

# OAK PARK-RIVER FOREST AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 2011 STRATEGIC PLAN

## **Background**

In 2001, the Oak Park-River Forest Area Chamber of Commerce completed its first long-range strategic plan with a revised version being approved in 2004, and an extensive analysis and revision being approved in 2007. Since that time, the business and economic environments have continued to change and so has our organization. In the fall of 2009 a planning group was convened to review the strategic plan and revise it to accurately reflect where the Chamber is today, and where it must be focused for the future. The Committee recognized that a Strategic Plan does not react, but is a planning document meant to guide the Chamber in realizing its goals. The Committee recognized that the 2007 Plan was a well executed document but sound business practices demand regular reviews of goals and strategies. To that end, the Committee reviewed each section of the Strategic Plan in light of the changes in the membership, the economic challenges and the needs of the Chamber members. This revised strategic plan will help the Oak Park-River Forest Area Chamber of Commerce identify the issues facing it as an organization and to define goals and strategies to help the Chamber succeed. In addition, it must be noted that the strategic plan is critical for updating the business and marketing communications plans.

## **THE PLANNING PROCESS**

### **The 2010 Planning Committee members included:**

Jim Doss	Jason Edgecombe	Krissé Lively
Michael O'Neill	Bruce Stumbris	Grace Whiting

This group met to evaluate the previous strategic plan and to discuss the necessary changes to enable the Chamber to grow and respond to the needs of its members. The group reviewed the organization's strengths, weaknesses and discussed opportunities and challenges facing the organization. As a result, a series of new goals and objectives were identified along with tactics designed to help implement these activities.

### **OPRF Area Chamber of Commerce Mission:**

The Oak Park-River Forest Area Chamber of Commerce is a business leadership and educational organization which serves to guide, refer and partner with businesses in the Oak Park-River Forest area.

### **OPRF Area Chamber of Commerce Vision:**

The Oak-Park River Forest Area Chamber of Commerce strives to become the premier business development resource for businesses in the communities it serves.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS THAT GUIDES THIS PLAN**

#### **STRENGTHS:**

- Networking. The Business After Hours (BAHs) and the networking meetings provide regular opportunities for member interaction and promotional opportunities for area businesses.
- Marketing. The Community Guide provides member businesses with valued marketing collateral. Special promotions and events, like the Chamber Check Book and the Ambassador Program offer valuable business visibility.
- Workshops. The Chamber's workshops offer members continuing educational opportunities on business-related topics.
- Referrals. The Chamber office utilizes every opportunity to refer member businesses to telephone, internet and walk-in requests.
- The Executive Director. The Executive Director is a long term member of the OPRF Communities with a high degree of visibility and a history of long standing relationships.
- Demographics. The demographics of the local community continue to attract members inside and outside of the geographic borders.

#### **OPPORTUNITIES:**

- Facilitation. The Chamber recognizes that there are opportunities to share critical information that impact the business community. The Chamber identifies issues impacting the local business environment and provides a vehicle for businesses to obtain information and to voice their opinion.
- Engagement. The Chamber recognizes that there are opportunities to strengthen its membership. The Chamber provides mentoring and support opportunities to assist members in growing their businesses.

#### **STRATEGIC CHALLENGES:**

1. Attracting and retaining members.
2. Strengthening community and legislative relationships to support Chamber initiatives, activities and members.
3. Enlisting volunteers to support Chamber programs and activities, particularly at the leadership levels
4. Establishing the Chamber's brand and identity as the voice of business interests.

## **CRITICAL GOALS AND STRATEGIES**

### **GOAL I: FACILITATION**

To provide a means to identify issues and communicate among members of the Chamber, in order to provide information that will guide, refer and partner with members for the success of their businesses.

#### **Strategy 1: Issue Identification**

Identify the local and legislative issues that impact the business community.

Tactics:

1. Conduct semi-annual, online surveys of member businesses and the larger business community.
2. Provide opportunities for Chamber members to seek answers to their business questions and concerns. Identify processes and resources, such as Web based social networking, to enhance discussion among member businesses.

#### **Strategy 2: Issue Management**

Provide the communication opportunities for local businesses and local/ state representation to interface.

Tactics:

1. Compile specific identified issues and offer resources that members may use to develop solutions that are relevant to their businesses.
2. Invite village/state representatives and officials to select Chamber functions to interface with this part of their constituencies.
3. Moderate panel discussions designed to bring both sides of pending issues to light for the Chamber membership.
4. Act as the representative voice of business membership as issues arise.

### **GOAL II: BUSINESS RESOURCES**

To provide access to activities and programs which expand and support a member's business.

Strategy 1: Provide networking and training opportunities for Chamber members.

Tactics:

1. Continue to conduct networking opportunities.
2. Host regular workshops and training programs led by Chamber member business topic experts.
3. Align educational programming with members' needs and use the expertise of the member educational institutions to assist in this endeavor.

4. Continue to host New Member Orientations to share and educate regarding the benefits of Chamber membership.
5. Strengthen the shadow program supporting new member introduction.

Strategy 2: Provide access to business support through the Chamber.

Tactics:

1. Continue to publish—in printed and online formats—The Community Guide to serve as a business resource to members and the community at large.
2. Continue to provide member referrals for goods and services.

### **GOAL III:     MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS**

To improve and enhance the Chamber’s market position and prominence within the larger business community.

Strategy 1.     Establish a consistent brand for the Chamber.

Tactics:

1. Implement a consistent visual identity and message; brand all ads, publications and the Web site to convey the same message throughout all media.
2. Maintain the regular Chamber sponsored newspaper column to introduce new members.
3. Share the mission and vision on a consistent basis to encourage understanding and acceptance of Chamber goals.

Strategy 2:     Identify member needs and expectations and provide programming to meet those needs.

Tactics:

1.     Conduct ongoing dialogue/research with members to evaluate Chamber activities and establish future programming.
2.     Develop new programs and audit existing programs for impact through participant surveys.

Strategy 3:     Market the Chamber to members and the community.

Tactics:

1. Continue to distribute the quarterly online member newsletter.
2. Seek coverage in the local papers.
3. Continue to enhance the content and use of the Chamber Website to support Chamber members and serve as a resource for the entire community.

Strategy 4: Implement fun, creative, promotional and special events that generate community awareness, add value to membership and provide additional revenue.

Tactics:

1. Participate in key community events including, Village Parades and “A Day in Our Village.” Provide support and publicity for the annual Davy Award presented at the “Day in our Village” event.
2. Establish promotions with member businesses to share with the community-at-large or other members. *Example:* The Chamber Check Book.
3. Continue the tradition of the longstanding Chamber Golf Outing to foster networking opportunities among members and their guests.
4. Continue the Chamber Fashion Show as a community event that establishes the Chamber’s value to its members and the community-at-large.
5. Promote and continue the Ambassador’s Program (Ribbon Cutting) to potential members and current members as a means to promote their business and strengthen business/Chamber relations
6. Host the Athena Awards as the budget permits.

#### **GOAL IV: CHAMBER SUSTAINABILITY**

To ensure the long-term viability and growth of the organization through sound fiscal management and efficient Chamber management.

Strategy 1: Add new members and retain existing members. Increase membership numbers annually and strive to retain 100% of members at renewal time.

Tactics:

1. Conduct semi-annual surveys, asking members for their needs and expectations of the Chamber.
2. Communicate the value of membership to all current, new and prospective members.
3. Encourage all members to recruit a minimum of five new members annually.
4. Develop and maintain an effective referral reporting system.
5. Continue the shadow program at BAHs to provide a comfortable and inviting experience for the new or prospective member. Develop and implement communication tools for new member program.
6. Review and upgrade member benefit programs.

## Strategy 2: Partnerships

Establish mechanisms to support the dissemination of information throughout the community

Tactics:

1. Partner with other area business-related organizations to support the dissemination of information regarding the community.
2. Partner with tourism organizations to share information with the community at large.
3. Utilize the Web to share local information regarding the community and its events and services with the public-at-large.

## Strategy 3: Fiscal Management

Manage the long-term stability and viability of the Chamber through efficient fiscal practices.

Tactics:

1. Consistently strive to implement revenue generators to support ongoing growth.
2. Analyze current revenue streams and determine their efficacy and continuation.

## Strategy 4: Staff Support

Continuously review the management structure of the Chamber to ensure excellent service to its members and the community.

Tactics:

1. Evaluate the staffing structure to determine the balance of staff resources and work to be accomplished.
2. Maintain standard procedures and staff development to ensure efficient staff management.
3. Identify Committee members and additional volunteers to support Chamber activities; increase the role and responsibilities of the volunteers.
4. Improve office and technology infrastructure.

## Strategy 5: Board Development

To assure Chamber sustainability through the development of a strong Board of Directors.

Tactics:

1. Implement a Board development plan addressing new board member orientation and clearly defined expectations and goals.
2. Establish a succession plan for the Board and the Committees.
3. Review the Strategic Plan every January.
4. Set goals, responsibilities and expectations for each Committee.
5. Actively recruit new members and promote diversity of membership and ideas in all Chamber events.