The Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce

Woods & Water

114th Annual Dinner
A Message from the Chair of the Board

Even though my role as a mining professional started my involvement with the Chamber, my status as a Hibbing resident, husband and father quickly contributed to my goals as a director and now Chair of the Board. It’s a privilege to be a member of the Chamber board and I look forward to serving as your 2019 Chairperson.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the Chamber membership, president, staff, and entire board of directors for this chance to lead in 2019. Our board is comprised of some of the most energetic and creative leaders from our business community (see right), and I would like to acknowledge and thank our outgoing board members for their service: Dave Hughes Jr., Wayne Kangas, Jeannie Nobens, Tim Angelo, Mary Rabe, and Christa Khalilieh.

I’d also like to extend a personal thank you to Marvin Vuicich, our 2018 Chair, for all of his efforts throughout the past year. His leadership has been extraordinary in keeping our Chamber viable and well-positioned for the future. Additional former board chairs in attendance at the Annual Dinner who I would like to acknowledge are Pat Ives, Jon Minne, Troy Loeb, Kelle Degnan, and Charlie Crep.

As you can see, we have a great team and a unique group of skills and knowledge that I know will be of great value to our membership. The Chamber is a vibrant organization with a strong and accomplished history. It holds a bright future for how it can contribute to support and evolve as an organization. In my year as Chair, I will commit focus and hard work to ensure the Chamber continues to add value to our members. I aim to do this through two key leadership principles I would like to share.

First, I will aim to give our organization “a fine reputation to live up to” ...

The Chamber is known for being motivated, active, engaged, and a strong advocate for its members. This is found in our Mission Statement and a major priority of our organization. As directors and staff, this is our “reputation” to live up to and a reputation Lory Fedo has helped build and sustain over the past three decades. Even though we look forward to new leadership and opportunities ahead, it will be up to the entire chamber team to continue this strong and fine reputation we have today.

SEE CHAIR 9
MDI manufactures a wide variety of totes, trays and boxes that are sold to businesses across the country. The highly capable and dedicated team also offers production services such as, kitting, packaging, palletizing and assembly, along with environmental services. MDI has been in Hibbing since 1992 and in Minnesota since the 1960’s.

A few years ago, Lory Fedo had met with the MDI management team Gary Flesland, Rod Wood, and Peter McDermott and they talked about their need for a larger, more modern facility in Hibbing. They had simply out-grown their space and needed to improve the efficiency and safety for their employees as well as have room to grow more jobs in the future. That was great news to hear, of course. We brought in a few community partners to MDI to discuss the possibilities and eventually the site on Highway 37 was settled on. MDI broke ground on June 7, 2017 to build their beautiful $4.7 million facility with the help of many donors and agencies. Today MDI has 143 employees in Hibbing and 502 employees statewide which includes facilities in Minneapolis, Hibbing, Cohasset and Grand Rapids.

What has impressed our board the most about MDI is their deep commitment to Hibbing, it’s employees and the region. That commitment is at all levels of the organization and is evident in everything they do.

Congratulations to the entire organization. You have given so much to our community and are truly deserving of this award. It has been a great honor and pleasure to work with you.

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Criteria for Business of the Year Award:
- Demonstrated growth and stability
- Dedication and service to the community
- Excellence and/or innovation in their field
- Special contributions of leadership and mentoring others
- Longevity of business and loyalty to employees
- Support and promotion of the region, chamber and business community

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Left: Accepting the award from Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce President Lory Fedo is Peter McDermott, CEO of MDI.
Right: Peter McDermott asks Joe Vendetti, MDI employee, about what he enjoys about working at MDI.
Outstanding Leadership Alumni — Mike Fredeen

For demonstrating the principles taught in the Chamber’s Leadership Program through his exemplary community work and achievements.

Mike was nominated for this award by our board chair, Jared Lubben. And he was seconded by Krystle Glad, who is the Executive Director at Range Center where Mike works. He was nominated and is receiving the award for the following reasons:

- Mike helped lead the effort to improve community wellness through a review of the Memorial Building expansion plans, community public forums, surveys and the completion of a study evaluating the economic benefits of expanding facilities at the Memorial Building through a Master Plan. This started with a group of six and ended with two dedicated leaders. Mike was instrumental in this project’s success.
- He is a volunteer t-ball coach and youth basketball referee.
- He was part of the Blandin Hibbing-Chisholm Cohort and he graduated from the Chamber’s Leadership Program.
- Recently he was a volunteer panelist at Hibbing High School for a presentation on time management.
- He is a volunteer board member and officer for the Central Mesabi Medical Foundation (CMMF) and is a member of the local Order of the Eagles.

Mike and his wife, Katie, have three kids and live in Hibbing.

Congratulations, Mike!

Ambassador of the Year — Lynn Erkelenz

In grateful recognition and appreciation for exemplary service and commitment to the Chamber, its Ambassadors and our community.

Lynn works at Midwest Communications. She has been involved with the Chamber on and off more than 25 years and is a consummate volunteer. She is on the Ambassador Committee and works on almost every event the Chamber puts on, including this dinner. She works on Sidewalk Sales, Small Business Saturday, ribbon cuttings, and she has reached out to new businesses asking to join the chamber.

Lynn also volunteers for other community efforts like National Night Out, Mighty Mutts, Relay for Life, and the Rotary’s Chili Cook-off. She also volunteers for organizations like the Salvation Army and the Hibbing Tourist Center Seniors.

We have heard that Lynn looks out for her neighbors—doing things like making sure they are plowed out. She also cooks and shares with many friends and help friends when they are sick.

Lynn is the most upbeat, kind and positive person I know. The Chamber staff all agree that this award is well deserved. Congratulations Lynn, and thank you for all that you do.
Special Thank Yous

- **Bob Paget and the Elk’s Lodge at the Androy** for the fabulous food, beverages, and hospitality
- **Express Print One** for producing all of our printed materials
- **Dustin Davidson** for providing our audio needs
- **Super One Foods** for providing the hors d’oeuvres
- **Range Floral** for lending us décor
- **SoHo Arts** for lending us décor
- **Sunrise Bakery** for the artisan bread loaves
- **Boomtown Brewery & Woodfire Grill** for the beer tasting
- **Hibbing Winter Frolic candidates** for helping us put on the chair covers

Volunteer of the Year — Don Brunette

Whose volunteer efforts and contributions have had a lasting impact on the Hibbing Area Chamber, the community, and its people.

Don Brunette has been the Executive Director of Access North, Center for Independent Living of Northeastern Minnesota for five years. Don is passionate about making a difference and pursuing and providing opportunities for people with disabilities and helping them to live independently.

Lory Fedo serves as chair of the Hibbing Broadband Steering Committee and the Chamber has been the applicant for past grant funds and the convener of the group. Don joined the Steering Committee last year as a volunteer. He was instrumental in working with our staff to give away over a hundred computers and printers to people of need, nonprofit organizations, and schools. Last year at the annual dinner, Lory said, “Don’s enthusiasm is contagious and we expect great things from him as we continue to work together!” and he did not disappoint!

The Steering Committee was offered the opportunity to apply for another broadband grant. So we did and were recently awarded $50,000 to do several projects. Don and his organization agreed to be our fiscal agent, which is immensely appreciated. He also is the grant project leader which will use smart home technology to create environmental controls and enhance safety and security within 21 senior citizens’ homes. This will allow seniors to successfully age in place. Other projects that were funded are iPads in the Fairview Range Emergency Room, the Hibbing Fire Department (HFD) vehicles, and the Nashwauk and Chisholm ambulances. This will connect the ER directly with the first responders so they can be better prepared for incoming patients. We will also provide an affordable wifi network to up to 60 low income families at the First Avenue Apartments; and will provide to Serenity House which is for local cancer patients. Finally, some of the funding will go to a joint project with Tech Tank, the Chamber, and the Entrepreneur Fund. We will offer work sessions and meet-ups that will teach business owners and employees how to improve business skills and technology.

Congratulations, Don!
Hibbing is my adopted community. I chose to be here 28 years ago, because I instantly fell in love with the community and area. The people here were welcoming and helpful. My family easily found friends and quickly adjusted to life in our little cabin on the range.

And then I fell in love with my job and all of the people I was able to work with. Each and every day, my job gave me great opportunities to make a difference. I have learned so much and shared all that I was able to.

Finally, I’d like to share one last thing with you and that is what I see as our greatest accomplishments together.

- We initiated the Business Energy Retrofit or BER Program and hundreds of businesses all across the Iron Range have benefited. BER gives grants to businesses to retrofit their buildings to be more energy efficient.
- We have more engaged women chamber members and business owners and managers than ever before.
- We have graduated over 1000 people in our Chamber Leadership Program over the last 23 years.
- We started the Jubilee 20 some years ago and recently added more family-centered events.
- We advocate, we go to rallies and hearings, we testify, and we do what we need to do to be heard.
- We started CIRI which has provided funding for Brownfield clean-up all across the iron range
- We started the great tradition of this annual dinner, our golf outing, and the funspiel.
- We developed a strong relationship with the Minnesota Chamber, other chambers across Northeastern Minnesota and also Jobs for Minnesotans. Those partnerships helped us leverage support. Nancy Norr from Minnesota Power is here tonight and I want to thank you, Nancy, for leading the Jobs for Minnesotans effort and including me on the board. It is one of the highlights of my career.
- We visited hundreds of area businesses through Grow Minnesota visits.
- We held literally hundreds of hours of local candidate forums.
- We started the effort to work on engineering programs in the schools which eventually became the Range Engineering Council.
- We annually do CEOs in the Classroom in all of the 8th grade classrooms.
- We applied for and received funding for the thousands of dollars in broadband and downtown grants.
- We completed the utility art wrap project.
- We started and continue to fund the flower basket hanging downtown.
- We started the Angel Fund so that we could donate money raised in a downtown promotion to local people who have cancer.
- We started a young professional group that has been in existence for over 10 years.
- There is more I am sure...but these stand out in my memory.

Finally, thank you to all of you. It has been an honor to serve you.
Hello, Chamber members and friends. Thank you for your support in coming to the annual dinner and for your continued support of the Hibbing Area Chamber.

I’d like to introduce myself, as I know I’m a new face to many. I grew up in Hibbing, attending Hibbing schools, and graduating from the Hibbing High School and Hibbing Community College in 2004. Like many 18-year-olds that you’ve met in our town, I was ready to be as far away from small-town northern Minnesota as I could get. Luckily for me, I had a great opportunity to travel across the country to attend college in Cleveland, Ohio. Fifteen hours away and a metro population of around 2 million people felt like exactly the adventure I was looking for.

I mixed adventures with studying, enjoying the culture, walkability, and people of the city during my four years in Cleveland. I learned about poverty, privilege, and the contrast between rural and city life.

My college career flew by, spending my school years in Cleveland and my summers interning back in Hibbing at Barr Engineering Company. My internship experience was invaluable in helping me develop in my career and gave me the opportunity to spend my summers in beautiful Northern Minnesota. More importantly, my summer internships in Hibbing kept me connected to the area and helped me learn what a great town this is to live in and that there was a company available for me to work at, right in my old backyard. I am a walking workforce development success story, and I didn’t even know it at the time.

I didn’t try to sneak it by anyone, my degree is in Civil Engineering. I’ve spent most of my career as a geotechnical engineer, working on earthwork and dam design projects for mining and power companies across North America. The next question is obvious. How did an engineer end up a President of the Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce?

Sometimes the key to finding your connection to your community isn’t finding it at all. It’s making it. The answer to the questions, why would an engineer want to become a Chamber president, is community. It’s a passion for economic and community development. It’s about making an impact in the area where I want to spend my next 40, or hopefully 50-plus years.

My story of “making my community” really started in 2013 when I applied to participate in a task force for the IRRRB to help look at the future of the agency and its economic development funds. After being selected as a young, “Next-Gen” member of the task force, I learned about the IRRR’s impact on economic development in our area, and I was hooked on getting involved in the future of my region. For the first time, I felt like I had been asked to participate in my community in a truly meaningful way. I made connections that brought me onto the boards of Northland Foundation and Project Care Free Clinic. I found out that I could have a voice and make an impact on my community. I had started to make my connection and build my own community.

Over the next five years, I worked on additional projects with the IRRRB, Blandin, and other regional partners on community and economic development. I found my way onto the Hibbing Area Chamber’s Downtown Steering Committee, working on downtown grant projects to improve bicycle mobility, improve a downtown store front, and install artistic wraps on utility boxes in our downtown. I was honored with the Hibbing Area Chamber’s President’s Award in 2017 for my work on those efforts.

My work with the Downtown Steering Committee helped me learn more about the Hibbing Area Chamber and led to a relationship and mentorship with President Lory Fedo. Lory was willing to be a thoughtful mentor to me in being a stronger community member, a young leader, a woman in economic development, and in the past month, as incoming Chamber President.
Duluth, Minnesota—March 5, 2019: The Entrepreneur Fund is pleased to grant the Mary Mathews Legacy Award to Lory Fedo, outgoing President of the Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce. Fedo accepted the award at the 114th annual Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce Dinner in February. The Mary Mathews award recognizes outstanding business leaders in northeastern Minnesota, central Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin and was created in honor of Mary Mathews, founding President of the Entrepreneur Fund.

“Lory Fedo is a dedicated champion of economic development and small business in our region,” said Shawn Wellnitz, Entrepreneur Fund CEO. “For nearly three decades she has helped strengthen the city of Hibbing and surrounding community by making the area a great place to do business.”

Lory Fedo joined the Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce in 1991, during a tumultuous time when Iron Range cities were working to rebuild in the wake of mine closures. Fedo believes in the power of community and supports the wide range of industries that lend great strength to our economy.

“I’m very proud of the work the Entrepreneur Fund and the Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce have completed together during my tenure as President,” said Fedo. “I’m absolutely honored to accept the Mary Mathews Legacy Award in recognition of everything we’ve achieved for our regional business community.”

Under Fedo’s leadership, the Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce has worked closely with the Entrepreneur Fund on several key initiatives to attract and retain business to the Hibbing area. Over the years, this partnership has resulted directly in:

- Over $1,000,000 in loan capital for Hibbing area entrepreneurs
- 20+ small businesses receiving digital marketing consulting
- Training and consulting to Hibbing area businesses
- A new Entrepreneur Fund office in Hibbing to provide strategic and financial resources to area entrepreneurs
- Bringing Wi-Fi downtown and providing technology consulting to entrepreneurs through the Blandin Broadband initiative

The Mary Mathews Legacy Award honors the work of Mary Mathews, who founded the Entrepreneur Fund in 1989 with the goal of creating a vibrant entrepreneurial culture across northeast Minnesota, central Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin. The award recognizes the success of small business owners and business leaders in the region who embody Mathews’ entrepreneurial vision through achieving significant milestones in growing revenues, adding jobs, community impact and community leadership.

“The partnership we’ve built with Lory has resulted in so many opportunities in Hibbing. Her leadership will be missed, but we look forward to continuing to work with the Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce and incoming President Vicki Hagberg,” continued Wellnitz.
CHAIR  Secondly, I would like to … “Lay down a challenge”. You may think I am challenging our board; however, I’m challenging you, our chamber membership and our business community. Over the past year the Chamber stated measuring how many members take advantage of what our Chamber offers. Perhaps it’s the scientist in me that wants to quantify and assign a number to everything but it became concerning to me that in 2018, 25% of our members were recorded as taking advantage of a chamber event, whether it was training, knowledge sharing, advocacy, a morale event or any number of other opportunities we offer our members. To me, 25% seems too low, or as another way to look at it, 3 out of 4 members didn’t take advantage of the benefits our Chamber offers. The challenge is to all of you and our entire business community to engage in our chamber and connect with our work. This could be through enrolling in the Leadership course, joining a lunch with peers to learn how to improve your bottom line, enjoying a round of golf, or lifting your favorite beverage and attempting to be the quickest to answer how many state capitols start with a vowel during one of our trivia nights. I challenge all of you to think about these opportunities and be active and allow the Chamber to provide you a great opportunity to be positively impacted by some part of the service and support we offer. I challenge you to make 3 out of 4 less, and expand the total impact of our Chamber.

These leadership basics are the chamber’s commitment to all of our current and prospective members in 2019.

Jared Lubben  
2019 Chair of the Board

HAGBERG  I have learned so much from this organization’s leader, and I am so thankful for her time, energy, and heart that she’s given to the Hibbing area and to me as an upcoming leader. With this feeling of gratitude is paired my excitement for the future and what it brings for our area. I’m excited to be coming into a strong chamber with many successful programs, a strong member base, and so many valuable and generous volunteers and sponsors. It’s clear to me, one month into my term as incoming president, that the Chamber would not be able to accomplish so much without all of your help.

My first month at the Hibbing Area Chamber has been filled with opportunities to learn more about the work the Chamber does as well as start to meet more of our members. In addition to planning for tonight’s event, we’ve been busy in the past month brainstorming on engaging lunch and learn events through our Government Affairs committee. We’ve met with Minnesota legislators at the annual Session Priorities event at the Capitol. We’re helping to educate and connect members to grand funding to help with succession planning for their businesses.

The Ambassadors committees is setting up networking opportunities for you as part of our Business After Hours series, and they’re also setting up a ribbon cutting for one of our new members in 2019—a new business in Hibbing.

Lory and I were recently able to tour Chamber member business MTI—Northern Foundry as part of the Grow Minnesota program, learning about the improvements they’ve made to the facility in recent years. The Northern Foundry facility was truly impressive, and our tour was a key way for the Chamber to learn about how we can engage and help with future projects.

I’d like to close my remarks with a request. Let’s meet. I want to learn more about you, our members, and about your businesses. I’d like to meet with your teams and tour your facilities. I want to help raise your voice to our legislators, to the Minnesota Chamber, and to the many resources in our state and region. I hope that you will reach out to us as we work to connect with you.

In thanks for the past, and in excitement for our future, I can’t wait to see where the next year takes us. Thank you for your support and your time.
We couldn’t have organized the Annual Dinner without our volunteers!

Without the help from our many volunteers the Annual Dinner would not be possible. Thank you to Shari Erickson (Max Gray Construction) for chairing this event and to Pat Ives (Kiddy Karousel), Ella Champion (North Star Church), and Aaron Baudeck (Red Rock Health Insurance) for joining us on the committee. The thank yous extend to our volunteers before and during the event: Kealey Baron, Cassidy Domogalla, Nicole Morell, Shay Jackson, Chris Westin, Taylor Slattery, Jeremy Rodorigo, Cassidy Koski, and Lynn Erkelenz.

Thank you, Melissa Schwarze and Ellen Lescarbeau, for your contributions of time and talent to the Annual Dinner and all of our events throughout the year. The Chamber is lucky to have you!

Guest Emcee - Kristen Vake

Kristen Vake is a Chisholm native and proud Iron Ranger! She currently co-anchors the CBS 3 Evening news at 6 & 10 with Edward Moody. When she’s not anchoring the news, Kristen reports on the local mining industry in her weekly Eye On Mining segment.

Thank you, Kristen, for being our emcee for the evening!

ENTREPRENEUR The Mary Mathews Legacy Award recognizes the efforts of local leaders. Candidates must own businesses or contribute to the business sector in the Entrepreneur Fund’s 17-county region in northeast Minnesota, central Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin and be a client of the Entrepreneur Fund in a financial and/or strategic capacity.

Candidates are also assessed on the following criteria:
1. Revenue: The business exemplifies innovation, professionalism and integrity and has shown an increase in gross revenues of at least 10 percent over one year.
2. Jobs: The business fosters a positive, fair and supportive environment for all employees and the business has added at least five new jobs or two FTEs to a community.
3. Community Impact: The business leads the way through reinvestment, community-minded business practices, and for the greater good of the community.
4. Community Leadership: The business serves their community with vision and integrity through innovation, growth, sound business practices, community responsibility and partnerships.

The Entrepreneur Fund presents the Mary Mathews Legacy Award to deserving entrepreneurs throughout the year. Previous recipients include Tom Hanson, owner of the Duluth Grill, OMC Smokehouse and Corktown Deli, Erik and Jessica Lietz, owners of several Iron Range restaurants and Janelle Riley, owner of Syvantis Technologies.

If you are interested in joining any of our 2019 committees, please contact the Hibbing Area Chamber at hibbcocf@hibbing.org or 218-262-3895.
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