

## Spreading Kindness Can Build Community



Lorraine Clarno, ACE

As the “champion” for each of our communities, the “catalyst” for business growth, and the “convener” of leaders and influencers, it may seem odd, but I am about to challenge you to prioritize spreading kindness in 2024.

Imagine what outcomes could be had if every chamber of commerce championed a local “kindness initiative.” Our country is polarized, and the potential for divisiveness to grow in magnitude this election year is almost frightening.

As chambers of commerce, we have the unique ability and channels to foster healthy, respectful and kind conversations with diverse members of our community. This would not have to be expensive or overly burdensome. We could easily add small things in each of our meet-

ings, communications, events and publications that deliver a simple message — be kind.

### Ideas

Here are just a few ideas to get your wheels turning:

- At community-building events, find ways to increase interactions and encourage people to listen to hear and not respond in our meetings. Always have a “parking lot” for things brought up that aren’t on topic but can be addressed going forward.

- Create collaborative initiatives that foster partnerships, perhaps, with underutilized community stakeholders and invite them to your table. Dig deep and find untapped voices in your community.

- Encourage our members to internalize kindness campaigns and promote employee roundtables to host discussions on issues that are important to them. Encourage civility and respectful discussions and set ground rules.

- Most of us provide personal and professional educational programming. Incorporate some topics on conflict resolution, effective communication and cultural sensitivity to businesses and community members.

- Recognize and celebrate

member businesses that are contributing positively to your community using digital platforms.

### ‘Red Notes’ Campaign

What could an internal kindness campaign look like with your team in your chamber? We could take an example from Keller Williams and their “Red Notes” campaign. It is a simple concept where everyone has a special pack of Post-it® notes, and you spread words of affirmation, congratulations, and good luck to team members

Spread kudos and high-fives in a quiet but meaningful way. Encourage random acts of kindness and challenge teammates to be intentional with each other. Have everyone at weekly staff meetings report one win from the previous week and one priority for the next. Find ways to celebrate those wins and find ways to support each other’s priorities and goals.

By actively engaging in

these initiatives, chambers of commerce can contribute to building a more united, kind and respectful community. Anything we can do to tamp down the rhetoric and meanness we all see daily will be a win for our chambers and communities.

Build kindness into your brand, welcome different perspectives to understand them, and model ways to deal with differences of opinion, stress, and conflict. With more than 385 chambers represented in W.A.C.E., just think of the difference we could collectively make.

I am so grateful for my year as chair of the board and look forward to seeing the results of our bold and courageous leap of faith to take our future into our own hands. We are in fantastic hands with Whitney Diver McEvoy at the board helm.

*Lorraine Clarno, ACE, is the president/CEO of the Discover Kalispell (MT) Chamber and 2023–2024 chair of the W.A.C.E. Board of Directors.*

**kw Red Notes** ♥

Join the movement to spread joy, one note at a time!

#KWRedNotes



# #2

**VOLUME 55  
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BOARD CHAIR PROFILE	2
OPINION POLL	3
LEADER TO LEADER	4
W.A.C.E. BY THE NUMBERS	5
AROUND THE WEST	6
EXECUTIVES IN THE NEWS	7

### SNAPSHOT

## Importance vs. Performance of Promoting the Community

IMPORTANCE

91%

PERFORMANCE

74%

DON'T KNOW

11%

Source: Industry averages from cumulative results of W.A.C.E. chamber performance surveys of 27,028 members of local chambers

2024-2025 BOARD CHAIR PROFILE

# Yountville CEO Says Be Patient, Kind to Self and Others; Listen to Gut Instincts on People



**Whitney Diver McEvoy, ACE**

President and CEO, Yountville (CA) Chamber of Commerce 2024–2025 W.A.C.E. Board Chair

**Background**

**Personal:** Born in New Jersey; grew up in Chicago, IL; St. Louis, MO; and Sacramento, CA. Currently live in Napa, CA with husband. Matt, and two cats, Tiger and Shadow!  
**Education:** B.A. in political science from Sonoma State University (CA).

**Chamber Experience**

• **2013–2015:** Programs and Events Manager, Director of Programs and Events, and Vice President of Sponsorship, Programs and Events at the San Jose Chamber of Commerce.  
 • **2016–Present:** President and CEO, Yountville (CA) Chamber of Commerce.

**Business Philosophy**

**Guiding Principles:** Be patient with yourself and others. Be kind to yourself and others. Be forgiving of yourself and others.

**Yardstick of Success:** Have we created an organization that people want to show up

for? Have we helped someone this week? Is our team thriving?  
**Advice to Others:** Clear is kind. Unclear is unkind. Have the courage to say what needs to be said clearly in a kind way; it will make all the difference.

**Judgment Calls**

**Best Business Decision:** Taking the time to rebuild the organizational structure and processes of the Yountville Chamber. After this was done, we were able to soar, ready to tackle important business and community issues.

**Worst Business Decision:** Not trusting my gut read on people, whether a board member, volunteer or staff member. Listen to what your gut says!  
**One-Word Description of You:** Collaborative.

**True Confessions**

**Like Best About Current Job:** All the wonderful people we get to interact with daily, our members, volunteers, board members and our team.  
**Interests/Hobbies:** 2024 goal: Make more time for these things — yoga, cooking, golf, hiking and spending time with friends.

**Pet Peeve:** People volunteering to lead or help on an initia-

tive and not following through. And people not responding to emails; what's up with that?!  
**Your No. 1 Strength:** Building consensus.  
**Thing You Need to Work on:** Being patient with others and myself — it's a guiding principle for a reason!  
**First Choice for a New Career:** Foreign ambassador (Have you watched "The Diplomat" on Netflix? Highly recommended.)

**Predilections**

**Favorite Book:** Just finished *Fourth Wing* and loved it; very entertaining.  
**Favorite Movie:** Hard to pick just one, but if I must, "The American President."  
**Favorite Quote:** "The secret to success is doing common tasks uncommonly well." — John D. Rockefeller  
**Favorite Song:** Anything by Taylor Swift and no, I can't pick just one!  
**Favorite Vacation:** Cruising through the Mediterranean.  
**Favorite Way to Spend Free Time:** Being outdoors, enjoying the beautiful Napa Valley with friends and family.

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

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**SURVEY SAYS YEAR IN REVIEW**



Western Association  
of Chamber Executives

- 23%** have a Political Action Committee (PAC)
- 7.3/9** average score that Chambers rated their organization's overall health
- 63%** of chambers reported event revenue has increased
- 53%** have an active 501c3 Foundation
- \$69,062** average NET from largest single source of non-dues revenue
- 29%** endorse candidates
- 73%** have 3 or fewer exempt employees
- 53%** of chambers have tiered dues
- 78%** said chambers are more pressured to take stands on social issues today than in the past.
- 76%** believe the business community has a responsibility to drive social change
- 45%** of chambers have multi-year visions for their community
- 46%** average percentage of budget non-dues revenue accounts for
- 78%** of chambers provide 2 weeks vacation after 1 year of employment

LEADER TO LEADER

# Good Relations with Board Members Depend on Trust, Respect, Clear Knowledge of Roles

*In your experience, what is the key to fostering a good relationship with your board, especially your board chair?*



**Cyndi Bester**  
CEO  
**Lethbridge (AB) Chamber**

The key to fostering a strong relationship with a board, particularly the board chair, lies in open communication, transparency and collaboration.

Building trust is paramount — regularly update the chair and the board on organizational developments, challenges and successes. Actively seek their input, valuing their perspectives and expertise. Establish clear expectations and goals, ensuring alignment with the chamber's mission.

Show appreciation for their dedication and commitment, acknowledging the key role they play. Foster a culture of inclusivity, where all members feel heard and valued. Effective relationship-building involves not only conveying information, but also actively listening and responding to concerns.

Ultimately, a harmonious relationship with the board chair is built on mutual respect, shared goals and a commitment to the chamber's success.



**Monica Holdaway**  
CEO  
**Box Elder (UT) Chamber**

This is a great question for all chamber staff. I think one word can describe the fundamental element for a good relationship with the board and board chair. That word is TRUST.

That trust needs to go both ways. If the chair can trust staff to do their job to the best of their ability, then the chamber will succeed, and the work will be done. Therefore, make sure that the chair's goals are accomplished and that staff are able to foster and build trust with their chair.

Here a few examples of ways to build trust:

- Listen to the goals of the chair, respecting the chair's ideas and comments.
- Follow through on ideas from the chair, within the chamber's goals and mission statement, and ensure that ideas are brought to fruition through the staff's work.
- Thank the chair often for their guidance and willingness to help lead the organization to succeed.

As staff listens, follows through and thanks the chair, the chair will trust staff to do their jobs and ensure success.



**Janet Steele, ACE, IOM**  
President  
**Albany Area (OR) Chamber**

First, as the president/CEO you should have a huge voice in who goes on the board, the executive committee and up the ladder to chair. You will be working with them for years and people you respect and trust are key to yours and the chamber's success.

Make sure the board chair and executive committee are well aware of any issues, challenges and opportunities the chamber has. Be honest and upfront. Build a culture of trust. They are my "sounding board" for new ideas — are they crazy or will they work? It's their opportunity to give important feedback and my opportunity to understand them and the business community they represent better.

We also have some fun at our board meetings. Lunch is served before the meeting, giving everyone a chance to relax. During board introductions, there is a question of the day that everyone answers. The questions can be personal, or business related. Either way, everyone gets to know each other a little bit more.

Our annual retreats are out of town and allow us

the opportunity to socialize. Board members pay for their rooms and the chamber pays for the rest. The night before the retreat, we have a board/spouse/staff/facilitator social with heavy appetizers and no-host bar. It's a great opportunity for everyone to relax and unwind before we get down to business at the retreat.

I am fortunate that many of my board members and chairs have become great friends, and we get together outside the chamber world. The culture of trust and respect that we have at the chamber continues as friends.



**Scott Ashton**  
CEO  
**Oceanside (CA) Chamber**

My keys to success are transparency and clarity about the role of board members. I am proactive in keeping our board informed in a timely manner on critical issues related to finances, staffing and public relations. We created a comprehensive onboarding process to provide new board members clear direction on their role with the chamber.

It is critical for a CEO to have a strong voice on the

*See Leader to Leader: Page 7*

# W.A.C.E. by the NUMBERS



**27,164**

responses collected through the W.A.C.E. Chamber Performance Survey since 2014



**139**

executives and staff that attended Academy in 2023



**24**

states or provinces represented by W.A.C.E. members



**40**

documents added/updated in the Resource Library in 2023

**343** people attended the 2023 Annual Conference in Sacramento, CA

**786**

total number of W.A.C.E. members



**CHAMBER LEADERSHIP PODCAST**

**53**

hours of continuing education offered by W.A.C.E. in 2023



**25**

Peer Groups launched with more than 200 participants

**117** episodes released of the Chamber Leadership Podcast



**1,300**

likes on W.A.C.E. Facebook page



**1,881**

survey responses collected from chamber executives from W.A.C.E. opinion polls in 2023



**26**

Accredited Chamber Executives still active in chamber management

NOTEWORTHY

# What Chambers Are Doing Around the West

## Santa Barbara Chamber Provides Visitor Trolley

The Santa Barbara South Coast (CA) Chamber convened a roundtable meeting of downtown businesses to gather insights into their goals for the future of downtown. The meeting served as a platform for exchanging ideas, addressing prevailing challenges, and fostering productive discussions.

A significant concern that could be addressed quickly was the need for a shuttle service to facilitate seamless movement of visitors between the waterfront, Funk Zone, hotels, and downtown areas. Recognizing the significance of this challenge, the chamber took action to address this issue.

Within the span of one month, the Santa Barbara Visitor Trolley was launched, enhancing the experience of visitors and providing convenience for residents that encourages exploring the area, shopping and dining – thus championing for a thriving business community.

## Medford Chamber Launches Dream Big Campaign

Faced with the challenge of reaching new dues revenue, The Chamber of Medford & Jackson County (OR) launched the Dream Big program. Designed to benefit small businesses, this initiative allows current members to sponsor struggling businesses that could benefit from chamber

services but can't afford membership.

As a Dream Big sponsor, members provide a sponsored one-year membership, emphasizing the shared vision of helping business succeed. The chamber, in turn, supports these new members with connections, advertising and

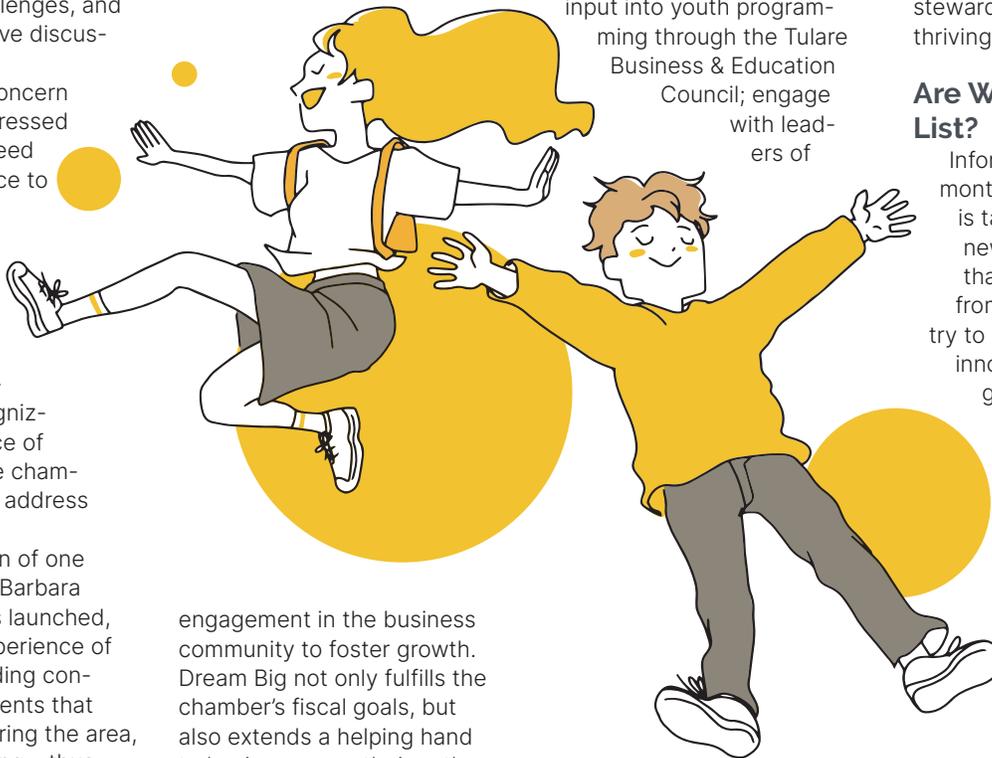
region's business, governmental, and agriculture operations. This program was designed as a non-paid work-based learning internship opportunity.

Team members participate in "classroom" and other learning activities and assist at designated chamber and community events; provide input into youth programming through the Tulare Business & Education Council; engage with leaders of

The program is sponsored by a local financial institution to cover the costs of youth program-branded clothing. Site hosts/presenters provide in-kind support through meals, etc. Currently it's a revenue-neutral program that contributes to the chamber's image and role as a good community steward and stakeholder for a thriving community.

## Are We on Your Mailing List?

Information featured each month in *Around the West* is taken from chamber newsletters and websites that W.A.C.E. receives from its members. We try to share best practices, innovative ideas and programs from chambers working hard to be Catalysts, Conveners and Champions and make a difference in their community. Make sure to subscribe W.A.C.E. to your mailing list, if you haven't done so already, and you may be featured in a future *Insider!*



engagement in the business community to foster growth. Dream Big not only fulfills the chamber's fiscal goals, but also extends a helping hand to businesses on their path to success. The program far surpassed the initial fundraising goal.

## Tulare Chamber Starts Youth Ambassadors Program

The Tulare (CA) Chamber created the Youth Ambassadors for Business Team to provide young adults with an opportunity to develop leadership, interpersonal and management skills, perform community service and become aware of the

business, industry and government; participate in social media campaigns; assist with podcast/video production; and prepare event venue design.

After having completed 90% of the program, it launches into business plan development during Small Business Week to allow the youth to creatively design plans to fill gaps, they've become aware of after having explored the town.

## Leader to Leader

From Page 4

board and officer nominating committees. I have spent decades building productive relationships with business leaders in our community and have a good sense of who to recommend for consideration for board and officer roles. Consequently, before anyone joins our board, I have usually already developed a positive working relationship with them.

By the time one of our board members takes the chair role, we have developed a synergy and mutual respect that help us lead as an effective team.



**Lance Beck**  
President/CEO  
Spokane Valley (WA)  
Chamber

In my experience, cultivating a robust relationship with the board, particularly the board chair, hinges on the bedrock of

trust and a shared comprehension of expectations. Establishing a solid foundation in relationships before individuals assume board roles is pivotal.

While inherited board members are inevitable, actively shaping the composition of the board by transparently engaging with the nominating committee is crucial. Open communication about expectations not only fosters a harmonious board dynamic but also aligns the team toward common goals.

Ultimately, the proactive approach of shaping relationships and expectations lays the groundwork for a cooperative and effective board dynamic.

## Chamber Executives in the News

The San Jose (CA) Chamber has hired a new president/CEO in **Leah Toeniskoetter**. Toeniskoetter is the founding director of public policy think tank SPUR San Jose, as well as a senior manager at Deloitte. Toeniskoetter succeeds **Derrick Seaver**, the chamber's most recent CEO, who resigned in August.

**Bryan Starr** has announced he is leaving the Greater Irvine (CA) Chamber. A plan for future leadership for the organization is being developed and will be released soon. Starr has led the chamber since 2017.

HAVE YOU  
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LATELY?

We have added/updated 143 documents in the resource library in the last two years. With over 800 documents in the library there is something for everyone!

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- Board Documents
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## MEETING DATES

W.A.C.E. Events  
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### Academy 2024

August 4-7, 2024  
Hyatt Regency Sacramento  
Sacramento, CA