

Chamber history, decade by decade

Chambers of commerce – in concept – date back to ancient Greece and the Roman Empire, when groups formed to promote trade and commerce. The first recorded reference to a chamber of commerce is believed to be in Marseille, France, in 1599. The first American chamber was founded in 1768 in New York City. The Chambersburg chamber predates both the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (1912) and the International Chamber of Commerce (1920).

1911-1921

Chambersburg's 'most progressive businessmen' began Chamber in 1911

In 1911, a group of businessmen in Chambersburg decided they needed to form a “Board of Trade” or similar organization because there was a need to attract factories that would provide jobs. William Alexander, the town’s burgess (now called mayor), said the group needed to accomplish things instead of merely talking about them.

Among their early goals:

- Work as a harmonious team.
- Recruit small and large industries, preferably many small industries rather than a few large ones.
- Encourage people to “buy local” instead of from Chicago.
- Market the town, its location and what it has to offer.

Recruit small and large industries, believing that many small industries were preferable to a few large ones.

By August, the men determined the name of the organization should be the Chamber of Commerce of Chambersburg, and they selected William Alexander as its first chairman. (He would serve as chairman for nine years.)

In 1911, the organization’s officers were described by the Public Opinion newspaper as being “Chambersburg’s most progressive businessmen.” They adopted bylaws and established six committees to work on the organization’s goals: Membership, Entertainment, Municipal, Industrial/Enterprises/Statistics, Publicity and Education. Dues were \$1 a month and the first collection brought in \$68. Today the Chamber still has the original 1911 dues book -- its pages very fragile – documenting the payment of dues each month by each member.

John Baumgardner, a relative newcomer to the community, was unanimously selected as the Chamber’s secretary – it was he who circulated the paperwork necessary to form the organization. Baumgardner obtained more than 150 “subscribers to the Chamber of Commerce

movement.” By the end of the year, membership totaled 178. According to an August 1911 article in Public Opinion, “He proceeded with tact such is rarely shown in forming any organization, and it is this tact as well as the energy of Mr. Baumgardner that we owe the existence of the Chamber of Commerce today. Mr. Baumgardner is deserving of the thanks of every business man and property owner in Chambersburg.”

When a large milk plant was interested in locating in the community that year, it was the Chamber that investigated how much milk was produced locally, to determine if it was adequate to meet the needs of the company.

The Chamber didn’t actually incorporate until 1920, when it established a board of directors and adopted new bylaws. Its standing committees were Housing, Health and Morals, Civic, Industrial, Transportation, Retail Trade, Membership, Publicity, Agriculture, Municipal Welfare, Education, City Adornment and Entertainment. Its offices were on the third floor of the Chambersburg Trust Co. building. Total dues revenue was \$2,551.65. The Chamber hired a secretary, Joseph E. Guy, who functioned similarly to today’s president.

In those early days, the Chamber gathered a lot of statistical information – about the banks, miles of street, employment, home ownership, taxation etc.

The Chamber also was an early advocate, endorsing the Daylight Savings Bill, for example, and “Go to Church” Sunday. It opposed a state tax on coal and the capital stock of manufacturing corporations. It also began providing window signs for member businesses “in good standing.”

1921-31

Chambersburg called ‘the ideal hometown’ in 1920s

The Chamber of Commerce of Chambersburg, as it was known in the 1920s, focused on helping businesses and improving the quality of life in the community. These are the same core principles that drive the Chamber today.

The Chamber’s early promotional material calls Chambersburg the “Queen City of the Cumberland Valley” and “The City of Opportunity.” Chambersburg was “the Ideal Hometown” and described as “Healthy, Moral (and) Religious.” Downtown Chambersburg had two national banks, two trust companies, 10 hotels, theaters and “automobile roads everywhere.”

The businessmen of Chambersburg were “wide awake to the wonderful possibilities of Chambersburg’s future. A live Chamber of Commerce will make it a business to investigate for you any phase of Chambersburg. We want to tell you what we have and we want you to bring your business and your family to Chambersburg. Seeing is believing. Come and see Chambersburg. We can’t begin to tell you all the advantages. When you come here you will agree with us that there is no place like Chambersburg and no tonic like the Chambersburg Spirit.”

According to a 1926 directory, there were 394 mercantile firms, including 13 men's clothing stores, 13 drug stores, 12 coal dealers, seven dry goods and notions; five furniture stores, 10 chain grocery stores, 50 other grocery stores, four wholesalers, 10 hotels, six jewelers, three daily newspapers, 27 doctors and dentists, 12 rooming houses, 15 restaurants, nine ladies ready-to-wear stores, and five "10 cent and variety stores."

The Chamber also touted the recreational opportunities in the area – Caledonia Park, Wolf's Lake and Red Bridge Park on the Conococheague, for example. Caledonia Park was "cool, delightful and healthy," and one could take a trolley to the park. Wolf's Lake featured boating, fishing, swimming, baseball in the park grounds, football and a merry-go-round. Hunting opportunities in the mountains included deer, bear, turkey, pheasant, rabbits, foxes, raccoons, wild cats, squirrel and other small game.

The Chamber's successes in the 1920s included:

- Financing and operating supervised play areas for several years, with the volunteer fire companies a key partner in this effort.
- Helping to prevent the relocation of local Pennsylvania Railroad workers to larger communities in 1922.
- Recruiting the H.J. Heinz Co. in 1924 -- and its many jobs – providing employment for hundreds of area residents for the next 50-plus years. Plant workers in 1924 made ketchup and chili sauce.
- Surveying the schools and developing building/relocation plans for the public school system.

At the end of the decade, when the stock market crashed in 1929, the Chamber responded to the dire news on Wall Street by urging elected officials to sustain charities during the emergency. The Chamber volunteered to register the unemployed.

1931-41

Chamber focuses on jobs in 1930s

The stock market went on a wild ride in the 1920s, a time of prosperity for most of the decade. F&M Trust's stock went up from \$30 to \$80 per share in a short time, according to "*75 Years of Progress with Chambersburg – an F&M Trust History.*"

After the stock market crashed in October of 1929, Franklin County was hit hard, as was the rest of the nation. Many banks suffered loan losses, and some closed, never to reopen. According to the F&M history, Franklin, Fulton and Huntingdon were the only counties in Pennsylvania that didn't have a bank failure; no F&M depositor lost a dime. As the remaining banks emerged from the crash, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. (FDIC) was formed in 1933. F&M Trust

became one of the first banks to join, providing up to \$5,000 in protection on checking and savings accounts.

Times were very hard, however. In November 1931, 24 percent of Pennsylvania's workforce was unemployed. By 1933, unemployment reached 37.1 percent and industrial production had been cut in half. Farming income dropped by more than 55 percent.

In Chambersburg, the Chamber of Commerce responded to the dire news by urging elected officials to sustain charities during the emergency. The H.J. Heinz Co., which the Chamber had helped to recruit to Chambersburg, gave tomato and cabbage plants to people who wanted to plant gardens for food.

The Chamber also volunteered to register the unemployed and continued its efforts to attract jobs to the community. Stanley Manufacturing established a training plant in Chambersburg in 1933, just the beginning of a successful history for the clothing manufacturer in the local community. Over the next six decades, Stanley would provide thousands of jobs.

Also in the 1930s, the New Industry and Agricultural Committees of the Chamber helped to attract the Hershey Creamery Co. It established a milk receiving and processing plant in Chambersburg, providing jobs for two decades. (It ceased operations in Chambersburg in October 1957 and the Pet Ritz Frozen Pie Plant moved into the former Hershey Creamery's location on West Vine Street the next month.)

In 1936, work by the Chamber's Transportation Committee was rewarded by plans to repair Route 30, and in 1938, construction began on the Pennsylvania Turnpike – providing jobs for many workers from Chambersburg. From its earliest days, the Chamber was an advocate for infrastructure improvements that improved the quality of life in the community.

The Chamber also was an advocate for education from the outset, and worked with school officials in 1940 to conduct a thorough survey of vocational education curricula at Chambersburg High School. Following the survey, the Chamber helped the district improve its vocational curriculum and develop a Training for Defense program.

The United States entered World War II the following year, in 1941, and war needs required the suspension of normal activities and aims of the Chamber.

1941-51

Chamber assisted with war effort in 1940s

Though the U.S. had yet to enter World World II, a Chamber of Commerce of Chambersburg committee surveyed industry in March 1941 to see if there was any idle manufacturing equipment that could be used for defense needs. Members of the committee visited every industrial plant and listed every machine and how many hours the machine was in operation, and if it could be available for additional hours.

The committee members hoped to help local businesses land defense contracts by dividing the work among plants with idle machinery. That way, they could seek contracts that a single plant would be unable to handle. The goal was “getting people back to work” after the devastating economic downturns of the 1930s.

Pooling of industrial resources was seen as the best way to revive employment, use idle machinery and assist the national defense drive.

By December 1941, however, local efforts turned in a new direction. Chambersburg was being evaluated as the site of a munitions depot. In January 1942, the site for the Letterkenny Ordnance Depot was secured, and by February, bids for railroad and highway construction were awarded and thousands of workers poured into the county.

After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, war needs required the suspension of any normal activities and aims of the Chamber.

In 1942, for example, 1,300-plus questionnaires and forms related to Selective Service were prepared by the Chamber, and it organized support of war bond sales. It also kept members informed of government regulations, including the GI Bill of Rights, and established a registration of room-for-rent properties. By the fall of 1942, the Chamber had a list of 60 rooms available for rent, primarily to Letterkenny workers.

The Chamber was one of many organizations that helped with the war effort at home. The needs were tremendous. An estimated 1,800 men from the Chambersburg area were drafted – many others volunteered for military service.

Letterkenny was completed in January 1943 and the next challenge was manpower. Letterkenny employed 1,900 and needed a total of 5,000 civilians to operate. The Chamber undertook a door-to-door survey to determine if any able-bodied citizens were not working, urging women not already in the workforce to join and students to work after school. From 1943 until the 1950s, women made up 50 percent of the depot’s workforce and regular employees worked seven days a week. At the height of the war effort, many area residents worked at Letterkenny and at a second job. Through diligence, persistence and hard work, the needs of the military installation were filled. Not only did the Chamber help to amass the necessary labor force and assist with housing needs, it helped ensure county farmers had sufficient men and women to harvest crops.

Chambersburg Engineering Co. also was in full production, manufacturing needed forging equipment to build guns, tanks, ships and aircraft.

The leaders of the Chamber didn’t wait until the war ended to start planning for life in post-war Chambersburg. In October of 1944, for example, the Chamber supported a six-session instructional course for prospective home builders because a building boom was expected after

the war. In November of 1944, the Chamber backed post-war improvements and expansion of Scotland School for Veterans Children because the school was expecting “an increased number of boys and girls.” And in December 1944, Chamber members were urged to help returning veterans with jobs and counsel.

Its community service didn’t end there. It was the Chamber that launched the effort to begin an organization similar to today’s United Way of Franklin County. (*See related article.*)

Once again looking to the future, the Chamber in March 1946 supported the expansion of the Borough of Chambersburg’s electric light plant to meet anticipated post-war demand, and endorsed the addition of off-street parking in downtown Chambersburg in 1948. In 1950, it budgeted \$2,500 to attract new industries to the borough.

By August 1951, it prepared and published an informational folder containing facts about Chambersburg. The publication was the No. 1 priority of the Chamber’s Committee on Community Publicity, with the goal of attracting new investment and new jobs.

Chamber leaders start United Way effort

The organization known today as the United Way of Franklin County owes its beginnings largely to the efforts of the Chamber of Commerce of Chambersburg. “What was so amazing – they did it in one month!” said Jane Harrelson, former director of the local United Way.

In September 1942, Chamber President J. Glenn Benedict proposed combining the fund-raising activities of charitable organizations. Benedict believed multiple campaigns that followed each other in quick succession were a duplication of effort and expense.

Incoming Chamber President Daniel W. Long appointed a committee, which got quickly to work. At its first meeting, the Chamber’s Community and War Chest Study Committee recommended that “immediate steps be taken” to call a meeting of charitable organizations to gauge their interest in the proposal.

Invited organizations included the Boy and Girl Scouts, Chambersburg Hospital, the Children’s Aid Society, the Franklin Pumper Fund, the Goodwill Ambulance Fund, the Salvation Army and the USO.

In October, the Chamber prepared an application for a charter, adopted bylaws and articles of incorporation. The application for “The Chambersburg Community Chest” was approved and Benedict served as the first campaign director. The effort raised \$42,039, or 134 percent of its \$31,000 goal.

Harrelson recalled the close ties between the Chamber and the organization she represented for many years. “Our office was located in the Chamber building, and when I started in 1956, we used the Chamber’s equipment, such as the mimeograph.”

According to Harrelson, the name was changed in 1966 to Community Chest Red Cross United Appeal, and in 1967, the Chambersburg Area United Fund Community Chest Red Cross. In 1974-75, it became the Chambersburg Area United Way.

It has been the United Way of Franklin County since 1994. In its recent campaign, United Way raised more than \$700,000 for 27 partner agencies and the people they serve – an indication of the Chamber’s lasting impact in the community.

1951-61

Downtown undergoes changes; the Chamber gets a new name

Throughout the 1950s, the Chamber of Commerce of Chambersburg focused on improving the business climate, particularly in downtown. In March of 1950, the Chamber budgeted \$2,500 to attract new industries to the borough because of “underemployment.” In August 1951, it prepared and published an informational folder containing historical and current-day facts about Chambersburg – it was the No. 1 priority of the Chamber’s Committee on Community Publicity.

It also sought transportation improvements – particularly ways to alleviate congestion on Route 30. The Chamber supported one-way streets, for example, and its proposal was adopted on major thoroughfares through the heart of downtown in 1955.

The Chamber’s Retail Merchants Division urged Borough Council to provide better lighting and recommended the end of Saturday night business hours in favor of Friday night hours until 9 p.m. Merchants were urged to close stores at 5 p.m. on Saturdays. According to Public Opinion, Chambersburg was the last town in the Cumberland Valley not to have Friday business hours, and Saturday night business was reported to be slow. The change gave sales personnel a longer weekend.

In what was a predecessor to the Black Friday sales of today, the Retail Merchants Division of the Chamber in February 1957 promoted the first Washington’s Birthday sale downtown, which caused shoppers to “storm downtown stores” in search of bargains. Some came as early as 2 a.m.

According to a report in Public Opinion, hundreds of shoppers congregated before the 9 a.m. opening on a spring-like morning. “Among the bargains was a one-cent electric razor, a \$9.95 TV set, 17-cent nylon hose, \$1 shirts for men, men’s suits as low as \$1, movie cameras for \$5, wool suits for women for \$10. The sidewalks were crowded with shoppers. At some stores, the press of customers was so heavy that police assistance was required to control crowds.”

Some stores closed and admitted new customers only as other customers departed – also similar to today’s crowd control on Black Friday.

Also new were schools built in the 1950s as a result of the birth of Baby Boomers after World War II. Between 1950 and 1956, the local school district built 20 schools, including a new high school on Sixth Street that graduated its first class in 1955.

New homes cropped up throughout the area to house these new families. In just one year, fiscal 1955 – the value of Franklin County’s real estate increased by \$5.32 million.

By the mid-50s, the Chamber was considering a name change to reflect the growth of the Chamber beyond the borough boundaries. Among the suggested names: Chambersburg Area Chamber, Chamber of Commerce of Greater Chambersburg, Greater Chambersburg Chamber of Commerce, and the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce.

In December 1957, the name was changed to the Greater Chambersburg Chamber of Commerce and the organization had 450 members at that time. Further reflecting its growth, the Chamber began an affiliate, Chambersburg Area Development Corp., in 1960. An initial fund drive raised \$375,000 to start the not-for-profit industrial development corporation. “What made it successful – we had the most influential and prominent businessmen in the community working for it,” recalled the late T.K. Nitterhouse in 1991.

Within two months of being organized, CADC was working toward developing a business park. In June 1961, William Coffield Jr. became executive vice president of the Chamber and executive office of CADC. (He would lead both organizations for the next 20 years.) By the end of 1961, CADC had acquired more than 200 acres of prime land, including a 39-acre parcel along U.S. 11, south of the borough line (the former Walkers Brothers property). With this, the CADCO Industrial Park was off and running.

1961-71

Chamber forms CADC and moves forward in the 1960s

Chambersburg entered the 1960s with a building boom. Doing its part was the Greater Chambersburg Chamber of Commerce, which began an affiliate in 1960 that would have a long-lasting positive impact on the community.

Within two months of forming the Chambersburg Area Development Corp. after an initial fund drive raised \$375,000, CADC was working toward developing a business park. By the end of 1961, it had acquired more than 200 acres of prime land, including a 39-acre parcel along U.S. 11, south of the Borough line (the former Walkers Brothers property). With this, the CADCO Industrial Park was off and running. As 1963 drew to a close, CADCO Industrial Park was developed with water, sewer and natural gas.

Leading this jobs creation effort was William “Bill” Coffield, hired as executive vice president of the Chamber and executive officer of CADC.

A decade ago T.K. Nitterhouse, now deceased, shared his recollections. In the early 1960s, “we were expending energy and had goals to make a better community by founding CADC and hiring Bill Coffield (who would lead the Chamber and CADC for the next 20 years). “The roundtable at the Hotel Washington had approximately 16 chairs, where business and professional men had lunch every day. The daily topic was local affairs and business. About 50 men attended at different times and more ideas were developed there than at Chamber meetings.”

Nitterhouse listed the key Chamber developments during the 1960s as the beginning of CADC and the purchase of the former library at 75 S. Second St. (The building housed the Chamber and CADC offices until 2004). Nitterhouse said the generosity of people made various projects and programs happen.

“We all worked together to try to make Chambersburg the active, vibrant community it is today,” said Frank Gayman in 2001.

In addition to promoting the CADC business park, the Chamber formed a Tourist Promotion Bureau in 1961 to promote the area’s historic culture and scenic beauty. It also continued to support Letterkenny Army Depot, telling the community in 1964 that the closing of 80 military installations elsewhere “should be a warning to us that this area of government relations is a full-time job.” The Chamber urged the establishment of a top leadership community task force that would maintain a close relationship with Washington and government agencies.

Gayman, chair in 1966 and now deceased, recalled that Letterkenny was operating at full capacity and working closely with the Chamber. Letterkenny added a five-building complex, and work from two other facilities was brought to Chambersburg from Ohio and New Jersey.

“A delegation from the Chamber visited those two bases, briefing the personnel about Chambersburg before they were transferred here. Many of those same people retired here and have contributed greatly to the economy of this area,” Gayman said. “This friendship between the Chamber, the Borough and Letterkenny led to the planning and purchase of land for the airport.”

The business park, the tourist bureau, the airport and Letterkenny are all examples of the Chamber’s forward-looking thinking. The construction of Interstate 81 through Chambersburg in the mid-1960s took a lot of traffic off of U.S. 11 and 30, and brought many business opportunities to the community.

John Hull, chair in 1968, recalled that the Chamber helped to gain public support for Memorial Park, which was approved by voter referendum; and committed funds for restoring the fountain on the Square.

Sidney Palmer, chair in 1969, recalled the Chamber's role in securing additional off-street parking in the downtown area, particularly off South Main Street, and its role in keeping the Sears store on Second Street through a 10-year lease.

Also during the decade, 13 acres at Washington and Catherine streets were developed into housing, and Southgate Mall was built between the two streets. The Franklin County Nursing Home was built on Franklin Farm Lane, providing a modern facility for residents and staff.

1961-71

Chamber helps to brighten the difficult 1970s

In 1970, the Census revealed that Chambersburg's population of 17,173 had declined 2.8 percent since 1960, though the surrounding townships were growing substantially. Greene Township's population grew by 33 percent during the 1960s, while Guilford Township saw a 19 percent gain. Chambersburg had a new municipal park and airport. The Greater Chambersburg Chamber of Commerce played a key role in obtaining support of both projects.

The average yearly salary was \$7,500 and the cost of a moderate-sized home was \$23,400. A loaf of bread cost a quarter and a quart of milk was 33 cents. The minimum wage was increased to \$2.10 an hour in 1971.

Franchising began in earnest with many well-known restaurants coming to Chambersburg, including the first McDonald's in 1972.

Nationally, Americans endured the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, the Iranian hostage crisis and much more during the 1970s. Locally, Hurricane Agnes was *the* story of 1972 when it dumped 10.4 inches of rain on Chambersburg from June 20-23. Nine inches fell in one day, the first major flood in Chambersburg since the 1930s.

Two thousand residents in Franklin County were evacuated from their homes; the flooding caused about \$3 million in damage. The Chambersburg Chamber assisted in offering flood relief loans and did what it could to improve the economic climate.

The Chambersburg Area Development Corp., a Chamber affiliate, constructed a 55,000-square-foot shell building on Wayne Avenue in 1972, hoping to attract new business. Grove Manufacturing purchased the building two years later, the same year that the Chamber paid its first reward in the Turn in a Pusher program, which it began to combat illegal drug use.

The Chamber turned to lighter matters in 1975-76, when ABC-TV chose Chambersburg as one of 27 towns to compete in games featured on its show, "*Almost Anything Goes*." (Regis Philbin was the sideline reporter on the show.) The Chamber selected the members of the Chambersburg Raiders team, who ended up winning the national title in Las Vegas. Their victory

in April 1976 was front-page news in *Public Opinion*, and gave Chambersburg great exposure nationwide.

Never before had the Chamber received so much favorable response from local residents and people from around the country. In addition to selecting the team members, the Chamber arranged to have a large “welcome home” sign placed to greet the returning champions.

That year was also the nation’s bicentennial, and the Chamber played a major role in the celebration – which included an air show, band concert, costume ball, fireworks, wagon train and a parade that featured Totem Pole actress and Emmy winner Jean Stapleton as the grand marshal. Stapleton was at the height of her career, starring in TV’s ground-breaking “*All in the Family*.”

The Chamber served as the bicentennial headquarters for both the Chambersburg and Franklin County observances, and devoted hundreds of hours of staff and volunteer time to the celebration. Two staff members worked fulltime on bicentennial event planning.

The Chamber became a major employer for awhile that year, hiring 325 students for eight weeks under a contract with the county commissioners. The students were “loaned out” to nearly 100 local public agencies and charitable organizations as part of the Federal Manpower Program.

During the bicentennial year, the Chamber created a self-guided tour of historic sites and tourist attractions in the community while serving as the headquarters for the South Central Pennsylvania Travel Council.

No new plants opened in Chambersburg during the economic downturn of 1976, but CADC had already been successful in helping to create 1,200 direct jobs in the previous 15 years and many other indirect jobs. In 1977, Arnold Graphics was recruited to the former Heinz plant building.

The Chamber also worked five years toward the installation of the first traffic signal at Lincoln Way Shopping Center, which improved safety on U.S. 30. The Chamber helped to raise money for the maintenance of the signal, which was transferred to Guilford Township.

Another energy crisis hit in 1978, and cars lined up at gas stations. The Chamber responded by promoting energy awareness and conservation techniques. The U.S. Department of Commerce recognized the Chamber for its leadership on the energy issue.

In the late 1970s, the Chamber also produced a publication that promoted Chambersburg. It won a national Chamber award.

As the 1980s began, gas rationing and high fuel prices were still a concern. In addition, the Chamber of Commerce lost its top leader when William “Bill” Coffield retired in 1981 after 20 years of strong leadership.

1971-81

Chamber grows significantly in 1980s

When William “Bill” Coffield retired in 1981, the Greater Chambersburg Chamber of Commerce lost a dynamic leader who was highly respected in the community. Coffield led the Chamber and the Chambersburg Area Development Corp. for 20 years.

His replacement, Jack Allston, stayed in Chambersburg for just over a year. In 1982, the Chamber’s board of directors recognized that they needed to find someone who would provide strong leadership in the future. After a lengthy process that included interviews of more than 30 candidates, David G. Sciamanna was hired as executive director.

The Chamber also that year helped to begin Franklin County Crime Solvers, an organization that offers rewards for information that leads to arrests. In addition, the Chamber encouraged the Franklin County Commissioners to implement a 911 emergency system.

Through a \$50,000 grant from the Gannett Foundation, the Chamber launched an economic study of Chambersburg to determine a direction for industrial recruitment. The study was a timely one because local unemployment in August 1984 peaked at 12 percent, higher than the national average of 7.5 percent. As former chairs Adrian Simpson and C.Q. Smith recalled in 2001, the Chamber led the effort to create the Franklin County Area Development Corporation’s first paid position in 1986, one filled by Mike Ross, whose work with Sciamanna and other business leaders led to the creation of thousands of jobs in Franklin County.

A Blue Ribbon Committee was formed, comprised of a cross-section of more than 100 volunteers and chaired by past Chamber chairman Bob Zullinger. It worked to improve the quality of life in Chambersburg.

This led to the beginning of Onward Chambersburg, the Council for the Arts, ChambersFest, the Trolley (which provided public transportation for several years) and the Franklin County Foundation. A study of the transportation system led to improvements of U.S. 30 -- championed by then state Sen. Terry Punt – and funding obtained by U.S. Rep. Bud Shuster for a new exit of Interstate 81.

In addition to beginning ChambersFest in 1986, the Chamber began the Leadership Chambersburg program. “We felt that our area had a wealth of untapped talent that could emerge as the leaders of tomorrow if only they were given a chance,” said C.Q. Smith, the Chamber chair at that time who was instrumental in the beginning of the program.

In 1987, CADC constructed a 27,000-square-foot shell building in CADCO Industrial Park and sold it. The following year, it sold 7.5 acres to AMVETS along Fifth Avenue, which launched the Fifth Avenue Commercial Center. In 1989, CADC received a \$570,000 low-interest loan from PIDA to construct a 38,000-square-foot shell building in the newly created Chambers-5 Business Park.

In 1989, the Chamber began Chambers Centre, a nonprofit corporation that focused local resources as well as state Main Street grant funds toward the economic enhancement of Chambersburg’s central business district downtown. It was the forerunner of Downtown

Chambersburg Inc., a Chamber affiliate formed in 1994.

The Cumberland Valley Visitors Station opened for business in May 1989, with funding and construction supervision by the Chamber and the Chambersburg Area Area Development Corp., a Chamber affiliate. By the time it opened, more than 135 businesses and industries contributed \$340,000 in cash, in-kind support and land.

The Chamber began its Civil War seminars in 1989 and worked with WITF to create a film about the burning of Chambersburg 125 years earlier. The seminars have brought thousands of history enthusiasts to Chambersburg.

The 1980s closed with a forward-looking community retreat, out of which the Chambersburg 2000 Partnership evolved. This public-private partnership is now known as the 21st Century Partnership, which continues to promote quality-of-life initiatives for the greater Chambersburg area.

The increased activity by the Chamber and its affiliates resulted in a dramatic increase in membership of nearly 50 percent during the last half of the 1980s, with membership totaling 737 in 1989. The following year, CADC sold the last lot in the South Main Street Industrial Park and completed Phase I of Chambers-5 Business Park.

1991-2001

Chamber's work leads to thousands of jobs in 1990s

The Chamber began the 1990s by building upon its economic development successes of the 1980s. Businesses were attracted to Chambers-5 Business Park off Orchard Drive, being developed by a Chamber affiliate, Chambersburg Area Development Corp. Borden's manufacturing facility – now Ventura Foods -- was the first major project in the park and it led to funding for Orchard Drive, a catalyst for development in the southern end of the Borough of Chambersburg. Orchard Drive serves as an important connecting road between Wayne Avenue and U.S. 11, leading to growth and easier travel.

Among those signing agreements during the decade and providing jobs: Nursery Supplies Inc., G.S. Electric, Olympic Steel, Chambersburg Beverage Inc., WCN Properties, TBJ Inc., Greencastle Metal Works, Olson and Olson, BAHF Properties and The Orchards. CADC also developed its EDA Multi-Tenant building at Chambers-5.

Meanwhile, CADC bought additional land for development at Chambers-5 and on Progress Road, and it sold land for development at the Fifth Avenue Commercial Center. The relocation of Fifth Avenue was the first step in the future development of the Norland Avenue project, which led to considerable economic and jobs growth.

In addition to working to attract jobs, the Chamber strived to save jobs, most notably at Letterkenny Army Depot, which was being evaluated by the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission. As part of the Letterkenny Army Depot Coalition, the Chamber rallied community support and joined legislators and depot employees to present the facts to the Commission, saving 3,000 jobs in 1993.

“We took a very proactive approach,” said Peggy Bosma-LaMascus, chair of the Chamber’s Board of Directors in 1992-93. The Chamber continued to spend a lot of time and resources on helping Letterkenny under the leadership of Chris Snavely, chair in 1994-95. Though Letterkenny lost jobs in BRAC-related cutbacks in that round, key parts of the depot remained, allowing for growth when war needs returned work to the depot.

Other initiatives included the support of Exit 7 construction (now Exit 17), which resulted in tremendous economic gain for the community, and negotiations with CSX/Conrail to remove tracks downtown. The Chamber and others enlisted former Congressman’s Bud Shuster’s help, and his support was critical to both projects. The removal of the tracks led to the rail/trail of today.

The Chamber – through its affiliates –focused on other downtown improvements, too. CADC sold land to Noelker and Hull at the Village at the Falling Spring, the beginning of a revitalization effort detailed in the Downtown Master Plan of 1995. “That was our blueprint,” said Paul Cullinane, the former president of Downtown Chambersburg Inc., a Chamber affiliate formed in 1994. The three projects identified in the plan have come to fruition: A cultural arts center (Capitol Theatre Center), a visitor/welcome center (the Chamber/Heritage Center) and Chambers Fort Park.

Another affiliate, the Greater Chambersburg Chamber Foundation, formed in 1990 and has been a catalyst for training of the area’s workforce and community leaders. It works closely with schools and employers to assist both.

“The 1990s were the most important decade of my years at the Chamber,” said David G. Sciamanna, who has led the Chamber since 1983. “I can’t tell you how exciting it’s been to see these projects develop and make a positive difference in the community. It’s been a team effort with many public and private partnerships over the years.”

2001-11

Chamber’s work results in community improvements

The past decade has been an important one for the Greater Chambersburg Chamber of Commerce, a time when the organization and its affiliates completed key projects and received recognition for their accomplishments.

The Chamber and its affiliates, for example, played a key role in reaching goals identified in the Downtown Master Plan of 1995. The three projects identified in the plan have come to fruition: A cultural arts center (Capitol Theatre Center), a visitor/welcome center (the Chamber/Heritage Center) and Chambers Fort Park.

The groundbreaking for the Capitol Theatre Center occurred in 2002 under the direction of Downtown Chambersburg Inc., a Chamber affiliate. DCI purchased the theater to save it from closing, raised funds in the community and obtained millions of dollars in grants to transfer the

historic theater into a beautiful cultural arts center. Another Chamber affiliate, the Chambersburg Area Development Corp. became a major benefactor of the theater and is the largest private supporter of Downtown Chambersburg Inc. (By the end of the decade, DCI accomplished its goal of transferring the property to the Capitol Theatre Center Foundation, which owns and maintains the theater today.)

In addition to the theater project, the Chamber was busy with a move of its own. CADC in August 2003 began rehabilitation of the 1915 former bank building on Memorial Square, also known as “the Marble Building.” CADC built the three-story office building connected to the Chambersburg Heritage Center and it houses the Chamber and all of its affiliate organizations. The Heritage Center offers a “walk through history” and an introduction to historical sites and other points of interest in Franklin County. It is a site along the Pennsylvania Civil War Trails. Since its opening in July 2004, people from all 50 states and several other countries have visited, as have students from area schools and local residents.

The Chambers Fort Park project, on Chambersburg founder Benjamin Chambers’ original settlement, included fund-raising for the Founding Family Memorial Statue, which salutes the Chambers’ family, and the recruitment of Noelker and Hull Associates Inc. to nearby property. After the architectural firm constructed a new building in 2003 at 30 W. King St., after purchasing the land from CADC, other public and private investment occurred downtown.

For its efforts, Downtown Chambersburg Inc. was honored in 2005 for having the Best Main Street Program in Pennsylvania. Paul Cullinane Jr. headed DCI from its beginning until his retirement at the end of 2010.

CADC also completed development of the 350-acre Chambers-5 Business Park during the decade, which resulted in thousands of jobs. “All you need to do is look at Chambers-5 and you know what an impact it (CADC) has had. The community owes them a vote of thanks,” said Bob Zullinger, former F&M Trust Co. president and chair of the Chamber’s board of directors in 1975. In 2002, CADC launched the United Business Park, a joint venture of the Chambersburg and Shippensburg development corporations.

The Chamber also saw its long-term goal of the addition of a new exit off Interstate 81 in the northern part of Chambersburg become a reality. The exit was completed in 2005, leading to the opening of new businesses and an improved internal transportation network.

In addition, CADC’s financial support enabled the Greater Chambersburg Chamber Foundation to hire a full-time executive director in 2008. Noel Purdy expanded workforce development initiatives and the Leadership Franklin County program – adding training for youths and adults. She also has led DCI since Cullinane’s retirement.

For its efforts, CADC was honored in 2008 by the Pennsylvania Economic Development Association for its success in job creation, downtown revitalization, civic contributions and its four business and commercial parks. It is currently marketing land in its United Business Park

near Exit 24 of I-81, in Southampton Township, which will lead to future development and future jobs.

The Chamber and its affiliates – under the direction of Chamber President David G. Sciamanna since 1983 -- form a unique organization that other Chambers have sought to model. In 2003 and 2009, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce named it a four-star chamber in its accreditation review, ranking it among the top 10 percent of Chambers of Commerce nationwide.

Doug Harbach, chair of the Chamber in 2002-03, summed up the Chamber's contributions when he became chair. The Chamber, he said, has "a successful legacy of improving our way of life and leaving this community better for the next generation."

Indeed, the organization has been a Chambersburg institution for a century and is poised to be a community leader for many years to come.