Greater Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce

2018 Annual Report
VISION
To Advance Commerce and Community

MISSION
Serving, Representing and Enhancing Business Growth

TABLE OF CONTENTS
Message from the Chairman 3
Progress Report 4
Project Champions 5
Winter Haven Chamber Foundation 6
Board of Directors, Staff & Volunteers 7
This year has been another outstanding one for Winter Haven. It began with the launch of our “Authenticity Reimagined” brand video. This video, put together by the video team at Potthast Studios, has been viewed 11,000 times on YouTube. Potthast Studios also won a Silver Telly at the 37th Annual National Telly Awards for this video. The brand video introduced the four key pillars of our community – Lakeside Lifestyle, Downtown is our Stage, Premier Family Friendly Destination and Collaborative Business Community – and the foundation of our people.

This partnership with Potthast Studios has continued with the creation of a community photo library that we launched in September. Businesses in the community can visit the Chamber website to access images that more accurately reflect the Winter Haven of today so that they can help tell our “authenticity reimagined” story to potential new residents, employees and customers on their marketing platforms. This is just the start. This tool will be continuously updated with imagery.

This year a collaborative business community was bolstered by continued expansion amongst small and large businesses alike. The Chamber held over 50 ribbon cuttings and groundbreaking ceremonies to celebrate new businesses or business expansions. Some key examples include Florida State University & Winter Haven Hospital Family Medicine Residency Partnership, Winter Haven Chamber, PEP and Polk County Public Schools Pilot Program, State Farm Insurance & Winter Haven Chamber Foundation College Scholarship Fund, City of Winter Haven & Chamber Development Industry Roundtable Initiatives, LEGOLAND Florida Resort and Grove Roots Brewing Co., Bond Clinic First Street Campus and Six/Ten LLC and so much more. . .

Winter Haven continues to evolve as a premier family-friendly vacation destination. LEGOLAND Florida Resort opened The Great LEGO Race Virtual Reality Coaster and announced the 2019 opening of the LEGO Movie World. The Courtyard Marriott is under construction and slated to open January 2018. In addition, at least 4 additional hotels anticipated to open in the next 3 years. Professional sports continue to expand including the opening of the Lakeland Magic, Florida Tropics Soccer Club and the Winter Haven United Soccer Club. We also saw the opening of the Winter Haven Tennis Center.

Downtown continues to be our stage for commerce, art, music, recreation, events, health and more. We saw low vacancy rates and new businesses open. There are several new murals and several more on the way. Live music continues to be staple at downtown businesses. Recreation expanded through the tennis center, renovated senior center, construction for South Central Park and the funding of the skate park and Lake Maude Recreation park. And this list goes on.

And we can’t forget perhaps our most beloved feature, our Chain of Lakes, which continues to draw residents and visitors alike to our Lakeside Lifestyle.

When I moved to Winter Haven eight years ago, I honestly didn’t know what our identity was. We’ve worked hard to define our identity, give homage to the past and build upon it for our future.

Adrian Jones  
Divisional Director, Merlin Entertainments USA  
2017-2018 Board Chairman
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
The Chamber President/C.E.O serves as an ex-officio member of the Winter Haven Economic Development Council Board of Directors. She also serves on the Airport Advisory Committee focused on business expansion of the airport as well as the Downtown Oaks Development committee and the Polk Vision Operations Committee. This year the Chamber also continued advocacy for municipal investment to improve economic development opportunities.

SMALL AND MINORITY BUSINESS PROGRAMMING
The Chamber partners with Central Florida SCORE, the Polk County Community & Small Business Assistance department and the Small Business Development Center to provide one-on-one business counseling for new and growing businesses. Members and non-members alike can schedule a one-hour consultation free of charge.

CHAMBER PUBLICATIONS
The Chamber’s primary member communication vehicle is “First Thing,” an electronic newsletter published every Monday morning. The format features calendar updates for weekly Chamber meetings and events, a community event section, new member recognition and a “Marketplace” section for members to advertise.

The Chamber also publishes an “In the News” breaking news eblast every 10 days or so as news is released.

For visitors and those considering relocating to the area, the Chamber publishes “Winter Haven Magazine.” The magazine is a compilation of Winter Haven area information including; area attractions, dining, arts and culture, hotels, how to become a resident and much more!

CHAMBER WEB SITE
The Chamber maintains www.winterhavenchamber.com where the member database interfaces with those online searching for a particular business or service. The Chamber also has a social media influence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Pinterest.
ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE
Hap Hazelwood - Vice Chair

This year our Vice Chairs served as “project champions” focusing on the 5 core strategic areas of the Chamber of Commerce as set by the Board of Directors.

Our organizational excellence committee includes a sub-committee of strategic planning, finance and capital improvements. The Strategic Planning was led by Kevin Ashley, Chair-Elect. A mid-year board retreat was held in March in which a 6-month touch-base is held to review the goals set the previous summer including organizational excellence, enhanced communication, powerful advocacy, engaged community and investor engagement. The 2018 Summer Board planning retreat was held in July and goals were set for the 18-19 fiscal year.

The Finance Committee continues to meet monthly reviewing the indepth financial statements of the Chamber and preparing the reports of the full Board meetings.

The Capital Campaign committee meet with an architect throughout the year to determine what improvements needed to be made to the 30-year old Chamber building. The results including conceptual designs were presented to the board at their summer retreat to lay the groundwork for the fundraising in the year to come.

The Chamber also hit a milestone this year of meeting their goal to get $180,000 in reserves to create a foundation of financial health for the future.

POWERFUL ADVOCACY
Renee Pobjecky, Vice Chair

This committee was Chaired by Renee Pobjecky and Chamber President Katie Worthington. The Committee completed a legislative agenda for the Florida legislative session. They attended Tallahassee for a joint trip with the Lakeland Chamber and chamber members. They addressed issues including transportation initiatives as well as local issues including the City budget, capital projects, and public education. They also hosted a Legislative wrap-up breakfast in April.

The Government and Legislative affairs committee also had three sub-committees this year: Downtown Oaks, Winter Haven Development Industry Roundtable and the Education Taskforce. The Downtown Oaks District is a neighborhood based committee chaired by Bob Stambaugh in which the Chamber GA committee is an advisor. They continue to advocate for the revitalization of this important downtown neighborhood. The Development Industry Roundtable began meeting in June 2017 and meets every other month. They focus on the “red-tape” and “bureaucracy” of business development and work closely with the City and County to create smart and unobtrusive development regulations and guidelines. The Educational Taskforce was focused on the improvement of the K-12 system. This committee explored all viable options for what the 17+ Winter Haven schools could do. They ultimately voted to work closely with the school district on a school board solution. The outcome of these negotiations include a new “Director of Community Engagement” pilot program for the Winter Haven community.

ENGAGED COMMUNITY

The Engaged Community committee was focused on promoting events that celebrate community. Their primary task this year was to focus on our special events including the Celebrate Winter Haven, CommunityFest, Taste of Winter Haven and Chamber Golf Tournament.

CommunityFest & Taste of Winter Haven
On March 3, 2018 the Chamber hosted our largest community event, CommunityFest and Taste of Winter Haven. CommunityFest is a completely free, family-friendly day in Central Park which includes games, activities and businesses coming out to support the community. In the evening, it’s an adults only event where we showcase food, wine and beer from local vendors. Between sponsorships and ticket sales this event netted over $28,000!

Celebrate Winter Haven! event
The event was held on September 20, 2018 at Nora Mayo Hall. Chris Hazelwood and Greg Littleton were awarded the Banker’s Cup Woman and Man of the Year. The small and large businesses of the year were also recognized, including Central Florida Media Group and Bond Clinic. The evening included a look back at the 2017-2018 year by Chairman Adrian Jones and a look at the year ahead by incoming Chairman Kevin Ashley. Jones gave an update on the new branding campaign discussed in the enhanced communication section of this annual report.

Chamber Golf Tournament
Nan Webster and committee made the 26th Annual Chamber Challenge a great success. Members provided a variety of great door prizes and the weather provided a perfect “Chamber of Commerce” day. Techmate Computer Sales & Service team won the coveted LEGO Trophy. This event was the highest grossing event in the tournaments history.

ENHANCED COMMUNICATIONS
Alex Nikdel, Vice Chair

The Enhanced Communications committee was focused on continuing to be the brand ambassador for Winter Haven and seeing the creation of the Winter Haven Photo Library through. In collaboration with Potthast Studios, we were able to create this photo library to be a tool for our community businesses and people to share the story and brand of Winter Haven in a fun and consistent way. This project is a continuation of sharing the Winter Haven brand through our pillars - Lakeside Lifestyle, Premier Family Destination, Collaborative Business Community, Downtown is Our Stage and Our People.

INVESTOR ENGAGEMENT
Jennifer Flasking, Vice Chair

Chamber membership continues it’s positive trend, with a retention rate of 88%. Reaching our goal of 750 members during the 2017-2018 year.

Ambassadors
The Chamber Ambassadors are the “welcome team” for new members and work to ensure existing members stay engaged. Their main task is to make our members feel welcomed and appreciated. This year Presidential Ambassador status was awarded to Kim Edwards and Amy Thompson, bringing the number of current Presidential Ambassadors to 8.

SpeedLeads
SpeedLeads continued to grow in popularity during the year. The event is held every other month and is a speed-networking event with 15-20 business members in attendance at each event.
Sharon Johnson, Chair
The Winter Haven Chamber Foundation, Inc. is independent from the Greater Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce. It is recognized by the IRS as a 501(c)3 tax-exempt entity. The foundation elects a Board of Directors that focuses primarily on economic development and education.

East Polk Economic Summit
The 14th Annual East Polk Economic Summit was presented by CenterState Bank, SunTrust Bank and Six/Ten, LLC. Merle Bishop, FAICP Growth Management Department Director at the City of Winter Haven and R. Kyle Winningham, State-Certified General Appraiser RZ 3688 Co-Owner Winningham & Pospichal, Inc. were the speakers.

Education Committee
Matina Wagner, Chair & Deborah Kindel, Co-Chair
The Education Committee provides the link between the education community and the business community, linking schools with potential business partners. During the committee meetings a series of speakers have presented to the groups on topics relevant to their schools and/or students.

The committee works in partnership with Sun Coast Media Group to provide content for their Education Connection articles, published in the Winter Haven Sun newspaper, thus sharing news from our schools with the whole community.

Polk Emerging Leaders Awards
The 8th Annual Polk Emerging Leaders banquet was held August 30th at the Bartow Civic Center. This award ceremony annually recognizes five young professionals from across Polk County making significant contributions and commitment to our community. The awards are once again hosted by the three young professional groups in Polk County, celebrating collaboration across city borders. The winners for the 2018 Polk Emerging Leaders Awards were MJ Carnevale, Suzanne Halverson, Jillian Spangler, Ashley Troutman and Chrissanne Long.

Leadership Winter Haven
Brian Yates, Class Chair
Leadership Winter Haven Class 38 graduated in June following a nine-month schedule hosted by area businesses and culminating with a three-day visit to Tallahassee during the legislative session. 26 graduates completed the 2017-2018 program.

Leadership Winter Haven Alumni
Tiffani Gozdur, Liaison
Nearly 100 alumni participate in a variety of activities including social occasions and educational updates. Programs are planned on a quarterly basis including their participation in a welcome reception for each year’s new Leadership class.

Young Professionals/Endeavor Winter Haven
Cari Herrington, Chair
Endeavor is a place for young professionals age 21-42 to develop their career, learn about the community, develop professionally and connect with other young professionals. Endeavor seeks to connect, inspire and engage the young professionals of the Greater Winter Haven Community.

The 2017-2018 programs included:

- Downtown Oaks Lunch & Learn
- Shaping Habits with Grant Nideu
- State of the City with Mike Herr
- Visit Central Florida Lunch & Learn
- Surtax Lunch & Learn
- Solar Energy with Tesla
- Trailblazers
- Cyber Security with Protected Trust
- Central Florida Health Care Lunch & Learn
- 7 Figure Future with Aventail Wealth Management
- School Safety with Sheriff Grady Judd
- Winter Haven Economic Development with Bruce Lyon
- Polk Emerging Leaders Awards 2018
- Bitcoin Lunch & Learn
Board of Directors, Staff & Volunteers

Chamber Officers
Chairman, Adrian Jones, LEGOLAND Florida Resort
Chair-elect, Kevin Ashley, Peterson & Myers, P.A.
First Vice Chair, Martha Santiago, Polk State College
Treasurer, Alex Nikdel, CNP
Immediate Past President, Hap Hazelwood, Six/Ten, LLC

Chamber Directors
Kevin Aspegren, Florida Polytechnic University
Ann Barnhart, Heart of Florida Regional Medical Center
Brian Burns, Ledger Media Group
Jeff Donalson, Tom Wolf Co., LLC
Angela Falconetti, Polk State College
Jennifer Fasking, State Farm Bank
Jay Gray, CliftonLarsonAllen
Kim Hulverson, BB&T
Rex Jackson, LEGOLAND Florida Resort
Robert Loftin, Citizens Bank & Trust
Steve Nierman, Winter Haven Hospital
Bob O’Malley, CSX
Claire Orologas, Polk Museum of Art
Renee Pobjecky, Pobjecky & Pobjecky Law
Mike Potthast, Potthast Studios
Johnny Read, Advantage Insurance
Ashlee Wright, New Beginnings High School

Ex-Officio Board Members
Chair, Winter Haven Chamber Foundation, Inc.
Sharon Johnson
Chair, Winter Haven Young Professionals
Cari Herrington
Winter Haven Economic Development Council
Bruce Lyon
Main Street Winter Haven
Anita Strang
City of Winter Haven
Mike Herr

Chamber Staff
Katie Worthington, President/CEO
Amanda-Jo Nicholson, VP of Member Services
Jennifer Romberger, VP of Finance & Events
Amber Weed, Executive Assistant
Marisa Hagman, Intern
Brianna Price, Marketing Coordinator

Chamber Volunteers
Rich Shapiro and Ann Windsor.