

ACADEMY CONNECTIONS

Academy Remains Strong in Anniversary Year



Glenn Morris, ACE

Last month, the W.A.C.E. Academy started its 20th year as our association's premier professional development course. One hundred twenty-plus local chamber professionals (a sell-out attendance) gathered to dig into best practices in fundamental management and leadership topics.

W.A.C.E. Academy is a three-year program that ensures local chamber professionals (CEOs and staff) are grounded in the foundational knowledge and skills essential to leading a high-performing, high-value chamber. Academy is central to W.A.C.E.'s goal of advancing chamber management as a profession and career. Academy graduates return to their chambers prepared to lead membership-based nonprofit organizations,

maximize the contributions of volunteers, and deliver results on key local issues and business needs.

Equally as important as the professional skills and knowledge gained through Academy participation, the connections class members build with each other and with the industry leaders who volunteer as staff and faculty are invaluable. As W.A.C.E. President Emeritus Dave Kilby was fond of saying, the connections you make at Academy can literally save your job one day!

Steering Committee

Academy continues to deliver each year because of the contributions of many chamber leaders who volunteer to ensure the future of our industry. Much appreciation is owed to the amazing individuals who served with me on the Academy Steering Committee this year, including:

- Sheri Heiney, Prescott (AZ) Chamber;
- Jill Lagan, ACE, Boulder City (NV) Chamber;
- Wendy Laros, Kona-Kohala (HI) Chamber;
- Jenny MacMurdo, Pacific Grove (CA) Chamber;
- Jake Mangas, Redding

(CA) Chamber;

- Chris Romer, ACE, Vail Valley (CO) Partnership;
- Zeb Welborn, ACE, Chino Valley (CA) Chamber;
- Kami Welch, ACE, Arvada (CO) Chamber.

The Academy Steering Committee's charge is to ensure that the program remains an incredible experience, both in terms of the content taught and the professional networks created. The committee regularly reviews the curriculum to ensure that we are covering the 18 most important foundation topics to ensure successful chambers today. The committee also is responsible for ensuring that we recruit the best chamber professionals as volunteer instructors.

Academy Instructors

Thanks as well to those who volunteered their time to support their colleagues as Academy instructors, including:

- Molly Alcorn, Alcorn Law;
- Whitney Diver McEvoy, Yountville (CA) Chamber;
- Tallia Hart, Healdsburg (CA) Chamber;
- Jim Johnson, Pearland (TX) Chamber;
- Dave Kilby, W.A.C.E.;

- Wendy Laros, Kona-Kohala (HI) Chamber;
- Jake Mangas, Redding (CA) Chamber;

- Kristen Miller, Santa Barbara South Coast (CA) Chamber;

- Nick Ortiz, W.A.C.E.;
- Tom Pierson, former president/CEO, Tacoma-Pierce County (WA) Chamber;

- Chris Romer, ACE, Vail Valley (CO) Partnership;

- Kyle Sexton, Chamber Think Strategies;

- Amy Shields, Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (ACCE).

- Katie Stice, Rancho Mirage (CA) Chamber;

- Mark Turner, City of Morgan Hill;

- Kami Welch, ACE, Arvada (CO) Chamber;

Registration for the 2024 Academy will open in March of next year. If you're ready to invest in your own chamber career — and in the professional success of your team — Academy is your right next step. I look forward to welcoming you as a member of the 2024 First Year Class!

Glenn Morris, ACE, is the president/CEO of the Santa Maria Valley (CA) Chamber and the W.A.C.E. Academy Steering Committee Chair.

#9

**VOLUME 54
SEPTEMBER
2023**

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| GUEST COMMENTARY | 2 |
| LEADER TO LEADER | 3 |
| ACADEMY IMAGES | 4 |
| FALL WEBINAR SERIES | 6 |
| EXECUTIVES IN THE NEWS | 7 |

Western Association
of Chamber Executives
FOUNDATION

**Thank you W.A.C.E. Foundation
for all you do for our members!**

GUEST COMMENTARY

Idea Exchanges Inspire Chambers to Tackle Programs that Build Community Diversity



Jessica Welch, ACE, IOM

What the godfather of chambers (Dave Kilby, W.A.C.E. president emeritus) always said is true: "When you've seen one chamber, you've seen one chamber."

We adapt to our diverse demographics, industry clusters, and the needs of our evolving communities. But in an age of digital advancement, more access to capital, and time poverty, our individual chambers can benefit from idea sharing and collaboration.

I had the honor of doing just that with Grand Junction (CO) Chamber President and CEO Candace Carnahan, ACE. What started as a pick-your-brain text thread evolved into 60-minute Zooms with screen sharing, and resulted in brand-new programming for both the Grand Junction and Greater Irvine chambers.

Total Resources Campaign

Looking for a way to enhance and solidify revenue streams, as well as future-proof the Greater Irvine (CA) Chamber, we adopted a Total Resource Campaign, much of the structure mirroring Grand Junction's. The program enlists hand-picked volunteers, board members and professional staff on a 10-week campaign that matches potential members, partners and investors, with chamber programming.

Participants are provided an instructional handbook that outlines the role of the volunteers, responses to frequently asked questions, and incentive structure. Our incentive structure was based on generated revenue thresholds, paid in cash, or applied as a chamber credit for membership or events.

Participants were also given a menu detailing available opportunities, including event sponsorships, advertising, chamber group trips, committee sponsorships, advocacy trips, and more. Our hand-picked volunteers and board members were enthusiastic about this never-been-done opportunity.

Young Professionals

Meanwhile, just a couple of

states over, the Grand Junction team was in event planning mode for their inaugural Young Professionals Summit. This event, a one-day conference that centers around empowering young professionals to ignite their curiosity, also included the Bestslope NEXTGen Awards program — modeled after Greater Irvine Chamber's 40 Under 40 event.

These awards programs help to bridge age gaps, providing the opportunity for companies and organizations to showcase their best and brightest, as well as highlight the chamber as they recognize community excellence.

Candace shared, "Through these collaborative efforts, we have not only nurtured a profound bond with our chamber partners at the Greater Irvine Chamber, but have also harnessed a transformative opportunity for the growth and prosperity of young professionals in our business community."

More Collaboration

Additionally, in just two weeks' time, the Chino Valley (CA) Chamber will visit our chamber for a half-day to exchange ideas, share best practices, and identify opportunities to collaborate.

Chino Valley Chamber of Commerce President Zeb Welborn, ACE, said, "The Chino Valley Chamber is excited to visit the Greater Irvine Chamber later this month. It's not just a visit, but an intentional effort to bridge our staff with their Irvine counterparts. By aligning roles and expertise, we aspire to foster deeper collaboration, exchange innovative ideas, and refine our understanding, ensuring we continually evolve to best serve our members. Engaging with such distinguished peers is our strategic step away from the confines of conventional thinking, opening doors to fresh perspectives and invigorating strategies. Our goal is to share knowledge and cultivate a chamber environment that is both dynamic and forward-thinking."

With more than 800 W.A.C.E. chamber members, we hope to encourage others to take advantage of the wealth of knowledge, expertise, and often sheer brilliance of the professional teams serving neighboring chambers.

Jessica Welch, ACE, IOM, is the executive vice president of the Greater Irvine (CA) Chamber and executive director of the Irvine Forward Foundation.

2023 - 2024 W.A.C.E. OFFICERS

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*Published by: Western Association of Chamber Executives,
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(916) 442-2223, Fax (916) 444-6685.
Website: www.waceonline.com*

Opinions expressed in articles are those of the author and not W.A.C.E.

LEADER TO LEADER

Communication, 'Freedom to Fail' Help Move Chamber Teams Toward Creative Solutions

How do you foster a culture of innovation, creativity, and embracing change within your chamber?



Alicia Bermes
CEO
Beaverton Area (OR) Chamber

This is an interesting question for me as I have spent my chamber career taking over for CEOs that have spent a lifetime in the position. At the first position the CEO had been there 10 years; next one 14 years; most current one 20 years!

When this is the case, members/staff have become very used to "the way things have always been done." That started to become my least favorite phrase. However, walking in and flipping the tables just doesn't work. It takes some time to learn the current culture and for them to get to know you.

I spend some time meeting with key individuals and that doesn't mean just the board, although they are important too.

Who is that ambassador, that volunteer, that member that everyone listens to? It's time to get to know that individual; ask them what has been going right and what could use some improvement.

Then it's time to look at trends; has membership been increasing or decreasing? In each case I walked into, membership was on the decline. Why is that? Maybe it IS time for some change.

Use those key influencers to help you to innovate and come up with creative ways to engage the membership that will foster growth and engagement. Sometimes these are ideas that you will come up with and use your influencers to support them.

Finally, the proof will be in the numbers. Is there increased growth and engagement? If so, you are on the right track!



Sherry Taylor
President/CEO
Mason Deerfield (OH) Chamber

I believe it starts with a culture of communication. We adopted the EOS [entrepreneurial operating system] model two years ago across our entire organization, and it provides regular avenues for the entire team to present issues, discuss as a team, and collaborate on a solution. This fosters a culture of trust which leads to a culture of innovation,

creativity, and change.

We have quarterly pulses and quarterly team building to reward each other for progress being made toward our vision. Each team member even has a signature celebration move that when someone does something well and pushes us toward our future of change, we all do that signature move together.

May sound silly, but the little things like that really do keep the continued momentum and help to build trust. Imagine everyone "raising the roof" in 2023 at a team meeting! Great communication leads to great teams, which leads to the innovation, creativity, and change necessary for continued growth.



Bryan Starr
President/CEO
Greater Irvine (CA) Chamber

In my view, culture is everything for any organization. With an effective culture and strong, relevant community values, chambers can set the tone for their respective ecosystems.

For Greater Irvine, no idea is too big, too small, or too far out there. Our culture is freedom to fail. Without failure there is no success.

Our executive professional staff also encourages our team to reach beyond what they already know. We encourage our team to be lifelong learners by seeking opportunities for personal and professional growth even if it's not directly related to their current role at the chamber.

We also strongly encourage our team to manage up.

Most important, our team members are encouraged to always seek out what's next instead of getting stuck in what always has been.

This approach also translates to how we manage and develop our board. The open-mindedness and freedom to fail mentality has built a great deal of trust and unity to collectively accomplish our mission to advance the economic vitality of Greater Irvine.



Lori Mattson, IOM
President/CEO
Tri-City (WA) Regional Chamber

In a quest to deliver the highest quality events, resources, programs, publications, etc., we conduct staff-wide CTC meetings (Cross Team Collaboration). When a team member is creating

See Leader to Leader: Page 7

2023 ACADEMY AND ACADEMY PLUS

Chamber Colleagues from Around the West Gather to Network, Share Ideas, Learn



139 chamber executives and staff from around the West attended Academy 2023 in Sacramento, CA on August 6–9.



A welcome reception kickoff at the CalChamber offices gives participants an opportunity to collect their event items and meet Steering Committee members and other attendees before the start of classes.



Academy and Academy Plus attendees join together on Monday night for an evening of networking, minigolf, and dinner at Tippy Putt Sacramento.



2023 ACADEMY AND ACADEMY PLUS

Chamber Colleagues Gather to Network, Learn Together



61 students started their Academy journey, attending their first year in 2023.



15 Academy alumni joined us for a two-day Academy Plus program focused on workforce development and cultivating a positive community.



41 students returned for their second year of classes.



Third year students laugh together during a group discussion as a part of their Everyday Ethics class.



35 students returned for their final year of classes. The class will graduate at the 2024 Annual Conference in February 2024.



First year students work collaboratively on a group activity in their Community & Board Development class.



Third Year students show their chosen books during the book presentation at the conclusion of their final class on Wednesday, August 9.



FALL WEBINAR SERIES

SEPTEMBER 13

Your Chamber & Artificial Intelligence:
Tools and Best Practices

OCTOBER 4

Cost Cutting & Efficiencies

NOVEMBER 8

Unleash Your Inner Marketing Genius:
Mastering Digital Strategies for
Chamber Engagement

DECEMBER 6

Combating Homelessness in Your
Community



All webinars take place 10:00-11:00 a.m. (Pacific)

Register now at:
www.waceonline.com/webinars

Chamber Executives in the News

Nicole Shahenian is the new president/CEO of the Whittier Area (CA) Chamber. Shahenian most recently led the Irwindale (CA) Chamber and succeeds **Carol Crosby**, who retired.

Derrick Seaver has announced he is leaving the San Jose (CA) Chamber and has accepted a teaching job. The search for his successor is underway.

The Yuba-Sutter (CA) Chamber is actively recruiting

their next executive. **Kristen Perry** has resigned to relocate with her family to Idaho.

Many of our W.A.C.E. members were recognized at the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (ACCE) convention in Salt Lake City last month:

- **Pearland (TX) Chamber** received the Chamber of the Year Award.
- **Robert Heidt** from the Glendale (AZ) Chamber

received the Board Chair's Award.

• **Sharon Mayer**, Allen Fairview (TX) Chamber; **Jim Johnson**, Pearland (TX) Chamber; and **Allison Walden**, Tulsa (OK) Regional Chamber, all received their Certified Chamber Executive (CCE) designation.

- **Colin Diaz**, ACE, with the Tempe (AZ) Chamber, was named to the ACCE Board.
- **Randy Gordon** was named an ACCE Life Member.

Leader to Leader

From Page 3

something new, or making significant changes to a program, a publication, an event, etc., they call a CTC meeting with our entire team.

Prior to the meeting, they give everyone details and context of what they're hoping to get from CTC, so the whole team can begin brainstorming or researching potential solutions.

At the meeting, we go around the table sharing our ideas and contributing input to other ideas. Ultimately, I believe that everyone feels like their opinions are valued and that all decisions aren't made

by only those in leadership or senior positions.



Robert Heidt
President/CEO
Glendale (AZ) Chamber
Fostering a culture of change at the Glendale Cham-

ber begins with leadership and our attitude toward innovation and creativity. While even small changes may stir feelings of fear or dread, I believe being a champion of change or continuous development can embolden the team to face the world with a new perspective, to bring forth new ideas or best practices, and to see where opportunities for progress exist.

And while change may not always result in the desired benefit, the way in which we address the outcome has much to do with whether we extinguish or encourage and nurture perpetual improvement.

MEETING DATES

W.A.C.E. Events
(916) 442-2223
www.waceonline.com

Webinar Series

- **September 13:** Your Chamber & Artificial Intelligence: Tools and Best Practices
- **October 4:** Cost Cutting & Creating Efficiencies
- **November 8:** Unleash Your Inner Marketing Genius: Mastering Digital Strategies for Chamber Engagement
- **December 6:** Combating Homelessness in Your Community

All webinars take place from 10 a.m.-11 a.m. (Pacific).

Registration and more information.

Annual Conference

February 7-9, 2024
Hyatt Regency Orange County
Garden Grove, CA

Sponsorship Opportunities

CHAIRMAN'S CIRCLE

Gold Members

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The Chairman's Circle is a special group of members that have committed to support W.A.C.E. through sponsorships. If your business would like to become a member of the Chairman's Circle, please contact Nick Ortiz, W.A.C.E. president and CEO, at (916) 930-1215 or email nick.ortiz@calchamber.com.

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