

**2019 Annual Meeting
SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES
(In order of appearance on the agenda)**



Brenda (B) Kyle

President and CEO, Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce

As President/CEO of the Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce, B represents over 1,200 Twin Cities companies of all sizes and industries, as well as non-profit and government organizations. The Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce is a dynamic network of businesses and individuals, and is known for its strong advocacy both at a regional and state level on behalf of the employer community.

Within the community, B is a Midway Chamber of Commerce board member. She also is the 2015-17 President of the Minnesota Precision Manufacturing Association (MPMA), and for 12 years was editor-in-chief of its bi-monthly trade journal, *Precision Manufacturing*.

B graduated from the College of Saint Benedict and is a veteran U.S. Army officer. Prior to her work at the Chamber, she spent 11 years at the Saint Paul Port Authority, ultimately co-leading its development work in Saint Paul on projects such as the Treasure Island Center, CHS Field, the Saint Paul Police Department's Public Safety Training Facility, and Major League Soccer.

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Dr. Susan Brower

Minnesota State Demographer

Susan Brower is the Minnesota State Demographer and directs the MN State Demographic Center. Susan became the State Demographer in February 2012. In that capacity, she travels the state talking with Minnesotans about the new social and economic realities that are brought about by recent demographic shifts. Susan's work applies an understanding of demographic trends to changes in a range of areas including the state's economy and workforce, education, health, immigration and rural population changes.

Susan joined the State Demographic Center after working as a researcher on the Minnesota Compass project at Wilder Research in St. Paul. Prior to that, she worked at the Population Studies Center at the University of Michigan.

Susan earned her Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Michigan, specializing in demography and family sociology. She also holds a master's degree in public policy from Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota.

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Farah Habad

Keynote Speaker and Consultant, Bridgeworks

Resident hipster-in-denial, Farah brings a unique flair to his speaking style, cultivated through 12 years of competitive speech and debate. He loves learning and connecting with all generations, but he especially thrives on learning from the unique experience and wisdom Baby Boomers and Traditionalists have to offer. Farah believes each generation has a story that offers valuable insight and perspective.

Having bonded with and learned from different mentors across generations, Farah strongly believes that human beings derive meaning from narrative. Each generation’s story speaks to the human condition in unique ways. Farah looks to peel back some of the layers of our collective experiences to better explain the “why” behind the “what.” His style is humorous but insightful, engaging yet strategic. He crafts his content in a way that is memorable and chock full of actionable takeaways that can be implemented the very next day.

Farah comes to BridgeWorks from the San Francisco Bay Area—quite the difference in weather and seasons. He’s a former member of the Melvin B. Tolson/Denzel Washington Forensics Society at Wiley College, the team featured in the 2007 film “The Great Debaters.” As one of our Gen Z/ Millennial cuspers, he’s actively trying not to kill various industries. When he’s not combing his beard, Farah enjoys going to poetry slams, playing with his nephew, or drinking his body weight in cold-pressed coffee.

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Nort Johnson

President, Faribault Chamber of Commerce

Nort Johnson is a native of Faribault, Minnesota and currently serves as President and CEO of the Faribault Chamber of Commerce.

Johnson attended both Worthington Community College and Mankato State University and began his leadership career at Cannon Valley Publishing in Northfield, MN in 1986. As Plant Manager Nort oversaw the expansion and relocation of the plant as well as managing the growth of the business.

In the mid 90’s Johnson relocated to Marshall Minnesota where he joined the Schwan Food Company. There he managed the Print and Fulfillment Services department directing in-house and outsourced production of marketing material as well as planning and execution of cutting-edge variable data campaigns. During that time, he also held a city council seat, sat on numerous volunteer boards and became involved in economic development at many levels.

Nort took those “extra-curricular” experiences to a professional level and left Schwan’s to work in economic development in both Minnesota and South Dakota. While in the Black Hills he was recruited by Black Hills and Badlands Tourism and as President/CEO orchestrated successful and sustained membership growth and introduced new marketing campaigns earning several awards. Johnson also worked on successful lobbying efforts at both the state and federal levels on behalf of the tourism industry. During his tenure Johnson became known for his tenacity in accomplishing goals and his ability to build strategic partnerships at all levels. Some of his favorites include Polaris, the Minnesota Twins, Washington Nationals, Deadwood Chamber/CVB, American Park network and South Dakota Department of Tourism.

With family and purpose calling, Nort found his way back home to Faribault in 2015 to join the Chamber. In 2016 a strategic Marketing partnership with Northfield and Owatonna won a marketing excellence award from Explore Minnesota for the Minne-Roadtrip™ brand. Personal interests include home renovation, golf, motorcycling, baseball, ice fishing, league darts and time with family and friends. He and Shelly’s blended family includes 7 grown children and 9 grandchildren.

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Ashley Nerhus

President, Thief River Falls Chamber of Commerce

Ashley became the Executive Director in 2015 after previously serving as the administrative assistant for a year. As the Executive Director, Ashley oversees all Chamber activities-- she fosters business-to-Chamber relations, is the liaison to the Chamber Board, plans and coordinates all Chamber events, maintains the Chamber's social media pages, recruits new Chamber members, administers the weekly Chamber newsletter, manages public relations for the Chamber and is the Chamber spokesperson.

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Matt Kilian

President, Brainerd Lakes Chamber

With strategic oversight by the Chamber's Board of Directors, Matt leads a dynamic Chamber team that works to maximize the value of membership and create a climate for economic success in the Brainerd Lakes Area. He is the resource staff member for regional business councils, government policy and positive dialogue.

224 West Washington St. Brainerd, MN 56401 | 218-829-2838 | mkilian@explorebrainerdlakes.com



Shannon Full

President/CEO, TwinWest Chamber of Commerce

Shannon Full has almost 20 years of industry experience, with expertise in chamber of commerce leadership, economic development, talent solutions and organizational management. She prides herself on strong relationship and communication skills, leading with passion and purpose, and strives to balance an active, dynamic career with a high quality family life.

Shannon joined the TwinWest Chamber of Commerce in Plymouth, MN as the President/CEO in February 2017. Prior to coming to TwinWest, she was most recently the President/CEO of the Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce and Regional Partnership in Appleton, WI. She began her Chamber career at the Twin Cities North Chamber of Commerce in Mounds View, MN and subsequently led Chambers in Melbourne, FL and Cedar Rapids, IA. An experienced and accomplished professional, Shannon has received numerous awards for her work including the Wisconsin Economic Development Association's *Governors Young Professional of the Year* in 2016, and the *Best in Show Winner for Talent Upload Program* from the International Economic Development Council in 2015. She was a *40 Under 40* winner in Iowa in 2009 and a *4 Under 40* winner in Florida in 2008.

Shannon has two children – Beckett, age 2, and Finley, age 5. She is married to her husband, Travis and resides in Blaine, MN.

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Pat Mulqueeny

President, Eden Prairie Chamber of Commerce

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Teresa Bohnen

President, St. Cloud Area Chamber of Commerce

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**Christie Ransom**

Director of Member Services & Sales, Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce

Christie is the Director of Member Services & Sales for the Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce and will be celebrating two years with the Chamber in March. Christie brought many years of sales and customer relations experience to the Chamber. She is committed to working with businesses to ensure that they understand the value of the Chamber in ways that matter to them. Through listening to each business and their needs, Christie is able to customize a valuable ROI. Since April of 2017, her efforts have brought 67 new members to the WLACC. They also celebrate an average retention rate of 93.2%.

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Brad Gruhot

Chamber Director, Marshall Chamber

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**Larry Dowell**

President, Dowell Management

Prior to founding Dowell Management in 2007, Larry Dowell's career spanned nearly 30 years in organizational management within the Chamber of Commerce industry in the Upper Midwest, with an emphasis on coalition development, local and state public policy, issues management, economic development and political action.

Following an internship in Alexandria, Minnesota in the late 1970s, he served as a manager, executive director, executive vice president, and president for Chambers in Rugby, North Dakota, as well as Montevideo, South Saint Paul and Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota, and the Twin West Chamber of Commerce. Following these leadership positions, Larry spent ten years building the Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce into the largest local and regional chamber in the state of Minnesota, representing nearly 2,200 business members.

Upon retiring from the Saint Paul Area Chamber, Larry started Dowell Management, which provides professional management services to business-based non-profit organizations, associations and business partners. As president of Dowell Management, Larry is best known for his professional expertise, practical advice, and ability to help organizations execute strategies to meet their objectives. To date, Dowell Management has served over 100 clients from across the Midwest with services ranging from full association management, strategic planning, public policy assistance, and executive searches.

Dowell also serves as Executive Director of the Mid America Chamber Executives, a six state executives association. States represented are: Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin

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Kristy Barse

President, Hastings Area Chamber of Commerce

Kristy Barse has worked in the Chamber industry for 6 years, the last three serving as President at the Hastings Area Chamber of Commerce. The Hastings Chamber serves 290 members and also operates the official Hastings tourism bureau. For 40 years, the Hastings Area Chamber of Commerce has hosted Rivertown Days, an annual community wide festival that brings more than 15,000 people to town for live music, good food, carnival rides and more.”

314 Vermillion Street, Suite 100 Hastings, MN 55033 | (651) 437-6775 | Kristy@hastingsmn.org



Carrie Johnston

President, Detroit Lakes Regional Chamber of Commerce

Carrie Johnston has been President of the Detroit Lakes Regional Chamber of Commerce since 2010. Carrie and her staff of 3 serve 450 members, operate the welcome center and fulfill a contract to manage the Tourism Bureau. Tourism and events are a key to the vibrancy of their region. With over 150 significant events in the community; the DL Chamber works to find balance on what role they play in each of these events and in new ideas that come each year.

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Randy Dewitz

Owner, Fanfare Attractions

Randy L. Dewitz, Owner, Fanfare Attractions started the Company in September, 1994. He has provided management services for the Festivals and Events industry for over 35 years.

Randy received his Certified Festival & Event Executive (CFEE) designation from IFEA in September 2016 and Festival Manager certificate in April of 1993. He was the President of the Minnesota Festivals and Events Association. Has been a long-standing member of MN Festivals and Events Association and the International Festivals and Events Association.

His Company manages the Operations for Saint Paul Winter Carnival, Supported the 2018 Ice Palace in Rice Park, Cinco de Mayo- Westside, Grand Old Day, Irish fair of Minnesota, Twin Cities Pride Festival, Eagan 4th of July Funfest and Vets for Music. Teaches Site Planning and Risk Management for the University of Minnesota Tourism Center on-line course. Fanfare works with over 25 other events and holiday décor venues across the Twin Cities.

Fanfare has significant experience working with Cultural, Heritage Festivals and Community based Events. Fanfare has experience working with City Governments, Non-Profit Organizations including Neighborhood Organizations/Districts. Fanfare has provided Event Evaluations/Analysis, Development of key Partners and Suppliers, and has access to a variety of resources for Festivals.

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Ed Lee

Executive Director, St. Peter Area Chamber of Commerce

Ed Lee is the executive director of the St. Peter Area Chamber of Commerce, which represents about 240 members in a community of nearly 12,000 residents. He has served five years in his position and has resided 23 years in St. Peter, 17 of which years were with the Herald weekly newspaper as sports editor, managing editor and finally editor/publisher (four years). Ed holds bachelor’s degrees in mass communications and geography from Minnesota State University, Mankato. He has been married to Melissa from 25 years, and they are the parents of JohnHenry, 21, and Sophia, 18.

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Sharon Henning

Chamber Director, Jackson Area Chamber of Commerce

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Janelle Jones

President/CEO, Two Harbors Area Chamber of Commerce

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Sue Olmscheid

President, Buffalo Area Chamber of Commerce

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Jay Byers

President, Des Moines Partnership

Jay Byers is CEO of the Greater Des Moines Partnership. The Partnership is the regional economic and community development organization serving Central Iowa with 24 Affiliate Chambers of Commerce and a network of more than 6400 regional members. Byers is a Certified Chamber Executive (CCE), graduate of the U.S Chamber of Commerce Institute of Organization Management (IOM), graduate of the University of Oklahoma Economic Development Institute (OUEDI) and graduate of Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives’ (ACCE) Ford Foundation Regionalism and Sustainable DevelopmentFellowship.

Byers currently serves as Vice Chair of ACCE and on the Executive Committee of the Iowa Chamber Alliance, the General Council of the World Chambers Federation and U.S. Chamber of Commerce Committee of 100. He is a member of the Professional Developers of Iowa, Iowa Association of Business and Industry and International Economic Development Council. Byers also serves on the boards of Simpson College, Catch Des Moines, Greater Des Moines Committee, ChildServe, Balance Autism and Keep Iowa Beautiful. He also is a member of the Young Presidents’ Organization.

Byers was named to the ACCE 2009 “40 Under 40 Rising Stars of the Chamber World,” Des Moines Business Record’s “Forty Under 40” Class of 2006, and Business Record’s “Forty Under 40” Alum of the Year in 2012. He received the Greater Des Moines Convention and Visitors Bureau Community Champion Award in 2014 and the Simpson College Alumni Achievement Award in 2015.

Prior to his current role, Byers served as The Partnership’s Senior Vice President of Government Relations and Public Policy. Before joining The Partnership, he worked as District Director for Iowa Congressman Leonard Boswell and as a corporate attorney at the Ice Miller Law Firm in Indianapolis, Indiana. Byers is a graduate of Simpson College and the University of Iowa College of Law. He resides in Des Moines, Iowa with his wife, Katie, and two daughters, Sophie and Charlotte.

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Doug Loon

President, Minnesota Chamber of Commerce

Douglas B. Loon is president of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, a position he has held since September 8, 2015. The Minnesota Chamber represents more than 2,300 Minnesota companies, 130 local chambers and 65 business trade associations at the Minnesota Legislature on a variety of issues that impact Minnesota's economy.

Prior to assuming leadership of the Minnesota Chamber, he spent 20 years at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 17 of those in Minnesota. As the vice president for regional affairs and advocacy, he managed the seven regional offices that provide political and grassroots outreach across the nation. He also managed the U.S. Chamber's Midwest Region that includes Minnesota. He was intimately involved in supporting state and local chambers and businesses to move public policy in a direction that helps them be successful. Previously, Loon served as director of congressional and public affairs at U.S. Chamber headquarters in Washington, D.C. There, he served as one of the organization's chief lobbyists before Congress on issues critical to the American business community.

Before joining the U.S. Chamber staff in 1995, Loon was legislative director to Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania. In his 10 years on Capitol Hill, Loon also served as acting staff director for the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs and on the Senate Commerce Committee. In addition, he worked for Senator Larry Pressler of South Dakota.

Loon received his bachelor's degree in government and international affairs from Augustana College in Sioux Falls, S.D. He is a graduate of the Congressional Research Service's Institute for Legislative Staff as well as the Federal Election Commission's program on campaign finance laws for incorporated trade associations and membership organizations. He also graduated from Leadership Minnesota, an exclusive program of the Minnesota Chamber addressing the economic and public policy issues of Minnesota businesses. He is past chair of the Eden Prairie Foundation Board of Directors.

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Patrick Baker

VP and Director of Government and Institutional Affairs, Greater Mankato Growth, Inc.

Patrick has been with GMG since 2012 when he began as the Director of Government and Institutional Affairs. He was promoted to Vice President of GMG in 2018. In his role, he works to support the overall performance of GMG and its four business units (Greater Mankato Growth, Visit Mankato, City Center Partnership and GreenSeam) and serves as lead support to Jonathan Zierdt, president & CEO. Additionally, Patrick serves as a relationship manager working with local business and community leaders, legislators and other influential leaders across the state to advance community policy priorities and raise awareness of the importance of our regional center. Prior to joining GMG, Patrick worked for the National Governors Association in Washington, D.C. Patrick is a proud Mankato native. He graduated from Concordia College in Moorhead, MN with a B.A. in Political Science and holds a Graduate Certificate in Public Management from George Mason University in Fairfax, VA. Outside of work, Patrick enjoys road tripping with his wife Claire and spending time with friends and family, especially if it's at a brewery, winery or around a bonfire.

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Darlene Macklin

Executive Director, Worthington Area Chamber of Commerce

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Deb McMillan

Vice President, Public Policy, TwinWest Chamber of Commerce

Deb McMillan has worked in the Chamber industry since May of 2000. She began her Chamber career serving as President of the Waconia Chamber of Commerce for more than seven years. She was hired to lead the Chaska Area Chamber of Commerce in 2007 and subsequently led a task force to merge the Chaska, Chanhassen and Victoria Chambers of Commerce, forming the SouthWest Metro Chamber of Commerce, which opened for business in January 2009. She served as President of the SouthWest Metro Chamber of Commerce until July of 2013 when she accepted a position as the Director of Government Affairs for the TwinWest Chamber of Commerce. Deb currently serves as the Vice President

of Public Policy for the TwinWest Chamber of Commerce.

Deb is a 2004 graduate of the Institute of Organizational Management and a member of the 2017-2018 Leadership Minnesota program. She has served on the board of directors for the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce Executives (MCCE), the Metropolitan Coalition of Chambers of Commerce (MCCC) and the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce. She served as chair of the board for MCCE in 2007 and chair of the board for MCCC in 2005 and again in 2016-2017. Deb currently serves on the board of the Mid-America Chamber Executives (MACE) group and a member of the 2017-2018 Leadership Minnesota class. She is a member of the Minnesota Governmental Relations Council and a registered lobbyist.

Deb and her husband, Kerry, have 4 daughters and live in Victoria.

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Chris Schmitter

Chief of Staff, Governor Tim Walz

Chris Schmitter serves as the Chief of Staff to Governor Tim Walz and Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan. Mr. Schmitter, originally from Rochester, previously served as Deputy Chief of Staff and Legislative Director for Governor Walz during his time in the United States House of Representatives, and as Campaign Manager during Mr. Walz's first congressional re-election in 2008. A graduate of Georgetown University and the University of Minnesota Law School, he was a law clerk for Minnesota's Chief U.S. District Court Judge, John Tunheim and for Judge Sidney Thomas, of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. Mr. Schmitter most recently worked as an attorney with the law firm of Green Espel PLLP, where he litigated for public- and private-sector clients.

Hannah Quinn | Senior Aide to the Chief of Staff | Hannah.Quinn@state.mn.us