

Elizabethtown Area Chamber of Commerce Annual Celebration: *Elizabethtown Shines* 2019 Keynote Address

Good evening! Thank you all so much for being here with us tonight in this spectacular room, right in the middle of our spectacular town - Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania. We're here to have a little fun, do a little shopping and enjoy a great meal with friends and colleagues. Sounds like the beginning of a pretty good story. As we know, every great story has a hero and the story that brought us all here tonight has more than one.

Our Chamber operations are supported by six active committees made up of individuals that donate their time and talent to help make your Chamber of Commerce the best it can be. I'd like to introduce you to my personal heroes of tonight's story, our Events Committee members, who have worked so hard to make sure that every detail of this evening is perfect - from designing centerpieces to tracking down treasures for our silent auction to spell-checking every one of your names. Thank you for doing a fabulous job!

We all have a story to tell, and it starts really from the day we're born. And from that day until this day, each and every one of us has had a little help along the way. We quite literally couldn't survive without the people around us.

Beyond the bonds of family and close friends are those some call work family, people we spend our professional lives with. And that's what ties us here in this room together - a mutual desire to succeed in business, but not just to do it alone. We seek to partner up, to share referrals, suggestions, strategies, customers. This is not a group of business competitors, rather a gathering of business compatriots.

We talk a lot about what the Chamber's overarching mission is in our community and for the sake of economic development. At the top level, it's to connect businesses to opportunities, but actually, the story goes much deeper than that, down to the foundational layer - connecting people to people. I want to share a few stories that took shape because of Chamber connections.

A little less than a year ago, a very ambitious gentleman walked into our office to tell us his idea about a new business he wanted to launch in Elizabethtown. He had a good idea, a smart financial plan, and, as it turns out a pretty spectacular product. He and his family started with a food truck and soon that truck had long lines of people waiting for delicious empanadas from Fuego Latino. We worked together to help Fuego Latino gain a coveted spot at the Elizabethtown Fair. Their debut showing at the fair resulting in more long lines which rivaled the famed milkshake stand. Just a few months later, the owner walked into the Chamber office to share his next big idea: opening a restaurant. I'm sure we were just one of a chorus of voices urging them on and we saw the sweet spot they would fill in our local economy. And, in the newest chapter of the Fuego Latino's story, just two days ago they announced their newest location in residence at the Lancaster Barnstormers.

Through your Chamber membership, you have access to SCORE Roundtable sessions where you meet and learn from other small business owners. A local staple of our community, Brandt's Farm Supply, was selected by the members to be workshopped as they navigated rebranding and thriving in an evolving market. This group of fellow chamber members from varying fields brainstormed ideas. Spurred on by this support and the coaching of a SCORE mentor, they launched the new Brandt's brand - a fresh and relevant take on an established Etown business. They've embraced social media and storytelling to communicate their brand through community events like Chick Days, gardening seminars and workshops.

Lastly, I met a gentleman at a SCORE Roundtable who had just started his own videography business, specializing in drone footage. When it came time to shoot last year's Chamber video I invited him to produce our video. Through that experience, I was able to connect him with a fellow chamber member Greenfish Labs, a virtual reality and artificial intelligence company. Eventually, they partnered up on a project for the Breeders' Cup, one of the world's premier horse racing events in Louisville, Kentucky at historic Churchill Downs. Through a blend of traditional and digital methods, they produced a first-of-its-kind broadcast that was groundbreaking in the high-tech world and provided an immersive virtual reality experience. It was such a huge success and Breeder's Cup invited our Elizabethtown-based team back this year.

And our story as a Chamber continues. Since our last Annual Celebration, we've welcomed 44 new members, launched a new brand and a new website. We've added new member benefits and a member-to-member discount program, celebrated many new business ribbon cuttings, forged ahead on economic development initiatives, created educational opportunities, and launched the first annual Christmas TreE-town initiative and Holiday Window Contest.

We've also welcomed some new members to our board of directors, a great group of thought leaders who have been incredibly supportive of the Chamber's growth. When we get to the heart of what makes an organization like this succeed and events like this possible, it all comes down to people. Everything we build in this life is built together. Structures like this one, joint ventures and mergers, business plans hashed out sitting around your kitchen table with family, mapping out ideas in a boardroom. All individual people, individual sparks, coming together to fulfill our brightest dreams.