



Arapahoe County Commissioners Annual Update July 28, 2020

The Chamber is a non-partisan, action-oriented membership organization serving as the leading business voice in the Eastern Metro Area. For our members, we seek to provide access, advocacy, and influence, as well as to be the Catalyst for business growth; the Convener of leaders and influencers; and the Champion for stronger communities.

The Chamber values **Arapahoe County** as an crucial partner in economic development today and into the future, and The Chamber's relationship with Arapahoe County during COVID-19 has been especially important, as we work together to share much-needed resources and information with the business community and the community at-large.

We are so fortunate to have **Commissioner Nancy Jackson** as a member of The Chamber's Board of Directors, and on the Diversity and Inclusion Council Executive Committee. In addition, **Commissioner Bill Holen** is an active member of The Chamber's Defense Council.

For many years, The Chamber has been a focal point for concentrated business leads and newcomers interested in relocating to the area. Our business growth focus has always been the development of small business, and support of some of the major business clusters of Healthcare, Hospitality, and Aerospace. Last year the Aurora Chamber celebrated with over 50 ribbon cuttings and grand openings. We held 40 networking events, 12 member events including General Membership Luncheons and Candidate Forums.

During COVID-19, our priorities have shifted to helping businesses stay in business, and to supporting our members during this difficult time. In addition to maintaining most of our monthly committee meetings online and providing information about business loans and grants, PPE, and PPP, we hosted a series of webinars about mental health, business resiliency and leadership. We have also kept updated information in our eblasts and on our website about healthcare information and resources, member restaurants and hotels, assistance resources, and community requests for assistance and donations.

The priorities we continue to work on include:

- **Arapahoe County CARES Program** - working on recovery in one of the most challenging times in our history. The Aurora Chamber is partnering with Arapahoe County on the distribution of **\$7 million dollars** back into the local economy for small businesses in Aurora and Arapahoe County. Disbursement of funds are planned from July – December 2020.
- Advocating to have **US Space Command** based at Buckley Air Force Base (will be renamed Buckley Space Base this summer)
- **Workforce housing**, affordable housing, senior housing

- **Daycare**
- Ongoing dissemination of COVID-19 **healthcare** information for businesses and individuals.
- **Small Business Development funding & assistance**
 - Monthly partnerships with **Colorado SBA offices**.
 - **Hosting the Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC)** - located in The Chamber office and serves over 800 people each year. Provides no-fee and confidential procurement technical assistance for selling products and services to local, county, state, and federal governments. Over 2,600 hours were invested in free training on how to do business with government contracting offices, resulting in close to **\$650 million** contracting dollars awarded to Colorado companies last year.

Along with our strong Small Business Development Council, the Chamber’s Economic Development programs, concentrates on **six** targeted industries:

- Healthcare
- Bioscience
- Aerospace and Defense
- Renewable energy
- Distribution/Logistics
- Tourism

These promising growth opportunities have produced new and expanding businesses with over 5,200+ new jobs and over \$500 million in economic impact.

We have a staff of six full time and two part time employees. Our offices and conference rooms are available to our members at no cost. We average over 450 meetings in our conference rooms last year alone. Within days of COVID “Stay at Home” orders, we began conducting virtual (Zoom) meetings with all committee/council/groups now being offered virtually; more than 40 have been conducted with attendance ranging from 15-100. Additionally, we hosted dozens of webinars to assist our members financially and emotionally through these challenging times.

The Aurora Chamber of Commerce offers opportunities for small and large businesses to participate in 11 active Chamber Councils/Committees/Programs.

1. **Defense Council** – consists of over 350 members. The council meets monthly at various military units/locations. Supports Buckley AFB leadership and the 15,000 employees and family members on base. Meetings bring together military and community leaders throughout the Eastern Metro area with the goal of strengthening relationships and increasing knowledge of the importance of active military and veterans, and their families to our community. Buckley’s 2019 economic impact to the local community was nearly **\$1.3 Billion**.

We recruit and retain a large workforce in the defense industry, ranging from Aerospace industry members such as Raytheon, Boeing, Northrup Grumman, and Lockheed Martin, active duty Air Force, Space Force, Army, Marines, Coast Guard, Navy, Guard and Reserve.

We also host the Armed Forces Recognition Luncheon honoring members of all military branches. Our 44th annual event was cancelled in May due to COVID restrictions and has been rescheduled to Aug 28. Even though attendance will be limited to 225 which is considerably less than our typical 500-600 attendees, we know how important it is to honor those who serve our country – especially now. We also support over 90,000 veterans in the metro area with the Veterans Salute at the Wings over the Rockies Museum each year. The Defense Council's Executive Committee has formed a US Space Command Basing Committee with the primary goal of bringing the command to Buckley.

2. **Government Affairs, Education & Energy** - meets monthly and supports two large breakfasts each year. Works closely with our elected officials at the Federal level, State, Counties, and Cities. The Aurora Chamber worked this year's 2020 General Assembly differently than in the past. Instead of bringing in one lobbyist to our meetings, we invited lobbyist from our schools, cities, counties, CDOT, Colorado Restaurant Association, Colorado Hotel Association, and Colorado Apartment Association, The State Chamber, and Denver Chamber, focusing on the priorities and challenges these associations were having statewide.

We work with four school districts (Adams 14, Aurora Public Schools, Bennet and Cherry Creek School districts) to pass bond elections, and school reform. Within the Oil and Gas industry, we attend and hold numerous meetings each year, educating the communities we serve on the importance of energy development and its positive economic effect to the county, cities, and state. Through Senate Bill 181, we continue working with our housing contractors and builders with new regulations that make our communities safe.

3. **The Transportation Committee** reviews, and monitors transportation issues and recommends changes to meet business and community needs. It is a highly diverse and specialized group of professionals that understand the importance of transportation infrastructure for the success of the business community. The monthly meetings cover a wide range of transportation topics including legislative and ballot issues, aviation projects and advances (including Colorado Air and Space Port - formerly Front Range Airport, Denver International Airport, Centennial Airport, and Bye Aerospace), and updates on CDOT, RTD, E-470, I-70, and County/City Transportation issues. Support of transportation funding is one of our top priorities at The Chamber.

During COVID, all transportation meetings have been online with average attendance of 40-50. Subjects have included CDOT and CDOT Aeronautics, Aerotropolis RTA, the Colorado Infrastructure Report Card and The River Mile, and the annual June meeting featuring **Bryan Weimer presenting about Arapahoe County Transportation planning and projects.**

4. **The Women in Business Committee** serves as a voice for women in business, acting as an advocate on issues that affect their professional growth and long-term economic vitality.

The purpose of this Council is to foster relationships between women and men alike in all fields through priceless networking opportunities; Provide educational programs through expert educators, committee meetings, and professional development activities; and empower dynamic women leaders.

Topics that our guest speakers have discussed include: Stress mastery for increased capacity & resilience; Workplace strategies for dealing with difficult people; Increased wages for women; Developing positivity and confidence to impact personal and professional relationships and communication; Using social media to your advantage.

The Women in Business Committee plans and conducts the Annual Women in Business “Unsung Hero” Luncheon every year. More than 250 people attended the event in February, where 20 women were honored for making a difference in their community and business.

5. **The Arts + Business Connection (ABC) Committee** demonstrates and promotes the value of integrating the arts as a business tool, by exploring how business and industry can – and do – benefit from the arts. ABC’s programming exemplifies how the arts are an integral component of business and industry - with a broad definition of ‘the arts’ to include the visual arts, performing arts, creativity, and innovation.

During the past year, many of the presentations were integrated with existing Chamber committees to share statistics and stories about how the arts make a significant contribution to these areas of interest, including the Health Series, Diversity and Inclusion, Young Professionals, Veterans, and Women in Business. The committee continues to explore additional areas in which the arts have influence, to include economic development, Veterans, Transportation, Government Affairs, and workforce development.

6. **The Tips and Leads Groups** - two groups with 37 total members that meet bi-monthly to network, exchange business leads, promote their businesses and share ideas to improve the overall business climate. Leads, referrals and actualized business is recognized and tracked. While many members have been active with this group for 20+ years, new participants are actively recruited to broaden industry sectors. We are in the process of starting a third group that would consist of businesses in southern **Arapahoe County**.
7. **Young Professionals** - empowers young business leaders from throughout the Eastern Metro area to become more involved in civic, professional, and public sector arenas through professional development, philanthropy, education, and community involvement. There are over 90 individuals in this group.

8. **Ambassador Team** members serve as goodwill representatives by welcoming new members at Chamber events and functions. Ambassadors work to spread word about The Chamber, and its benefits to attract future members in the community. They are a peer resource for new members and stay up to date with Chamber information and functions.

The team also calls on members for personal follow-up and to encourage participation in Chamber activities. This group is a support group to Chamber events and ribbon cuttings as volunteers. These individuals are actively involved and are regular attendees at various Chamber events.

9. **The Diversity and Inclusion Council** is moving into its sixth year promoting diversity and inclusion in the business community through education, outreach, networking, and recognition programs that engage the entire community and support business leaders. More than 70,000 people live in Aurora who were not born in the U.S.

Some of the topics our guest speakers have discussed include: Understanding Cultural Appropriation in the Workplace; LGBTQ+; Dimensions of diversity & understanding identities; Understanding & addressing gender bias in male dominated fields; Inherent biases and using culturally awareness inside and outside counsel; and Strategy for Improving Organization Inclusion.

Last October, the Diversity & Inclusion Council presented the Fourth Annual Diversity and Inclusion Resource Summit theming our purpose of “Our Differences Make the Difference.” The Summit included a Resource Fair incorporating two professional development workshops providing insight into the importance of a diverse workforce and creating an inclusive workplace for both employees and customers. The summit included 30 business vendors, six food vendors, and more than 150 attendees.

10. **Leadership Aurora** – is a ten-month program that for **36 years** educates and prepares community leaders who are committed to shaping Aurora and the Eastern Metro area’s future. The ten-month program includes topics such as, Community/Quality of life, Education, Media Training, Police/Criminal & Civil Justice, Economic and Infrastructure, Military/Government, Healthcare, Fire Protection Services and Leadership Training. Over \$5,000 in tuition scholarships are provided to small business and non-profits.

At a recent Leadership Aurora Board Retreat, we decided **not** to go forward with a class in 2020-21 due to uncertainties related to COVID 19. Our decision was based on the following:

- Safety
- Financial constraints on applicants
- Inability of organizations to support monthly sessions
- The likelihood of a significantly diminished experience
- The current class not having completed their program

With the help of a passionate and dedicated board, we will take this time to:

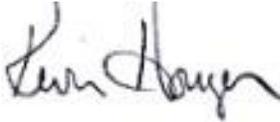
- Enable the current class to finish their program - our #1 priority
- Host alternative leadership experiences and alumni/special events
- Refine the program for next year's class

11. **The Work Well 2.0 Health Series** has a mission of providing timely and useful information about healthcare trends and issues - provided by industry experts. Through this committee, The Chamber is also involved in a partnership with **Tri-County Health Department** for the Worksite Wellness Initiative.

The goal of the Worksite Wellness Initiative is to engage organizations to adopt best practices and policies to provide a healthy workplace environment. The initiative provides resources, assessment tools, counseling, and funding for Chamber member businesses that commit to joining the coalition.

Arapahoe County is a critical partner in the **economic recovery and development** of our region and state! We are extremely grateful for your investment, support and partnership and look forward to continuing our work together to create and sustain positive economic development for our growing communities.

Sincerely Yours,



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