship of the Hollyhock Festival in 2013. Under the leadership of Byron and Becky Williams, Greg Terrell and Pat Miller the festival instituted two successful and fun filled contests – a garden contest and a hollyhock depiction contest. Recruiting qualified

judges and offering prizes were important to the success of the contests. The Garden contest had two divisions one for gardens featuring hollyhocks and a general garden contest. The art contest also had two divisions an adult division and a kids division.

The Art Festival was also a Chamber project. Reports from the Saguache art community were that both visitors and revenues from art purchases were up substantially. Local artists opened their galleries and set up displays and exhibits outdoors. A map directing visitors around town and a beautiful day encouraged a walking tour and lots of time for interchanges. The mood was festive and fun. Our art community enjoyed a profitable day ending in a congenial pizza party at the Smith Gallery. The Art Festival was spearheaded by Byron and Becky Williams.

The Chamber was able to help sponsor the Pow Wow which suddenly found itself without its traditional support. Recognizing that this event celebrates an important part of Saguache history as well as its current Native American residents, the Chamber stepped in to provide funding and in-kind donations that allowed Pow Wow organizers to continue the traditions of holding an evening feast for the elders followed by a day of traditional dancing, drumming and singing in Otto Mears Park.

The Chamber began to assist with and the traditional Fall Festival in 2011. Our commitment to and participation in the Fall Festival has increased to the point where the Chamber is a major sponsor, planner and coordinator of the festival. Carita Ginn took the lead for the Chamber. She was instrumental in producing fine group of vendors in the Community Building and Otto Mears Park as well as entertainers that kept our visitors happy. Turn out for the Fall Festival increased and participants had a great time.

The tradition of holding a fund raising auction for the Chamber as a part of the Fall Festival was also carried on. The auction was the most successful we have ever held. The auction proceeds help fund the events and activities of the Chamber.

Other Efforts to Increase the Visibility of Saguache and the Chamber

Three other Chamber efforts to enhance public awareness of Saguache are among the accomplishments of the Chamber in 2013 and early 2014. (1st) Our web site, which has had 5,350 hits since its launch, was expanded and enhanced thanks to the efforts of our Vice President Mike Cowan. Mike added an online store featuring Chamber gear. The gear itself, as well as the store's presence on the web page, reflects well on Saguache and spread our reputation. The gear sold well enough that we added Saguache mugs. (2nd) The Chamber purchased an advertisement in the Colorado Tourism Vacation Guide. Although those ads are small and not inexpensive, without an ad Saguache would have no presence in this premier tourism publication. The ad raises the profile of the Chamber and the Town of Saguache in that very popular publication. (3rd) In 2013 we were able to create a space for the Chamber in the

Saguache Tourism Council's Advertisement in "Summer on the Rio Grande". For 2014, we were able to hold that space complete with the Chamber's web address and QR code.

CHAMBER MEETINGS & BUSINESS

During the year the Chamber held its regular meetings on the second Tuesday of every other month. The Board of Directors continued to meet between the General Membership meetings once and sometimes twice a month. The Chamber has reserved the Meeting Room at Road and Bridge for the rest of 2014 for the general membership meetings. Everyone is welcome to attend!

The Chamber exceeded its membership goal for 2014 and increased chamber members by 25%. More members bring a healthy increase to the treasury. Fifty businesses and individuals joined as Chamber members by the end of the year. A membership packet, the website and individual one-on-one contacts were responsible for that increase.

BRINGING THE SAGUACHE COMMUNITY TOGETHER

In the fall of 2013 the Chamber began to work on a plan to bring the Community of Saguache together. As so often happens in communities, if people don't interact with each other on a regular basis and try to develop trust and coordination, rumor, jealousy and suspicion can begin to erode community cohesiveness. Consequently, focus and work on positive community efforts and important issues can falter. Having caught wind of the beginnings of divisive rumors and recognizing that it is essential to the progress of Saguache that the community work together, the Chamber decided to take on the issue of community cooperation and cohesion directly. A two part strategy was developed.

First of all, the Chamber worked with the Town of Saguache to create liaison relationship. One representative from the Town and one from the Chamber were chosen to attend meetings of the other on a regular basis. The goal was to have someone present who could clarify perspective, correct misperception and help coordinate the actions of Town and the Chamber. This has increased the contact and the cooperation of the Town and Chamber.

Secondly, the Chamber decided to invest resources in a community coordinating and planning conference. The stated goal of the conference was to create a community calendar. The reason for doing so with a conference was so that all members of the community would be aware of the plans of other members. That way groups could coordinate and cooperate with each other. The Chamber was able to locate special speakers from the Colorado Tourism Office and its publisher Miles Partnership who could help all our groups understand marketing opportunities and new programs being offered at the state level. This conference was well attended! Every seat in the house was taken. Lunch was provided by our local restaurants, The Oasis, The 4th Street Diner

and Villa Grove Trade. Participation was strong with many participants lingering after the planned program to confer with each other and our speakers.

A colorful and comprehensive calendar has been prepared by Maria Archuleta Van Sant's company Legacy Media. Copies are available to any member who has a place to display the calendar. It will also be posted on the web site and at the kiosk in Dave Martinez Park. We hope it will help spread the word about community activities.

OTHER CHAMBER ACTIVITIES

Ribbon Cutting and Local Business Promotion: The Chamber held its first Ribbon Cutting for Aventa Credit Union last year. The Credit Union provided entertainment and food for the event and the Chamber provided speakers and participation. The Chamber also participated in the celebration of the Welcome Center's first anniversary party. Finally the Chamber was able to implement its idea of recognizing our members in a regular feature ad in the Crescent.

Involvement with Mountain Valley Business Students: In order to promote entrepreneurial spirit in the Town of Saguache, the Chamber increased its involvement with the Mountain Valley business classes. Chamber member Mike Cowan participated in mock interview sessions and the Chamber and individual members worked with students in the graphics class on various marketing projects. The Chamber also agreed to act as an advisory board to the business classes. In that capacity, members of the Chamber board reviewed the curriculum with Deanna Bartee the enthusiastic business instructor.

Help from the Saguache County Board of County Commissioners: The Chamber applied for and received two generous grants from the Saguache County Board of Commissioners through their Sales tax grant program. The Commissioners' grants have enabled the Chamber to carry on and indeed enhance its civic activities and events. The grants are most appreciated. The Chamber thanks the County for its continued support.

Creative District and CTO Activities: The Chamber connected with Colorado Creative Industries (CCI) in two ways. First, the Chamber applied for Creative District status for Saguache. Although our application was not successful this year, we learned a lot and we believe we can now position ourselves for an art filled future. The CCI complimented Saguache on the level of organization shown by its business community, the support of our town government and the level of creative activity given our small size. Second the Chamber nominated Dean Coombs and the Crescent for a Governor's Creative Leadership Award. In addition to being featured on CBS's *Sunday Morning* TV show, Dean will be honored on May 2nd and receive a one of three Governor's Creative Leadership Awards.

2013 SUMMARY

In summary, 2013 was a year of turning ideas into accomplishments. The Chamber was able to fulfill the missions of increasing our membership, creating a strong business and community oriented website, building successful events, drawing more visitors and visibility to Saguache.

The Chamber Vision for 2014

Looking forward for the year 2014 the Chamber has much to accomplish.

Economic Development: Economic Development is still the number one priority of the Chamber. This has to be a long range strategy. Members of the Chamber board attend meetings, make contacts and do research focused on the goal of bringing or developing one or two small job-producing businesses to Saguache. This effort is slower and more intense than our other activities but if any members have a passion for seeing more economic growth in Saguache we would welcome your active participation making it happen here.

Economic Development Tourism: Two programs hold promise for developing more tourist interest in Saguache. Without water and snow activity potential, Saguache needs to get really creative in looking for ways to bring more visitors to Saguache and inducing them to stay longer and spend more of their hard-earned vacation dollars with us.

New Events: Old Cow Town and Gillette's Trading Post will host Old West Days and The Welcome Center will bring Saguache a new event focused on the cannibal, Alfred Packer. Caroline Wolfgram Irwin will again bless Saguache this summer with a performance by the Polynesian Dance Troop. The Chamber will support these special events as a participant and on the website. In addition, to these new events the Chamber will continue to sponsor the Hollyhock, Art and the Fall Festivals and contribute to the Pow Wow.

Saguache Arts: Although Saguache was passed over for candidate status in the Colorado Creative Districts program, we believe that commitment to the arts must be a vital part of economic development through tourism for Saguache. We have an amazing group of local artists whose combined strength can help put Saguache on the art tourism horizon. Art tourism increases traffic for our local galleries and artisans as well as creating a carry-over effect for local businesses.

Agricultural and heritage tourism: Agricultural and heritage tourism hold strong potential for Saguache. The Chamber is looking for a way to help local producers and heritage groups create a tour that will interest the growing number of tourists interested in history, culture, farming and ranching. If we can get this organized we can get marketing help from the Colorado Tourism Office.

Economic Development: The Education Component.

We have exciting opportunities to expand our joint activities with Mountain Valley business classes and students. A program of “internships” is being worked out. The goal for this year is to begin with two summer internships and work toward a more expanded program of Friday internships for the fall.

Conclusion

The purpose of the Chamber is “to promote the business community, to organize civic functions, to provide community services and to encourage tourism and economic development within and for the Town of Saguache, Colorado and the surrounding community, and help promote Saguache County.”

Membership in the Chamber is not limited to those affiliated with a business nor just to Saguache residents. Anyone with a connection to this valley who wants to see Saguache strengthen its economic base and build a stronger family-oriented community is welcome to become a member. All the Chamber efforts require planning and execution by volunteers. Volunteer hours and contributions are critical to maintaining a strong Chamber and making continued progress. Whether each member has one free hour a year or several hours a week, participation is key to continued Chamber success. Volunteer for your Chamber and your community

2014 should be another great year for the Saguache Chamber of Commerce. With hard work and increased volunteer participation by members, the Chamber can create exciting new programs and community involvement. Respectfully submitted on this date, April 8, 2014

Board of Directors: Faith O’Reilly, President
Mike Cowan ,Vice President
Barry Van Sant, Treasurer
Byron Williams, Secretary
Carita Ginn, Acting Secretary
Anne Nielsen, Member at Large