

A History of the Carroll County Chamber of Commerce

To Commemorate 75th Anniversary of Service to the Business Community

By Diana Scott, Public Relations Committee

At 8 p.m. on September 12, 1929, a group of businessmen met at the Fireman's Building in Westminster. They were there to elect a new Board Of Managers (now Board of Directors) and to discuss their involvement in the activities of the town. C. Edgar Nusbaum, the first president of the Westminster Chamber of Commerce, Inc. presided over the election. Those elected that night were E. Edgar Nusbaum, D.S. Gehr, Denton Gehr, Joseph L. Mathias, Arthur M. Zile, T. William Mather, W.H. Davis, Charles N. Fisher, John L. Reifsnider, Ralph Bonsack, William N. Keefer, D. S. Babylon, d. Eugene Walsh, Howard T. Koontz, T.B. Cash. H. Preston Gorsuch, George E. Matthews, Charles H. Bowers and J. F. Wantz.

No one knows for sure whose idea it was to establish the Westminster Chamber of Commerce, inc. 1924. It was most likely that the men who comprised the Board of Managers in 1929 were among the same group of visionaries who organized the Chamber a few years earlier. (1)

Getting Carroll County on the map was something in which the community could take pride. It was only 12 years before this when the Chamber of Commerce of the United States was formed during the presidency of William Howard Taft. (2) Even at that, the national organization was not the first, as many local Chambers had been in operation as far back as colonial times. But Chamber went back even farther than the 15th century. Associations of this kind were formed in the days of the Roman Empire. The first group to have actually used the name "Chamber of Commerce" was established in 1599 in Marseille, France, to represent the commercial needs of the port. All of these Chambers had the common goals of bringing new industries to their communities and furnishing information that would encourage individuals and businesses to see their towns in the best possible light.

Activities

On that evening in 1229 the Board of Managers discussed creating a fund to meet the payment of the taxes on shoe factory property. Replacing a shoe factory in Westminster took some prominence in the 1920' and early 1930's, finally concluding in the Muskin Shoe Co. moving into the old quarters of the Newark Shoe Manufacturing Company. The Board also negotiated with Farmers Stone Picking Machine of Baltimore to obtain a stone-picking machine and with shirt manufactures D. Greenbaum & Sons of Philadelphia in their effort to relocate to Westminster. Due to the financial demand, which would be put upon the Chamber, the matters were dropped.

A New Year's Day parade for 1930 was discussed as well as the State Grange meeting, which would be held at the Fireman's Building. The baseball committee reported a total receipt of \$71.85 for the game between the Rotary Club and Chamber of Commerce. This amount was split between the two groups and donated to the ambulance fund.

Finance

D. Eugene Walsh was the secretary/treasurer and in the minutes, the financial report for

1928 revealed that the secretary received a salary, but by 1931 the Chamber was no longer offering remuneration for this service. One thing to note about this position is that there were 10 presidents from 1924 until 1955; there were only three secretary/treasurers. D. Eugene Walsh gave over reins to Ralph G. Hoffman in 1939. David H. Taylor took on the responsibilities of the position in 1944. It was not until September 13, 1939, that the Chamber resolved to pay the secretary/treasurer \$10 a month for his services.

Committees

The records show that there were six committees operating under the auspices of the Westminster Chamber of Commerce. They were the Industrial, Civic, Membership, Retail Merchants, Finance, and Press committees. As a matter of comparison, today there are 16 committees – ambassador, Business and Education, Business Fairs, County relations, Executive, Finance, Gala Dinner Dance, Golf, Leadership, Academy., Legislative, Membership, member Services, Nominating, Professional Development, Public Relations and Charles D. Schaffer Scholarship Foundation.

First Location

Word of mouth has it that the Chamber first occupied what is now the Locust Wines/Antiques building behind the present-day library (Currently occupied by Sidetracked Antiques and Design at 10 E. Main Street). This as an especially good location in the 1920's and 30's as it was the hub of commerce. Located near the railroad station, the property was owned by the Albaugh- Babylon Grocery Company, which had been in business since 1894. The grocery company, which had offices downstairs, rented out the upstairs space.(3) Sales for the company, which was one of the biggest businesses of its type in what was then known as Western Maryland, peaked at \$564, 251 in 1920.(4) The Democratic Advocate pointed out that:

“The premises which they (Babylon and Albaugh) own and occupy on East Main Street, a large and handsome brick structure, dimensions 60 x 198 feet, stands in close proximity to the railroad station, and could not, in fact, be better located. Here they conduct a wholesale traffic in groceries, notions, tobacco, cigars, confectionery and grocers' sundries, for the firm represents leading manufacturers in this line all over Western Maryland, where their trade indeed extends, as well as over much of Pennsylvania.”(5)

Therefore, it is safe to assume that the Chamber's founding fathers knew what they were doing when they rented the upstairs of this building from Albaugh/ Babylon next to the old railroad station.

First Woman Associated with Chamber

Also in the 1930s, there was a first mention of a woman included in Chamber activities. Gladys Wimert is mentioned as a frequent visitor and committee member, and a sometimes substitute secondary/ treasurer. Her husband was Paul Wimert, a member of the Board of Managers. She was first on record as writing a letter to the Chamber asking for a letter of recommendation for her son's possible entrance into Wet point. As time goes on, she was recorded as spending more and more time as a visitor at the Chamber meetings and taking on more responsibilities. One of her first assignments, in 1941, was awarding monetary gifts to those whose doorways were best decorated for Christmas. The first prize of \$5 went to Paul Bixler of 77 West Green Street; second prize of \$3 to Ralph Starnier and

Horace Leppo for 24 Pennsylvania Avenue, and third prize of \$3 to C. F. Sullivan of 65 W. Green Street. One more entry in 1953 reveals that she was acting as Chair of the Advertising and Publicity Committee.

- The Chamber is in possession of two hardbound books, which contain minutes, financial records, and letters documenting Chamber activities from 1928 through 1954.
- The Chamber of Commerce of the United States, formed in 1912, is currently the world's largest federation of businesses, trade and professional associations, and state and local Chamber of Commerce. It has 180,000 members. Its headquarters are at 1615 H Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20062
- Interview with Helen Billingslea.
- Minnich, Dean, "Albaugh and Babylon: Two Giants in Carroll County's Past," *County Wide News*, January 1989
- N.A., Albaugh- Babylon Grocery Company: "One of Westminster's Monuments of Thrift and Energy," *Democratic Advocate*, n.d.

Move to City Hall

The second move for the Chamber was to one room of City Hall, formerly the old Longwell Mansion. Perhaps the only way to estimate the timing of the move is to say that it must have been after 1930, which is the date when they City of Westminster purchased the home municipal activities.(6)

Activities in 1940's

In the 1940's they were concerned with the pros and cons of installing parking meters in Westminster, whether or not Westminster should build an airport, a Best Citizen Award, and going in record as favoring the Chesapeake Bay Bridge project.

They were concerned with Western Maryland Railroad's discontinuance of passenger service between Cumberland and Baltimore, happy over the decision of the Blue Ridge Bus Service to increase bus service in order to accommodate passenger traffic, and reported that Charles Carroll Hotel was available for installation of 24-hour telegraph service. They desired a better water supply for Westminster and wanted to add fluoridation in the drinking water. There also was a need for larger buildings in the area- one business needed 70,000 square foot of space. They could not accommodate that need, but were able to arrange for Sears to move into a 30,000 square-foot building.

Dues Ledger 1939-1965

The Chamber is in possession of an old ledger book, kept alphabetically by business, which was used for recording dues. Record keeping in this book began in 1939 and continued through 1965. The book gives a very good look into the types of businesses that chose to make Westminster and environs their homes. For old time members of the Chamber, this book would make a good topic for "remember when" discussions. Listed among the dues paying members were the great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Co. (the A&P to

many of us), Modern Recreation Bowling Alley, G.C. Murphy & Co., Read Drug & Chemical Co., Westminster Shoe Co., and Willow Farm Dairy. These are mixed in with names of businesses still active in the Chamber- Baltimore Gas & Electric Co., Carroll Gardens, Carroll County Bank and Trust, and Modern Ideal Laundry and Cleaners, among many others.

Revision of Westminster Chamber of Commerce, Inc.

Becomes Westminster Area Chamber of Commerce, Inc. (between 1955-1966), Becomes Carroll County Chamber of Commerce, Inc. (1973)

The Ledger book reveals that something happened in the Chamber's history in 1947 and in 1961 because the dues went up considerably each time. Businesses that had been paying \$5 per year before 1957 now were paying \$20; some were paying \$100 instead of \$10. What was happening? A report exists in the files of CCCC, which gives an answer.

A reorganization of the Chamber had been recommended. The committee, under the leadership of E.O. Weant, Jr., called the changes to be made in the Chamber a revision. They recommended that 1924 by-laws be re-written, and that office space, if possible should be acquired in a central location so that the Chamber would have an established headquarters.

The committee report also recommended that "a full-time man who is capable of carrying on the affairs of the Chamber of Commerce on a high plane and in a manner that will command respect of business men and community leaders" be hired. If it was possible, they wanted this man to have a college degree and be capable of "organizing and developing Chamber activities." They were willing to give him a starting salary of \$3600, which could be increased as time went by.

The dues structure was changed. Business organizations with 1 to 10 employees would be assessed at \$25; those with 11 to 25 employees would be assessed at \$50 per year; those from 26 to 50 employees would be assessed at \$75 per year and those businesses with 51 or more employees would be assessed at \$100 per year. They would need approximately 238 members in various categories (198 in the \$25 per year range) to raise money they needed to put this plan into action.

Apparently, it took the Chamber some time to gather enough money to put their plan into action. The revision plan was set forth in 1955. Records for 1955-1966 are not in the Chamber archives, so educated guesses are needed for this period of time. The ledger affirms the need of raising dues twice- once in 1957 and again in 1961. In 1961, businesses paying \$20 were assessed \$25 and those paying \$100 were now paying an additional \$25. This must have been in preparation for implementing the 1955 goals established under the Weant committee.

Sometime between 1955 and 1966, the Westminster Chamber of Commerce became known as the Westminster Area Chamber of Commerce, Inc. By-laws dated 1967 are designated Westminster AREA Chamber of Commerce, Inc. It could be assumed that the first Executive Director, who was hired in 1966, was responsible for changing the name to include "Area" when he came on board, and was in all probability responsible for the 1967 By-Laws.

In 1971, a letter was written by William E. Miller, the Chairman of the By-Laws Revision Committee, on stationery with the heading Westminster Area Chamber of Commerce, Inc. Two years later, the organization's name was changed again. Beginning

January 1, 1973, financial records are headed with Carroll County Chamber of Commerce, Inc.

Charles D. Schaffer
First Executive Director

Finally, in 1966, the Chamber hired Charles D. Schaffer who had retired from Baltimore Gas & Electric Company that year. He was knowledgeable and dedicated to the Chamber goals, having been president of the association from 1946 to 1949. His new title was Executive Director.

It is not known if the Chamber moved to its 22 North Court Street location before or at the time Schaffer was hired. The house, historically known as Gernand- Clemson House, was built circa 1870. (7)

Charlie Schaffer was well thought of during his time with the Chamber. Chamber members said that during his years with the organization membership triples, the group was put on a sound financial basis and its legislative action activities gained influence. It was said that he was interested in *everything*, set his sights high, and was very efficient.

Helen Utz, the current Executive Director for the Chamber, came to work for Charlie Schaffer in 1972 as an administrative secretary. She replaced Thelma Holland. Mrs. Utz said that when she first started with the Chamber, the organization occupied the second floor of the North Court Street building and that James J. Schwartz, Jr. was the organization president.

In an interview in 1998, Mrs. Utz remembers Mr. Schaffer as being persistent, a man who kept after a project until it was successfully completed. She said when she first met him he was a widower. He had one daughter, Mary Ellen Schaffer Mercer, and three grandchildren. She said he was an advocate of the free enterprise system and worked very hard on two pet projects- establishing the Westminster Airport and seeing that the Carroll County Vocational Technical Center was realized.

Mr. Schaffer was born in Baltimore, and attended Baltimore Polytechnic Institute. In 1918 he graduated from Sadler's Business College, and later was awarded an associate bachelor's degree in economics from the Johns Hopkins University. He had been employed 52 years with the Baltimore Gas & Electric Company, first as the Westminster office manager and then as Western District manager. He retired from the Carroll County Chamber of Commerce on March 1, 1983, after seventeen years of service. He had worked tirelessly to have the Carroll County Chamber accredited by the Chamber of Commerce of the United States. In light of this, and his many contributions, he was made an honorary life member of the Maryland Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives. At the time of his retirement, there were 300 members in the Chamber. (8)

The Chamber is in possession of a letter Mr. Schaffer wrote to the Board of Directors recommending Helen Utz for the position he was vacating. He said that he felt "Helen (was) the only person qualified to replace (him) without any further training or instruction." He said, "With her ten years of experience in Chamber work, her training at the U.S. Chamber's Institute, and her contacts with other chambers' Directors, Helen will be able to carry on the work of the Carroll County Chamber." He recommended that Helen increase her hours to accommodate the needs of the Chamber and hire a part-time secretary to work 20- hours a week.

- Weeks, Christopher. *The Building of Westminster in Maryland* (Annapolis: Fisergate Publishing Company, Inc.) 42,43. The mansion, known as “Emerald Hill” was built in 1842 and originally belonged to John K. Longwell. Mr. Longwell, a newspaperman, started again in 1871, becoming a county Commissioner in 1875.
- Weeks, 190.
- Letter dated February 8, 1983, to Charles Schaffer from Chamber of Commerce of the United States under signature of Ralph Shelton, Director of Accreditation.

Alert New Public Disclosure Regulations for Tax-Exempt Organizations

Effective June 8, 1999, exempt organizations must comply with new public disclosure requirements regarding their annual information returns and their application for the tax exempt status. The new rules are an attempt to increase public oversight of exempt organizations and increase availability of the above cited information to the general public. Previously, organizations only needed to make the forms available for public review onsite, at their principal offices. A recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* quoted a former IRS assistant commissioner as saying the new regulations would likely result in “the greatest scrutiny of nonprofit financial operations ever.”

Final regulations under IRC 6104 were published April 8, 1999. These regulations related to the amended disclosure legislation created under the Tax and Trade Relief Act of 1998. These new rules apply only to exempt organization; however, private foundations are excluded from these new procedures.

Helen Utz

Second Executive Director

Helen Utz became the second Executive Director of the Carroll County Chamber of commerce, Inc., effective March 1, 1983. The president of the Chamber at that time was Melvin mills. Jill Kartalia was introduced as Mrs. Utz’s new secretary at the February 17, 1983 meeting. They continued to work out of the 22 N. Court Street building.

One of her first official duties involved establishing the Charles D. Schaffer Foundation. It was determined that the Chamber would make an annual award to one student in each of the five high schools in Carroll County. Each student would have to meet the criteria of being a county resident and of majoring in or concentrating in business and/ or economics. The Foundation was begun on March 17, 1983, with a \$2,500 donation from the Chamber in honor of Mr. Schaffer’s dedication to the Chamber over the last 17 years. A committee was set up to administer the Foundation’s finances so that a \$500 scholarship award could be made annually at each public high school.

In the 1980’s, the Chamber tackled many new projects. Mrs. Utz suggested a celebration to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the Chamber as a county organization. She and the Board began to look into feasibility of publishing a Membership Directory. The Board must have been extremely busy complying with the accreditation requests made by the Chamber of Commerce of the United States in February of 1983. On one night- June 16, 1983- the Board of Directors approved the Procedures and Personnel Manual, the Policy Manual and the Volunteer Leadership Handbook (a copy of each are in the archival

material). The group also discussed business people going into the classroom and visits by Olin Adams, the Superintendent of Schools and Robert Kersey.

Chamber Doubles its Ranks

Two years passed and the success of making the Chamber and its services known in the community became clear when an article dated January 25, 1985, appeared in the *Carroll County Evening Sun*. Its headline proclaimed, "Chamber doubles ranks." Some 234 new members joined the county Chamber swelling the ranks to 529. Most of the new members were small independent businesses who said they wanted the same consideration given to large companies. They said, "Concessions are made to newcomers, while the small shop that has been in business for years runs into bureaucratic red tape on minor requests for expansion or services." Mrs. Utz is quoted as saying that the real challenge of Chamber officers will be to meet the needs of a diverse membership.

More Activities in 1980s

In addition to the items mentioned above, the Chamber conducted a business fair at the Agriculture Center, held a computer application seminar for its members, released 10,000 Free Buyer's Guides at the Business Fair, assisted the county high schools in creating a job interviewing skill course, and developed a Business Guides. They also took an active part in reviewing business related bills in order to make the Chamber's positions known to the County Delegation.

Two Moves on Main Street

Two more moves were in store for the Chamber. Sometime in the late 80s or possibly 1990, the staff was increased (Eileen Alexander) and that necessitated a move to larger quarters. A move was made to 229 East Main Street. Linda Dennis joined the staff as a Communications Assistant in 1991 at the same location. Traditionally known as the Bernstein House, which was built in 1870, it remained home to Carroll County Chamber of Commerce, Inc. until the staff moved one block away to the building which once housed the Bank of Westminster, an institution of historic proportions.

Author, Christopher Weeks explained that "it was the first bank in the wilderness between Baltimore and Pennsylvania." The present tenants/ owners, Carroll County Mutual, are proud of the bank and happily show off a vault, dating from the early 1800s, and its boardroom refurbished to that time period. Alas, neither the Chamber nor their neighbors at 249-251 East Main Street offer Maryland Rye on tap in the board room as did the Westminster Bank when it was trying to induce farmers to cash their checks at their bank. You see, it was to the advantage of the banks, each of which produced its own paper money, to offer inducements such as these so that its notes would travel as far from home as possible. They were the good old days."

One more person was added to the Chamber staff when it moved to the bank building. And that was Connie Saul, the Membership Director. Under her capable management, the Chamber continues to expand.

The 1990s

The Chamber continues to prosper partly because of its leadership. Helen Utz, on behalf of the board, has said, "The Chamber of Commerce is a catalyst- a common vehicle

through which business and professional people translate group thinking into action.” She believes that the Chamber’s mission is to do whatever is necessary to keep the area’s economic condition at a level where business people will risk their resources in hopes of making a profit. She also said, “Only by succeeding in this fundamental goal can we provide the jobs and provide the wealth to finance all the governmental, civic, educational, cultural, and charitable needs that our County faces every day.” Carroll County businesses seem to agree. Membership, which reached 700 in 1997, continues its healthy trend upward.

Celebrating 80 years of Connecting our Members!

Based on an historical record on the Carroll County Chamber of Commerce written by Diana Scott in 1999 and revised in 2004, originally entitled “History of Carroll County Chamber of Commerce 1924-1928,” the following covers the past five years. The complete text is available from the Chamber.

A Chamber for a New Millennium

New Leadership, New Look

In late 1999 the Carroll County Chamber of Commerce underwent two significant changes. On December 31, 2009, Helen Utz retired after 27 years of tireless work on behalf of the business community, with 17 as Executive Director. Helen’s successor was Bonnie Grady who became the third person to provide leadership for the organization and the first to do so in the new century. Ms. Grady came in under a new title- that of President/ CEO

In 2000 the Chamber got a new look. A new logo was adopted, two green swirling C’s in a box next to the words CARROLL COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE. The new logo is now used consistently on business cards, letterhead, the newsletter masthead, etc.

The Membership Directory and the Buyer’s Guide changerd; the Quality of Life Guide was dropped in favor of an in-depth look at the Chamber’s programs and services along with a month-by-month review of the previous years’ events. A *Carroll County Street and Road Map* was added as a complimentary piece to the Directory.

Technological Transformation

With the start of the new millennium, the Chamber underwent a technological transformation. Upgrades to the telephone system were put into place with five phones replacing three and voicemail lines instead of old fashioned tape recording machines. New computers were installed, computer networking was set up and the website was enhanced. Online registration for the Chamber events became a reality as well as acces to an online directory and a members- only bulletin board.

A New Home

On August 28, 2002, the Chamber moved to a new Westminster location at 700 Corporate Center Court, Suite L, in the Carroll County Commerce Center off Route 97 North. The larger quarters have made it possible for the Chamber to think in bigger terms to cover its expanding programs and membership needs.

Events, Programs and Services

The concerns of the business community continue to be addressed through monthly Membership Luncheons and Networking Breakfasts. Connections After Hours offers networking opportunities each month to a different business host and dozens of guests.

Leadership Carroll continues to grow. Started in 1990 to nurture potential community leaders and increase their knowledge of the County and municipal requests for proposals. Another new member benefit, the Carroll County Chamber of Commerce Electricity Purchasing Cooperative, was introduced this year, enabling members to realize long-term budget stability on their electricity bills. In May the first Carroll County Chamber partnered with the Maryland Chamber to present Disney's Keys to Excellence, a first in Maryland. With the two chambers holding exclusive rights to the popular program in Maryland, it will be repeated on May 5, 2005.

The Chamber continues to offer members numerous promotional opportunities. The annual Small Business Awards and the Hats Off Awards recognize businesses for major milestones and extraordinary achievements. The annual Business Fair "SpringFest" allows members to promote their goods and services to local residents. This year the Business Fair broke all records for attendance and number of exhibitors. The annual Golf Tournament continues to grow while another Chamber tradition has been worked: the new member orientation is now held monthly under the name Coffee and Bagels.

The Outstanding Teacher Awards now dovetails into the Maryland Teacher of the Year program while Job Shadow Day for public high school juniors and seniors has been added to our business-education program of work. In 2002, Youth Leadership Carroll was created by Leadership Carroll alumni and others to provide leadership development to high school sophomores.

Committed Volunteers, Loyal Members

Chamber staff members work with more than 100 volunteer committee members to meet members' growing needs and expectations. At a time when many membership organizations are struggling to survive, the Carroll County Chamber continues to maintain a steady membership of around 620. Businesses join the Chamber to stay with the Chamber because they know that the County's oldest and largest business advocacy organization has something to offer all members, regardless of size or industry. Happy 80th Anniversary to our members and volunteers!

A Snapshot in Time: The Last Five Years at the Chamber
By Kathleen Campanella

The Carroll County Chamber of Commerce celebrates its 85th anniversary at a special event on October 22, sharing wonderful photos and memorabilia from its early days. This is a good opportunity to look back over the Chamber's more recent history – the past five years.

Finding Solutions

Meeting the needs of the business community has led to creative ways to solve problems. The cost of energy has been a big issue for business organizations. The Chamber found a way to help members control their costs with the Energy Purchasing Co-op program which

was in full swing in 2005. Locking in electric rates over a contract period allowed participants in the co-op to better manage their expenses.

Keeping a close watch on legislation both locally and in Annapolis continued to be a priority for the Chamber's Legislative Committee. Topics that surfaced in the last five years included everything from taxes on computer services to the impact of a Route 140 bypass in Westminster.

Technology

Technology has had a significant impact on the way the Chamber operates. In 2005, communicating with members had shifted from a monthly newsletter to a magazine format as ChamberWORKS began featuring Carroll County businesses and nonprofits with cover photos. ChamberWORKS became a quarterly publication in October 2006 and ChamberEVENTS, consisting of a listing of upcoming events and a registration form, was mailed to members each month.

This year ChamberWORKS became an online publication that includes local business news and an event photo gallery as well as feature articles and regular columns. E-mail has almost completely replaced direct mail in keeping in touch with members. Online registration and payment for Chamber events began in September 2009 adding another aspect of electronic communication.

Leadership

The Chamber has helped groom leaders in the community through Leadership Carroll, which has grown significantly over the past five years. Most of this program's alumni have served in business, government, or with nonprofit organizations. There were 141 participants in the program in the Classes of 2005 through 2009, almost half of all graduates of the 20 year-old program.

During the past five years there has also been a transition in the top management position. Bonny Grady who ushered in a number of new initiatives for the Chamber completed her service at the end of 2005. Helen Utz came out of retirement to serve as interim until the current President, Richard Haddad, began in February of 2006.

Looking ahead

The Chamber staff, working closely with the Board of Directors, will continue to serve the business community whatever the economic climate. Through new initiatives as well as proven networking and informational events Carroll County can count on the Chamber to provide opportunities for success.



Kathleen Campanella is the Director of Partner & Public Relations at the Brethren Service Center, New Windsor, Maryland and a member of the Chamber's Public Relations Committee.