

WACE CONFERENCE 2024

# MY PATH TO BECOMING A CEO

JESSICA PENMAN  
PRESIDENT & CEO  
TRUCKEE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



# A LITTLE BIT ABOUT TRUCKEE

## Truckee

- Located in Northern California near Lake Tahoe in the Sierra Nevada Mountains
- Elevation: 6,000 feet
- Town Population: 17,000 with an increase to 100,000 on busy weekends/holidays
- 17 special districts (all with elected boards)
- In Nevada County but intersected by Placer County
- The closet city is Reno, Nevada
- 70% of housing stock is second homes
- Main economic drivers are tourism and outdoor recreation

## Truckee Chamber

- Established in 1912
- Members: 550ish
- Budget: 1 million
- Staff: 4 full time | 5 part time Welcome Center Staff
- Contract with the Town of Truckee for the Truckee Welcome Center, Economic Development, Workforce Development and Community Connection
- NOT the DMO





# A LITTLE BIT ABOUT ME

- Born and Raised in Napa California
- BA in Anthropology/Classical Civilization from the University of Arizona
- MA in Egyptian Archaeology from University College London
- Have lived in London England, Luxor Egypt, Orvieto Italy
- Taught archaeology and anthropology at community college for 8 years
- Love to read
- Hate podcasts
- Completed 1 full marathon and 16 half marathons
- Have one dog (Auggie 9 months) and one cat (Mico 11 years)
- One Boyfriend of ten years (Dustin)
- Like to always be right





# MY CHAMBER TIMELINE

**Feb '17**

Meet Whitney Diver McEvoy, President & CEO of the Yountville Chamber, at a mixer and find out she is hiring for a team to rebuild the Yountville Chamber

**April '17**

Interviewed for Membership & Programs Manager job at the Yountville Chamber on the same day I got let go from my job at the Napa Valley Museum after 5+ years

**Nov '19**

Promoted to Director of Community Relations at the Yountville Chamber

**Feb '22**

Joined Emerging Leaders Council for W.A.C.E. and found my chamber people.

**May'22**

Applied for Truckee Chamber President & CEO position and had the worst first interview with the recruiter of my life. I cried.

**July'22**

Got the job! After doing my second interview in my car. Then had to tell Whitney I was leaving (terrible) and gave six weeks notice (also terrible).

**Oct'22**

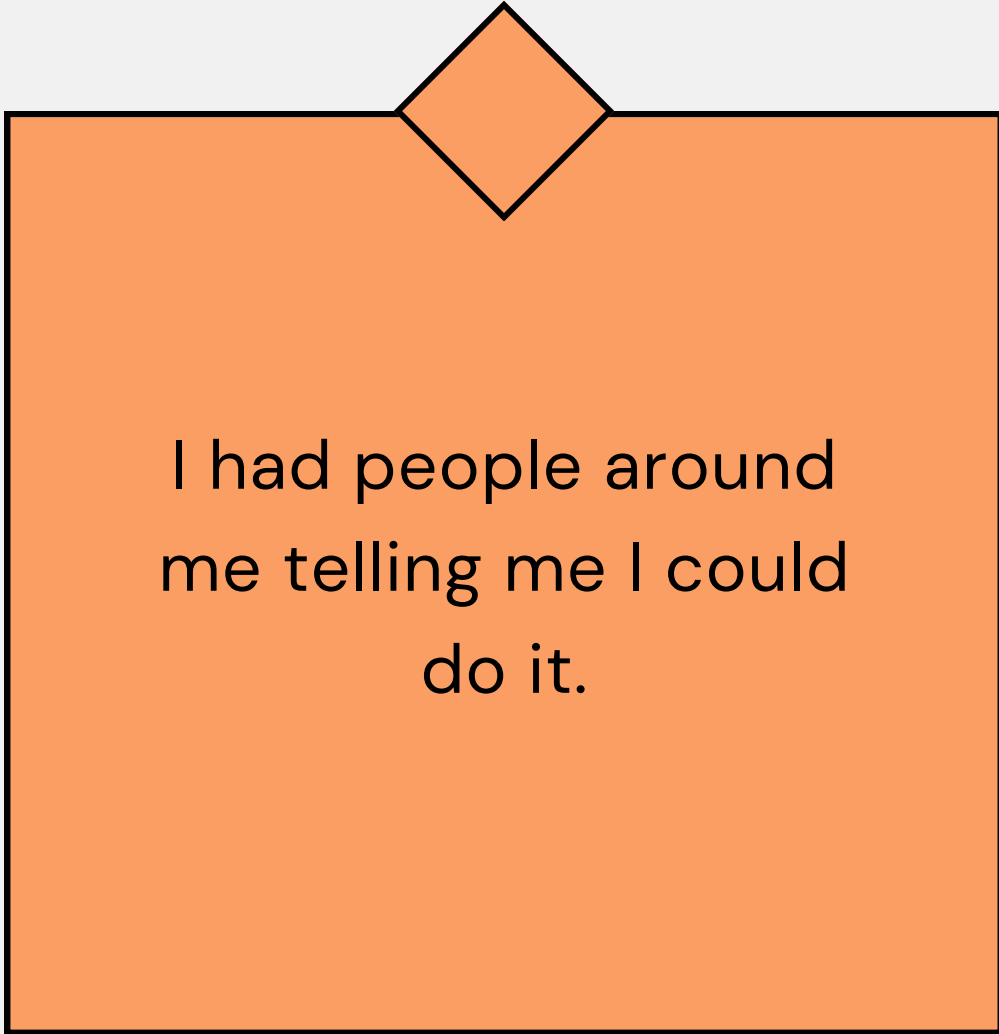
Started as the new President & CEO of the Truckee Chamber! And the rest is history...not really.



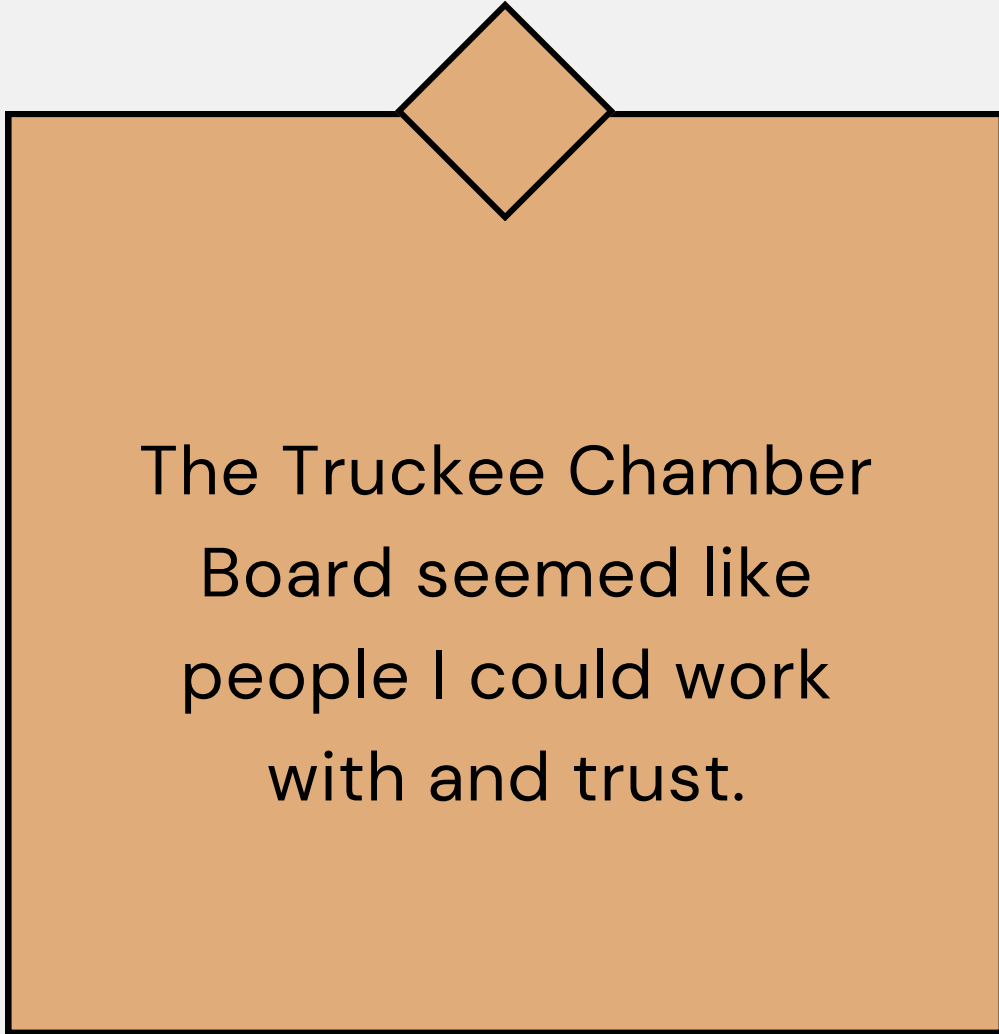
# THINGS THAT MADE ME KNOW I WAS READY AND COULD DO IT



I was bored at work.



I had people around  
me telling me I could  
do it.



The Truckee Chamber  
Board seemed like  
people I could work  
with and trust.



# MOVING TO A NEW COMMUNITY IS HARD





# LESSONS LEARNED AS THE NEW KID IN TOWN

- Take it sloooooooooooooooooow
- But also do something you feel proud of in the first three months
- LISTEN to everyone who wants to be heard
- Find an ally
- Lean on your mentors
- You will make enemies even if you are the best human around
- It is really hard to make friends when your job is so public
- Embrace not knowing everything
- Make a list of everything you love about your new chamber
- Try not to compare it to your old job/home/etc
- Give yourself at least one year before joining any clubs/boards/organizations/etc
- Don't go back "home" often in the first few months
- Get ready for the newness of you to wear off
- Take lots of deep breaths
- Be kind to yourself
- Try REALLY hard not to work more than 40 hours a week







**BIGGEST PIECE OF  
ADVICE...  
BELIEVE IN YOURSELF  
AND  
IMPOSTER SYNDROM IS  
REAL AND NORMAL**



**THANK YOU  
VERY MUCH**

**JESSICA PENMAN  
PRESIDENT & CEO  
TRUCKEE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
JESSICA@TRUCKEE.COM  
707-363-5907 (CELL)**



# My Path to Being a CEO



Western Association  
of Chamber Executives



# Room introductions: title and chamber



Western Association  
of Chamber Executives





# Greater Modesto, Stanislaus County

**Modesto: “City of great Neighbors”**

**Population of 218,000**

**Home to E & J Gallo Family Winery, the largest wine conglomerate in the world, with 6000 employees.**

**Domestic and export production: Frito-Lay, Del Monte, Stanislaus Foods, Blue Diamond, Sciabicca Olive Oil.**

**We are home to George Lucas, Jeremy Renner, Timothy Olyphant**

**We are the center of the Central Valley, Center of Northern California**

**We are a natural hub as a transfer station for good and bad.**

**Natural Mediterranean climate plays into our quality-of-life benefits.**

**Stanislaus County:**

**Water, homelessness, and housing are top issues**

**Population of 551,000**

**83% white, 49% Hispanic, all others are 1% to 6%**

**We suffer from high unemployment compared the state and national average.**

**Home prices continue to increase, we have larger than average family sizes.**

**Wages remain flat.**

**Stanislaus county lags in nationwide educational attainment in most categories**

**Strongest industry is agriculture.**

**1 in 8 jobs is directly tied to agriculture or related food manufacturing.**



# Modesto Chamber of Commerce



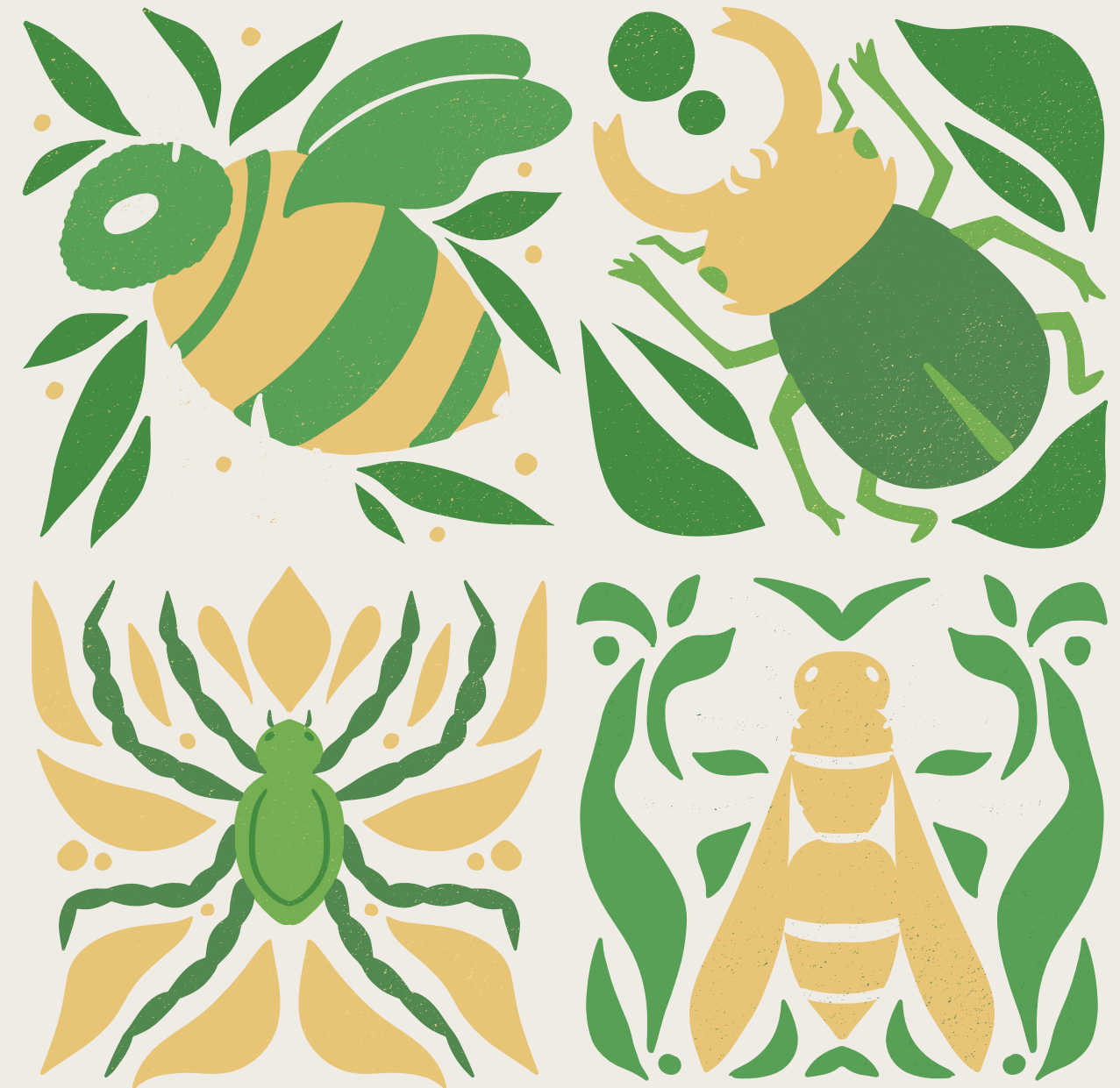
- Trish Christensen, President & CEO
- Established in 1912
- 750+ members
- 25 board members
- 5 staff, plus me





# My story and trajectory

- Married 35 years
- Moved to Modesto August of 1988
- Stay at home mom of 3 children
- Perpetual volunteer, evolving leader
- Consulting business
- Part time events coordinator – March, 2018
- Programs and Events Manager – November 2018
- Interim CEO – August 2018
- President & CEO – December 2019
- Hired two staff members between October 2019 and January 2020
- The shut down arrived in Stanislaus County March 2020
- Board service:
- Boys and Girls Clubs of Stanislaus County, executive seat – 9 years
- Stanislaus Partners in Education, executive seat
- Community Police Oversight Committee
- Various advisory committees



Western Association  
of Chamber Executives





nikewomen  
SAN FRANCISCO



“From chaos comes creativity,  
from creativity comes order...”



Western Association  
of Chamber Executives



# Youth Expo



# Soiree











C.A.R.E.S

COMMUNITY  
ADVOCACY  
RELATIONSHIPS  
EDUCATION  
SERVICE







# My Mantra

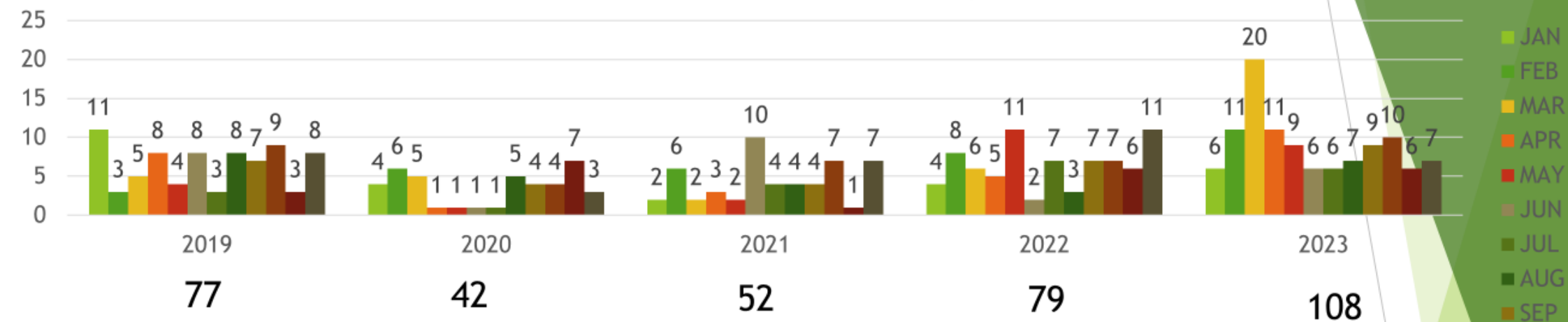
- To support business, we must work with the understanding that we need to engage in all aspects of our community.
- Supporting business means supporting the employers, the employees, and our education system at each level.
- They are all raising their kids here, in our school system.
- Those kids are our future workforce.



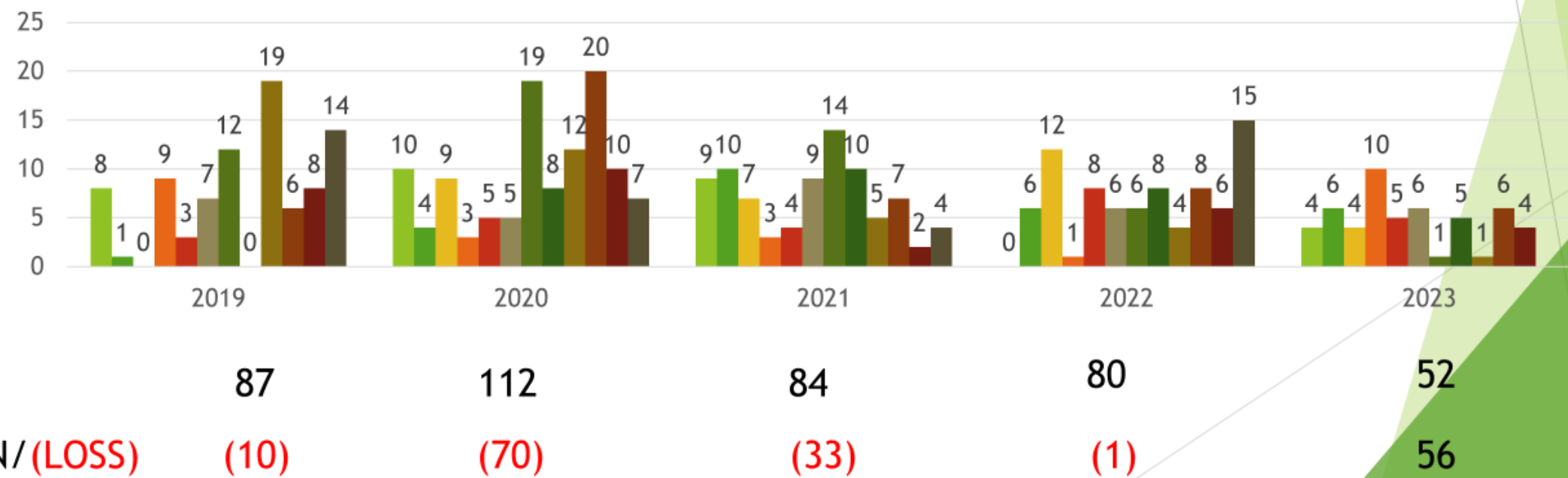


## new members & dropped members by month/year AS OF 01/09/24

Number of New Members by Month



Number of Dropped Members by Month





# QUESTIONS?





# THANK YOU! TRISH CHRISTENSEN

[tchristensen@modchamber.org](mailto:tchristensen@modchamber.org)



Western Association  
of Chamber Executives

