

Hello everyone: I thought that I would share my thoughts with you. This is what I would like to strive for this coming year. You may see this information in the Athabasca Advocate next week.

A bit of history on the Chamber and my role within it: I was the last Chamber manager, 1995 - 1999 and then a year later without pay when we lost the position. I had to do what the volunteers did. Being a chair back in the 90's was a lot smoother and more long term with more being accomplished than what we have accomplished over the last few years. This, however, is no one's fault.

1. A number one priority this year is to make things easier for our Executive and appointed Chairs. To that end then, we have to come up with binders for every Chair and Executive. Having a person take a binder into their possession each year, update it with minutes and reports and then handing over to the next person has to be done. The binders also need to be complete with our By-Laws and educational information on our Chamber. We cannot retain members or move forward when the members, Executives or Chairs have no understanding what they are needed to do, nor what we are all about.
2. We need to refocus our efforts and image for the Chamber. We are lobbyists. I want a Chamber that will fight for its membership. I am not into wine and cheese mixer's or tea parties. While these can be included in the Chamber's functions, these are not what we are mandated for.

I want us to go back to having Service Best Courses, Speaker's on retaining and keeping staff, helping smaller business survive in this progressive world, etc. I am also open to any and all suggestions that any member of the Chamber (or the community for that matter) wishes to put forward.

3. But neither I nor the entire Executive can do it all. The Chamber is only as good as its membership. My goal this year is 100 members. The Chamber needs diversity in its membership and direction from our current leaders. The Chamber operates by direction from the voices of our member's. This is what dictates its efforts in our community and in our province. The Chamber helps it's member's and is based on what the majority say; that is the direction we need to advocate for our membership.
4. Another thing I would like to see this coming year is having the local media kick it up and start having the Chamber back in the paper weekly like it was at one time. Be it controversy or educational, we need to move forward. We need to be seen and heard, and we need to feel proud of our accomplishments to continue to strive in this fabulous community
5. I do plan on having a monthly newsletter going out to all our members and I will be looking forward to many emails and calls from our membership on their thought's. I firmly believe in communicating to all our members and I plan on talking lots.

6. I also plan on working with Pat Barr, the town and the county. We need these relationships to be stronger and have them as partners alongside of us.

But people need to know what they get this by signing up and joining the Chamber. Michael Neville, as secretary, will be sending out an email to all our member's and snail mail to those that do not have email addresses registered with us. Everything a (potential) member need to know on why they should be a member of the Chamber of Commerce, and the benefits to you or your business as well as what you will receive for your membership will be included.

We are very lucky this year: The 3 Executive members in place (Lorette Kisinski, Michael Neville and I) all believe in running a Chamber as it needs to be. This also includes adhering to the By-Laws.

Carol Epp did a fabulous and professional job on the books for the first time in years. She has agreed to continue to do the books "behind the scenes" but we need someone to step up and assume the Treasurer's role – be the spokesperson at our meetings.

Frank Ponto will be looking after Tourism and our representative on the Athabasca County Tourism Board. Most importantly, he will be selling spots on the Fun Map to recoup much need money. I am meeting on with him, Nadine and Denis Jacob's to move this forward as soon as possible.

In closing I would like to say that the Chamber supports all growth in the community. Our mandate as the Chamber of Commerce means we are dedicated to the enhancement of our community. The Chamber has never lobbied to keep out a business, but have lobbied in favour of some businesses at different times, e.g., when the SAAN store was going to close down.

We recognize the strain that having new large corporate stores come into our community will place on the local retailers. We need to work with the smaller retailers to ensure they remain competitive and viable. We need to ensure they are the places where people go in and get smiled at, talked with and treated like they matter; the places that our local residents prefer to shop.

The Chamber is a part of the AB Chamber of Commerce. We will be contacting them tell them our concerns and get direction in a higher power. This is why we pay memberships to them and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. Our voice is huge.

Sincerely
Joanne Peckham
President
Athabasca District Chamber of Commerce