



STATE OF THE CHAMBER  
2015 REPORT

# **2014 was a Year of Progress and Important Changes for the Saguache Chamber of Commerce.**

## **THE CHAMBER'S 2014 ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS**

1. Printed and distributed the 2014 Community Calendars throughout Saguache
2. Created a new design for memberships
3. Decided to create a "Job" posting component in the Web page
4. Supported five annual Town events
  - a. Memorial Day Parade – Our truck "float" helped spread candy and fun
  - b. Hollyhock Festival – Sponsored two garden contests and an art contest
  - c. Saguache Art Festival – Sponsored marketing and map for the event
  - d. Wacipi Pow Wow – Helped the organizers find support
  - e. Fall Festival – Chamber member Carita Ginn was coordinator and planner
5. Submitted two successful Sales Tax Grant applications
6. Applied for Creative District Status with Colorado Tourism Office
7. Developed, sponsored and presented Second Annual Saguache Planning Conference
8. Increased the Chamber membership.
9. Developed rack card for the Chamber
10. Increased active involvement with MVHS

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TOURISM PART OF OUR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

As one part its economic development strategy. in 2011, the Chamber became involved in the effort to increase the number of visitors to Saguache. Initially called the "Marketing Plan," the Chamber effort to publicize Saguache, has become one important part of the Chamber's Economic Development Plan for Saguache. The 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. The new Saguache Chamber rack card was designed, printed and widely distributed. Three annual events were planned and executed.

### **Chamber Events**

The Chamber has been the sole sponsor for the Hollyhock Festival since 2013. In 2014, Byron and Becky Williams provided the leadership for the festival which included two garden contests

and a Hollyhock art contest. Qualified outside judges were recruited and prizes were awarded. Both are important to the success of the contests. This year art entries from on residents were included. The winner of the Hollyhock Garden competition was Raymond Garcia. Eric and Sarah Frey were the winners of the open garden contest. The art contest winner was Teddie Coleman. The kids art competition winner was Laura Morfit.

The Art Festival is also a Chamber project. The Art Festival was held on August \_\_\_\_\_. Reports from the Saguache artisan community and gallery owners were that both visitors and revenues from art purchases strong. Sales at restaurants and our other shops also benefitted.

Chamber members were again able to help the Wacipi Pow Wow organizers. This event celebrates an important part of Saguache history as well as its current Native American residents. It is also important as a time for Native Americans to come together. Pow Wow organizers Ruth and CrowFox continued 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 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, an active individual Chamber member, is the lead organizer for the festival. She was instrumental pulling together a strong organizing group. The Fall Festival is combined with a quilt show featuring colorful quilts made by local residents. Quilts were displayed in the Community Building. Vendors and entertainers drew a crowd in the Community Building and Otto Mears Park.

An auction with an auctioneer from Salida was held in the east parking lot in the afternoon. Many fine items were donated by Chamber members and local citizens. The auction did not have a strong turnout and bidders got some real bargains. Due to the sparse crowd, many items were left over. Some were later sold in another auction and the Town disposed of some things. The auction produced good funding for other Chamber projects. However, the level of effort it took to haul items around means the Chamber will go back to its tradition of a silent auction,

For the 2015 Fall Festival, the committee Carita has assembled has plans to do a broader outreach. An untapped visitor base in Del Norte, South Park, Creede corridor will be the focus of this effort.

## **OTHER PARTS OF THE CHAMBER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

### **The Effort to Increase the Visibility of Saguache and the Chamber**

In 2014, the Chamber decided to create a rack card and distribute it as broadly as possible. A colorful, professional quality card was developed. Copies were printed and widely distributed.

Rack card holders were also found. The colorful new Chamber rack cards are now display in Saguache and other communities in the San Luis Valley.

The Chamber decided in 2013 to purchase space in the Colorado Tourism Office (CTO) publication called “Colorado Vacation Guide.” The ad came out in the 2014 edition of the publication. The space is very expensive. The 250 word 3 point type ad costs \$500. The reason we decided to purchase space is that only if at least one business or organization in a town purchases an ad will the name of the town appear in the Guide. This publication has very wide circulation. It is distributed nationally and internationally. The CTO distributes copies nationally and internationally. The CTO research shows that visitors’ bring it along in the car as they travel. Saguache is small but it is located on Highway 285 a major touring route. Having Saguache appear in this publication along with the Chamber website address helps raise our profile for travellers. The Chamber has bought the ad again for the 2015 edition. Any local business that serves visitors and can afford the \$500, should consider buying a spot in this premier tourism publication. The more ads for our town the more appealing we will be.

The Chamber also voted to support the “Keep It Cool” campaign of the San Luis Valley Tourism Organization. This slogan now appears in an ad in the Colorado Tourism Guide on the same page as the Saguache County Tourism ad which uses the slogan, “Warm Sunny Days, Cool Starry Nights.” Hotter summer locations like Pueblo and Texas are the target of this campaign.

### **Bringing the Saguache Community Together**

For the last two years, we reported that the Chamber had launched an effort to bring the Community of Saguache together. We noted that if people don’t regularly interact with each other and make a real effort to develop trust and coordination, the result is that rumor, jealousy and suspicion can undermine community cohesiveness. In 2013, the Chamber worked with the Town of Saguache to create liaison relationship. In 2014 and continuing into 2015, the Chamber’s liaison designee, our intrepid volunteer Carita Ginn took the part of liason and attended Town Board Meetings. Carita promptly reports back to the Chamber. In this way Chamber members are kept abreast of town decisions and issues. We hope to encourage the town to designate representative who will attend Chamber meetings and similarly advise the Town about Chamber projects and perspectives.

Chamber members turned out in force along with many concerned county residents to a meeting with the Saguache County Board of County Commissioners concerning the proposed County Strategic Plan. The BOCC members listened attentively to the comments of town and county residents who had concerns about the direction and costs involved in the plan. Changes to the plan appear to be in the works.

Early in 2015, the Chamber initiated a joint meeting with the Saguache County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). The meeting was held on the 7th of April. The meeting is focused on

Economic Development an important issue to both the BOCC and the Chamber. A separate report on that meeting will be presented at the May meeting of the Chamber membership.

Also the Chamber again decided to invest its resources in a community coordinating and planning conference. The topic chosen for this year was how to finance a small business. Speakers were from Accion, a regional micro-lender and SLV-DRG, the group charged with distributing Colorado economic development funds in the valley. This year the dates for the Calendar were solicited prior and at the beginning of the meeting. This approach cut down on the time needed to collect the information and allowed groups who could not get a representative to the meeting to be included on the Calendar. In preparing the Calendar it was decided to separate regular community group meetings from special events with a header for each group. Developing a clear understanding of the planning cycle for events is still a critical need.

Laurie Vigil catered the lunch for the meeting. Again all the seats in the conference were filled and participants lingered after the program to meet and talk. Maria Archuleta Van Sant's company, Legacy Media, was again contracted to prepare the actual calendar. Since we were not starting from scratch this year, the process moved along swiftly and the Calendar is now posted widely around town thanks to Carita's hand delivery of the fresh copies. More copies are available to any member who has a window or bulletin space to display the calendar. It will also be posted on the web site and at the kiosk in Dave Martinez Park and in the new display case at Gillette's Trading Post.

### **Involvement with Mountain Valley Business Students**

A school is a very busy place. It can be difficult to bring one more thing to the students and over worked faculty. Saguache is very lucky to have a young dynamic business teacher, Deanna Bartee. Deanna has connected with the Chamber Board in several ways. This spring I was lucky to be involved in the Shark Tank experience of the business class. Playing the part of "shark investors" four of us grilled the students on their business plans and presentations. One of the requirements of the students "plans" was they had to be situated in Saguache. Deanna's point was she wanted the students to investigate opportunities available in their own home town. This approach compliments The Chamber's economic development strategy of putting time, effort and money into developing entrepreneurial spirit in the Saguache's young people.

### **Internships and Micro-lending Projects**

The Chamber Board will also serve as the Advisory Board for the SLV business program. The Board has also moved our interest in making internship experiences available to students. The plan is to develop an internship matching program that will put individual students into a work place that approximates their own career goals. I want to urge all Chamber members who own a business to consider taking an intern. The Chambers newest project with MVHS is to create a micro-lending program for students. Small loans to finance summer or after-school micro-

business experiences for students are the heart of this program. Micro-lenders provides startup funds for entrepreneurs who do not have access to bank loans and other traditional lenders.

## **CHAMBER MEETINGS & BUSINESS**

### **Chamber Meetings**

The Chamber continued to hold its regular meetings on the second Tuesday of every month. Most of the meetings this past year were held in the Road & Bridge Conference Room. Hospitality for the meetings was provided by the regular membership committee with Carita taking the lead. The Membership Task Force held its own meetings as did the groups organizing the special events, The Board of Directors continued to meet between the General Membership meetings. The Chamber will again reserve the Conference Room at Road & Bridge for the 2015 general membership meetings. Everyone is always welcome to attend!

Our treasurer, Barry Van Sant has organized our books and our budget. Barry produces a budget report at each meeting that shows both the planned budget expense for each budget line and the actual expenditures.

### **The Membership Task Force and the new Membership Design**

This year the Chamber decided to create a Membership task Force to look at the feasibility of having more than one level of membership. Up to this point, individual members were asked to pay the same dues as businesses and all businesses were treated the same regardless of size or needs. This task force went forward with great energy and creativity. First the membership was asked to complete an online survey. The survey return was both encouraging and interesting. Fifty percent of our members shared their perspective with the Task Force.

The growth of the Chamber and the success of the web site engineered by our vice-president Mike Cowan lead the Chamber boards to create a task force to reconsider our membership design. The new design created two levels of business membership plus an individual level. Standard membership is still just \$25 but for \$50 business membership can have an enhanced web presence. To see the new ads that feature pictures and a larger panel on the first page, go to [www.saguachechamber.org](http://www.saguachechamber.org) . Individual members can still join for \$25 or they can join for free by volunteering to participate in Chamber activities. All members are eligible to vote, participate in meetings, contribute to Chamber projects and hold elective offices, To adopt the new membership structure the board made some changes to the bylaws.

## **OTHER CHAMBER ACTIVITIES**

### **Local Business Promotion:**

The Chamber continued its practice supporting a regular feature in the Crescent recognizing a one of the Chamber members. Our website features all the businesses that are members of the Chamber. This year with a growing number of members, a decision was made to create topical pages (accommodations, restaurants etc.) so that web visitors could quickly find what they need.

**Help from the Saguache County Board of County Commissioners:** Saguache County Board of Commissioners through the Sales tax grant program continued to provide invaluable support for the Chamber. The Sales Tax Grants enabled the Chamber to continue supporting civic activities and events. The Chamber is grateful for the grant support. The Chamber thanks the County for its continued support.

## **2014 Summary**

2014 was a year in which the Chamber was able consolidate the progress of the last few years and move forward. Membership increased, our events began to draw more visitors. The Chamber members supported many other civic events. In early 2015 the Planning Conference was again well attended and sponsored speakers. 2015 was a year of consolidating gains of 2013 and 2014 with more development of the web site, the new rack cards, increased membership and stronger events. The Chamber was able to fulfill its on-going plan to increase membership, create a strong business and community oriented website, and build successful events that draw visitors and enhance the visibility of Saguache.

## **The Chamber Vision for 2015**

Looking forward for the year 2015 the Chamber has much to accomplish. We welcome new members. The Chamber needs your energy and enthusiasm for this great little town. If you enjoy small town events the Chamber applauds your participation in any of our sponsored events, school activities and activities undertaken by other Saguache groups.

**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 members 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.

New artists opened galleries. The Ice Cream Parlor opened but sadly closed its doors at the end of the year. The Sandoval family is working on plans to open a traditional restaurant featuring family recipes and conversation in the Ice Cream Parlor space. Our new member Brenda Garcia is starting a computer business after completing extensive computer training. Brian Miller is making fast progress on his all-in-one metal, leather and wood working shop in the old Shell



Station next to the ALTA station. Scott Alexander's pizza parlor looks like it will be ready for a spring opening. Downtown Saguache is popping!

On the other hand, there is still unused capacity for enterprising residents and anyone looking for a naturally beautiful small town setting for a business startup or a great place to live.

### **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 or more summer internships and work toward a more expanded program of Friday internships for the fall. Also we hope we can find young enthusiastic business people among our high school students with ideas for a profitable summer venture.

## **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

Anne Nielsen, Member at Large and Assistant Treasurer