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**Cover Story:** "We know we bring value to all businesses, but it's finding that right piece that matches that particular member. And so many people associate us with networking, which isn't a bad thing but there are also intangibles that we would love people to be aware of and be proud of." – Eileen Dautrich, President, TriCounty Area Chamber of Commerce



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## TRICOUNTY AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

## Building on the Past — Focusing on the Future



Making a
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IS WHAT WE DO.



Eileen Dautrich, President

ineteen-twenty-seven was a notable year — Charles Lindbergh made the first successful solo, non-stop transatlantic flight in 1927. (Six prior attempts by others failed). Today, we take for granted our ability to travel to almost anywhere on the face of earth in a matter of hours — or to be virtually anywhere, anytime, via Skype.

It was also in 1927 that Philo Farnsworth transmitted his first experimental electronic TV motion pictures, ushering in the age of television. Today we share information, interact, and do business using computers, tablets, phones, wristwatches, and even digital eyeglasses.

In our region, in 1927, another event occurred that has reverberated in the business community and continues to have a positive impact even today —The Pottstown Chamber of Commerce was formed by a small group of business leaders seeking to support one another and promote economic growth and vitality within the borough. Much like the industries spawned by the efforts of Lindbergh and Farnsworth, the Chamber has evolved and expanded its role during its 90-year history.

Today the TriCounty Area Chamber of Commerce — the name was changed to reflect the expansion of businesses out into the surrounding areas — is a tech-savvy, dynamic, vital regional business advocacy organization, firmly focused on serving the present

and future needs of its members in an ever-changing business landscape along the Route 422 and 100 corridors in western Montgomery, eastern Berks, and northern Chester counties. The TriCounty Area Chamber of Commerce is an events-driven organization that views itself as a connector; to community, future customers, resources for members to take advantage of, tools for members' employees to benefit from, and advocacy on behalf of businesses in the region.

TCACC President Eileen Dautrich has seen the organization go through a variety of changes and overcome numerous challenges during her 18year tenure with the organiza-

tion, most notably, the Great Recession that began in 2008, when she served as vice president of operations. Today, Dautrich manages a chamber that is financially fit and growing in terms of membership numbers (currently 460) and participation.



When Dautrich took on the mantle as president in November 2010, that was not exactly the case. "When the transition happened, we really were just focusing internally on keeping the doors open," she said. The Chamber staff had been reduced from six to three. The primary challenge was to get lean and mean and do more with less.

"On the outside, nobody knew there were only three people working here," Dautrich said. "We didn't stop doing anything we had done previously. Every event on the calendar stayed on the calendar."

With the support and guidance of her board of directors, Dautrich and her dedicated staff continue to weather the storm, and as the local economy has rebounded, the Chamber has maintained its priority of servicing members. "We became much more focused on the membership than we ever had been before," she recalls. "We started to change the mentality of the membership organization, and focus more on our role as being a support system for the business community and putting that message out there. We're all going through tough times. Let's support each other. That's where the ABCs came from (Always Buy Chamber). You're paying dues to be a member of this organization. Let's have it support itself and each other."

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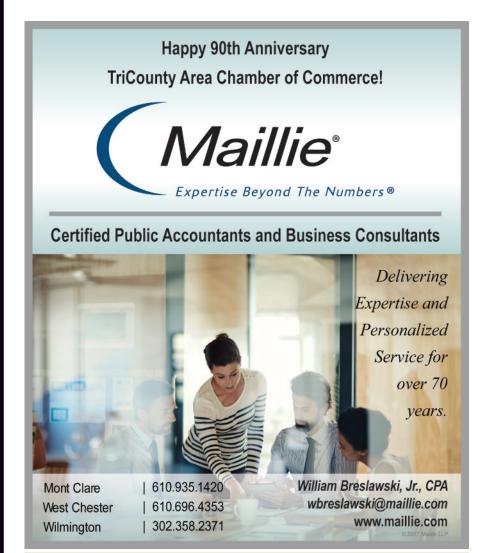


Jennifer O'Donnell, Member Relations



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## Kitty Papp Retires

We wish to share with the Chamber ization. Our events are a critical backbone

Events Director, will be retiring from her position in December of 2017.

Kitty began working at the Chamber in October of 2006; at the time she retires Kitty will have worked for and contributed to our organization for over 11 years.

The details of all of our special events, luncheons, and regularly scheduled

events (breakfasts, business card exchanges, seminars, etc.) were organized, managed, and expertly facilitated by Kitty in her role for our organization. She has spoken with many of you as she has worked with our Members to find the most appropriate and effective sponsorship opportunities for Members to gain exposure. Our events provide member engagement opportunities and fulfill the networking member benefit that so many of you seek. They also serve as a funding stream necessary for sustaining the organ-

Membership that Kitty Papp, Special for the Chamber and we appreciate

Kitty's professionalism and passion for their success.

In addition, Kitty has directing Leadership Tri-County program, of the TriCounty Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation, Inc., for the last five years. She has continued to direct the program through this most recent class year; the Class of 2017 was Kitty's final class to

direct. Her commitment to the mission of this professional development program and her desire to help the class participants grow and succeed has contributed to the respect that Leadership Tri-County has in the region.

We wish Kitty the best in her retirement, and we look forward to celebrating Kitty over the next several months for her dedication to our organization. Please stay tuned for opportunities for you to join us in celebrating Kitty and thank her for all she has done for your Chamber.

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#### **COVER STORY**

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That message of supporting other member businesses was expanded and has evolved into the Chamber's current message focusing on three pillars — "building communities," "creating connections" through events and educational opportunities, and "supporting commerce."

That message emerged from the Chamber's bi-annual board retreat in 2013. "That was the last piece that we used to mold where we were, because we could just take everything we were doing and fold it into one of those three focus areas," Dautrich said. "We've continued to build on that over the last few years."

The 2017 retreat was about to take place as this article was being prepared. Dautrich expressed great optimism regarding her expectations for the upcoming retreat. "We're in an interesting transition," she said. "At some prior retreats, our focus was on our financial stability and the board's direct support of the Chamber. The board has been very hands on as far as making sure we stay here and the employees stay here, and where events are being held, and where can they do sponsorships to support us and send their employees if they couldn't be there themselves." She also shared, "we are in a stronger

place as an organization, and in a better position to be able to really look at the future of the Chamber. I have a lot of weight placed on this retreat. I look forward to the Chamber benefitting from the business acumen and skill sets of our board members, helping us take the Chamber to the next level dedicating resources to make sure we remain a relevant business asset for many years to come."

In preparation for the retreat, Dautrich presented the board with a set of forward thinking ideas offered by the Association of Chamber Executives in the form of a series webinars, and in a report titled, *Horizon Initiative: Chamber* 2025 — *Eight Influences Shaping the Next Decade for Chambers of Commerce.* 

The report looks at the potential impact on chambers in terms of societal trends like: Belonging and Gathering; Communications and Technology; Political and Social Fragmentation; Resource Alignment; Population Shift; and other relevant factors.

"The conversation (at the board retreat) will really focus on the future," Dautrich said. "Horizon Initiative: Chamber 2025 will help us look at where we, as a chamber of commerce, can and should be by the year 2025. People have changed the way they do business, and as a business organization that's had an impact on us. Our current model will not sustain us forever. It will eventually fade out. (Continued on page 10)

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hen Rich Krumrine enrolled his son at The Hill School, he knew he would visit Pottstown a little more often. What he didn't know was that he and his partner Barb Nissel would end up moving their business headquarters there as well. After hearing about the Hobart's Run initiative in a Philly.com article, the SOS Group explored the option of moving from Malvern to Pottstown. By June 1, 2017, they were in their new home at 555 E. High St., just a block and a half away from The Hill School. Mr. Krumrine says, "As a business with over 380 employees spread throughout eastern PA, we found Pottstown to be a terrific geographic location for our company headquarters. We're thrilled to be a part of the community".

SOS Group is a stellar example of how business expansion can work to grow a company — even in a post-industrial town. It also makes a bold statement to future investors considering relocation that says, "If I did it, you can do it too."



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#### **COVER STORY**

(Continued from page 9)

We will examine where we need to make strategic changes within the organization that will alter the model of what people are used to seeing as a chamber of commerce, in order to focus on areas where we provide the greatest value to our members. We will talk about advocacy," she continued. "Where could we be doing more? Is there some sort of component where we should be doing more on the municipal level? But those things are going to take some more time. Resources will have to shift."

"My hope is to come out of the board retreat with a clear direction of where we are going, at least for another year or two," she continued. "We are going to focus on the people we think will be passionate about the direction we are going. Then Jen (Jennifer O'Donnell, Member Relations Director) has more of a strategy to go and seek out new members in that particular focus area that we think could benefit from membership, and who wants to be involved in what we have going on," she said, adding, "I want this to be the board's legacy piece. When you walk away from this board of directors and your time on it, I want you to say we helped put that in place. This is where I took the organization, and I feel good about that."

One thing that won't change is the Chamber staff's accessibility and personal attention to the needs of members. One or all of the Chamber staff — Dautrich, O'Donnell, Melissa Shainline, Marketing and Administrative Director, or Kitty Papp, Special Events Director — are always in attendance at the Chamber's frequent networking and special events, which the Chamber is best known for.

"People appreciate the fact that I'm out at events," Dautrich said. "If they want to talk to me, I will talk to them. I know their name. My accessibility, and the staff's accessibility has meant something to our membership. As we grow we don't want to lose our customer service reputation that we are complimented on."

As always, the challenge remains on how to best communicate the direct and indirect value of membership to both members and potential members. Every bit of publicity helps. October is officially Chamber of Commerce month in Pennsylvania. This month also marks the 18th anniversary of TCACC's unique partnership with *Route 422 Business Advisor*, the official publication of the TriCounty Area Chamber of Commerce, which provides the Chamber with a ten-page spread in each issue to disseminate its message to members and to thousands of nonmember businesses throughout the region.

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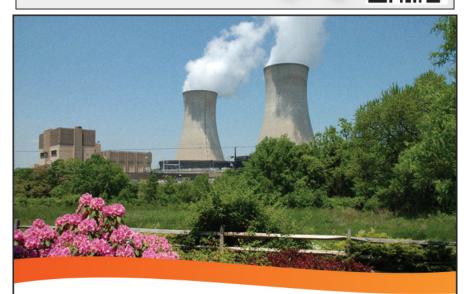


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#### **COVER STORY**

(Continued from page 10)

"The challenge for us is how to best explain the value of membership," Dautrich said. "We know we bring value to all businesses, but it's finding that right piece that matches that particular member. And so many people associate us with networking, which isn't a bad thing, but there are also intangibles that we would love people to be aware of and be proud of," Dautrich said. "We just did two marketing pieces. One is about chambers being a "Peace of Mind" for your business. It just so happens that peace has five letters, and we have five stars in our logo, so we have each star stand for: Problem Solving; Education; Advocacy; Connections; and Exposure — All important business development services the Chamber provides."

The second marketing piece is *Be the Bridge*. "You (a member) are the bridge between your membership investment, and what you can do for others because of your membership," Dautrich explains. "We share this message and explain it in making use out of our email newsletter that includes community events, job postings, and articles from elected officials or community organizations. We put a networking tip in there as well. It takes five minutes to glance through that newsletter, and then you become the

resource, based on the knowledge that we've been able to provide you. You need to take that information and use it to your benefit in dealing with other people," she said. "An employee whose spouse got laid off, or you have a customer who is looking for something to do this weekend with out of town guests, now you know some of the people who are hiring and know what is happening in the region, because you took five minutes and read this email, and you can say, hey, you should check out the chamber's website. They post jobs and have a community calendar."

Speaking of bridges, or alternatives to bridges, the Holland Tunnel opened in 1927. Yes, some notable events occurred in 1927 — Lindbergh's flight, Farnsworth's invention, the first Academy Awards, Babe Ruth's record setting 60<sup>th</sup> home run off Tom Zachary — and the Pottstown Chamber of Commerce was formed, evolving into a business organization that still benefits its members and contributes to economic vitality in the region it serves, and looks forward to doing so for at least another 90 years!

For additional information, please call 610.326.2900, and visit www.tricountychamber.com.



