

2015 State of the Chamber

*Written and delivered by Jessica Capistrant, Chamber President/CEO
at 2015 Annual Awards Dinner*

I would like to begin by saying *thank you*. This portion of the evening is all about you, our members and friends, and how you've positively influenced and affected the Chamber. So, thank you for being with us tonight. Thank you for your feedback. Thank you for your engagement, your membership, and for your investment in this community.

When the Chamber formed through 1928 and 1929, it was run strictly by volunteers. It wasn't until many years later that we had the ability to hire staff and have an office. There have been hundreds of volunteers and board members over the years, and for anyone in the room who has served or is currently serving to help move the Chamber forward, we thank you.

In its 87-year history, the Chamber has been a lot of places, and has moved in a few different directions. Tonight, we want to talk about what we've been doing in recent history and today.

Over time, the Chamber has proudly been a part of many different initiatives, government affairs projects, and events. We have had various numbers of members and changing levels of engagement. And in 2010, a big change hit.

This may have been a change some noticed and some didn't. It wasn't as obvious as the serious market crash of 2008, but it was indeed a change. When a law that allowed associations like Chambers to offer a group rate on health insurance was overturned, the membership numbers took a hard hit – in the neighborhood of more than thirty percent. So, we had some decisions to make.

We decided to take it back to basics. Find out what our members wanted. We surveyed, asked questions, and performed research. We began to realize that our membership was as diverse as Phoenixville itself. We started with initiatives that were high in demand, like offering more networking opportunities. And we continued to chip away so that we could rebuild. The most common thread, we found, is that our membership wants to feel connected. We believe that connections are your foundation to a network of lasting relationships, and we wanted to start building with you.

We have worked to schedule an average of three to six networking events per month, including our monthly meeting, educational seminars, business card exchanges, young professionals events, ribbon cuttings, and after hours mixers.

We have also brought back our Ambassador Committee, to enhance our members' connections not only to each other, but to the Chamber itself. It's a fantastic opportunity for peer-to-peer interaction that has certainly helped create a stronger retention rate and a higher percentage of new members joining us each year. More importantly, members are being heard.

Over the last three years, with the help of volunteers, the Chamber has also rebuilt the Government Affairs Committee and has created opportunities to serve on various event or special task committees throughout the year. Additionally, we now host a CEO and Entrepreneur Roundtable, and we will be launching the non-profit roundtable in 2015.

Another major project the Chamber recently underwent was the launch of a new community website and a new logo. In September 2014, with the help of PAEDCO (Phoenixville Area Economic Development Corporation) and our advertisers, we launched a membership- and community-driven website, which includes a robust membership directory and an all-inclusive community calendar – one of the most common requests we had received. The site features great historical information, relocation information, event overviews, and links to the wide range of needs a visitor to the site may have. It also boasts an online payment system and easier ways to register for events and retrieve information. We are very proud of the site and all it has accomplished so far.

Via these initiatives, we have experienced more positive results in surveys, retention, and growth. In fact, we're thankful for the challenges that presented themselves and allowed us to renew our focus on our members. I am proud to report that we have since grown by 95 members, a 35% increase.

The Chamber is in a very strong financial position due to fiscal responsibility, which has provided us the ability to reserve programming and marketing dollars so that we can give back to our community. For example, events such as our Charity Gala have afforded us an opportunity to provide donations of as much as \$5,000 per year to other non-profits and charities right here in Phoenixville.

But the Chamber has not limited its engagement to the business sector of Phoenixville; we are a part of the greater community as well. When there is positive growth in the community

at large, it will help to raise up the businesses. Through Phoenixville First, which is comprised of the Borough, the Chamber, PABA (Phoenixville Area Business Association), and PAEDCO, along with other community leaders, we've been able to work on the creation of a comprehensive marketing program *together*. As one. This has led to better communication and relationships, as well as the execution of some fantastic events in town.

Under the Phoenixville First umbrella, you will find First Fridays, the Food Festival, and the Summer Music Series. These events have grown and gained crowd traction not only from those local to Phoenixville, but outside of our community as well, bringing thousands into the downtown. Putting Phoenixville on the map in a cohesive way is the end goal. The Chamber is now also a part of a few other steering committees and groups that help us remain educated about what's happening in the community and how we can best serve.

If you take a look at this infographic, you will see an overview and even some additional specifics of the year in review.



As the year continues, we encourage you to be on the lookout for membership appreciation events, engaging speakers at our monthly membership meetings, opportunities to provide feedback, and other great events to network and better yourself.

We are also thrilled to share a video with you tonight. As you know, we have a hardworking staff and board. We have recently acquired an intern, Derrick Harvey with the University of Valley Forge, who is as ambitious as the rest of us. I sat with Derrick and threw a big idea on him in our first meeting. I am proud to say that the idea that began two years ago now has a face and a name.

Tonight, we are launching a new video project called *Find it in Phoenixville*. The video you're about to watch is an overview of what we've been working on, and we can't wait to premier the full videos. I would like to thank those who have already completed a shoot with us: Bridge Street Chocolates, The Fenix Bar, LuLu Boutique and Gifterie, and Mod House Vintage. You will also see shots of the many other businesses that have booked a time with us. A special thanks to our Front Office Coordinators, Maggie Douglas and Tom Herrick, for their feedback and ideas, not only in this project, but in others as well.

Again, we thank you. Your membership in the Chamber supports efforts to make Phoenixville a strong community. We are deeply invested in being a part of a team that brings positive connections, events, and activities into our community and region.

We are here. We are listening. And we are going places - together.