

NOTE FROM THE INCOMING PRESIDENT

# Actively lead our community

Dear Chamber Member,

On behalf of The Alexandria Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce and the board of directors, I want to thank you for your chamber membership. 2008 marks the sesquicentennial of Alexandria and the state of Minnesota! We invite you to celebrate this 150th anniversary with us all year long by renewing your membership and continuing your involvement in a thriving chamber.

Throughout 2007 we focused on "Setting a Direction" to continue the rich history started by many businesses and individuals more than a century ago. But, before we could set a direction for the future, we took a close look at where we have been and where we are. In looking back, it was easy to see that we owe a debt of gratitude to those whose heartfelt passion for our community helped mold the greater Alexandria area into the ultimate destination to live, work, play and prosper. Thanks to them, Alexandria truly is "easy to get to and hard to leave!"

To get an idea of where we are now, we looked at the economic and demographic trends that we are facing. That data shows that we are not alone in recognizing the tremendous value that Alexandria offers. We draw from a labor pool from far outside our city and county boundaries, and we have become a regional commercial hub.

Given our passionate history that made Alexandria such a regional leader, there can be no question that Alexandria is "The Heart of Commerce" in west central Minnesota. So, in addition to celebrating our Sesquicentennial in 2008, join us in celebrating Alexandria as "The Heart of Commerce."

Another part of "Setting a Direction" in 2007 was our participation in a nationwide chamber of commerce survey, and about one-third of our local chamber members participated in it. The survey results were very encouraging, for they showed that our chamber fared better than the national average in nearly all

categories surveyed. For example, we outscored the national average in areas such as business advocacy and leadership, membership and community involvement.

The survey also indicated that you, as members, want the chamber to expand upon the educational, leadership and networking opportunities you see as valuable components of your membership. Your chamber's board has also heard your message that you want those opportunities delivered in a variety of ways to meet your varying schedules and communication styles. Some of you prefer e-mail, webinars and podcasts between 9 and 5; others want a printed newsletter and coffee and rolls before work or our "Lunch N Learn" format. Our challenge is to offer services to meet your diverse needs.

As your 2008 Chamber Board of Directors President, I invite you to renew your membership as we celebrate Alexandria as "The Heart of Commerce" in west central Minnesota. Please review the opportunities to give back to your community via one of our many committees and/or events. And, so that your Chamber can better serve you, tell us about the services you want and how you want them delivered.

Finally, my challenge to each of you is to help actively lead our community. You may have lived here a long time and can offer your historical perspective and mentorship skill. You may be a relative newcomer and have fresh ideas to share. Regardless of your position, do not sit on the sidelines. Step up to the plate and help lead Alexandria and our Chamber as we continue our rich tradition as "The Heart of Commerce!"

Cordially,  
**Tom Jacobson, 2008 President**  
**Alexandria Lakes Area**  
**Chamber Board of Directors**



**Tom Jacobson**  
PRESIDENT

NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

# Thanks for involvement, support

**"Our mission at the Alexandria Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce is to promote Alexandria as the ultimate destination to live, work, play and prosper."**

By Coni McKay  
 Executive director

The 2007 theme of our outgoing president, Yvonne Kinney Hockert, centered on setting direction for the chamber's 670-plus members.

While this area has a rich past history of hospitality and tourism, we also enjoy a significant manufacturing and distribution base, our retail sector is strong and growing, we are an educational center of excellence, and we are a medical "hub" for both Douglas County and the region.

All of those sectors mesh together to create an economic vitality that continues to set a dazzling pace for this greater Minnesota small city.

All one has to do is look around to see the future of our region. Yvonne asked the important question – "Where are we going?" One answer to that question might be – "The sky's the limit!"

As we move boldly forward with our chamber's initiatives in 2008, our incoming board president, Tom Jacobson, will share more with you about his theme for the year.

The commerce of this region has sustained and enriched the lives of its residents, both past and present, and will continue to do so in the future. While our chamber organization celebrated its 100th birthday in March 2007, we have only just begun!

The 150th birthday of the state of Minnesota and of Alexandria will be celebrated in May and June of 2008, and we will continue to look forward and celebrate the changes that have brought our chamber and community to this point.

One of the important ways our chamber staff and board team is preparing for the future of local com-

merce is by planning and producing multiple educational opportunities to our members each year.

In addition to our popular Lunch N Learn series, in 2007 we provided half-day sessions on organizational excellence and customer service.

While we all strive to work smarter – not harder, we work hard for our customers.

In 2008, our members will see the chamber become more "member-centric" as we focus on the business of commerce.

Technology will continue to be a driving force in our chamber and our community; a new technology committee is currently developing important tools to assist our business members.

GROW Minnesota is a new undertaking for our chamber; as a result, in 2008 a team of business volunteers will call on more than 30 local member businesses to solicit their feedback and offer resources and support to help them prosper.

A newly formed young professionals group (Alexandria Area Young Professionals – AAYP) is gathering steam as they prepare to lead our community into the future. And it is a bright future ahead of us!

The Alexandria Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce staff members, Ginny Eastley, Carol Wenner, Jennifer Schmidt, Debbi Rydberg, Joni Karger and myself, Coni McKay, wish to thank you for your continued involvement and support of our chamber.

As you read through the various committee reports in this tabloid, I hope you will be able to catch a glimpse of the future of commerce in our region and how your business might prosper.



**Coni McKay**  
DIRECTOR



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