

Sweet Grass County Chamber of Commerce 2017 Annual Report



2017 Sweet Grass County Chamber of Commerce End of Year Report

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I. Introduction

The purpose of the Sweet Grass County Chamber of Commerce (the Chamber) is to promote business and commerce in Sweet Grass County through tourism, consumer and merchant education, community events, advertising and other activities. In the midst of changing times, businesses need an advocate. The Chamber works tirelessly to shape policies, ideas, and opportunities that improve the business environment.

2017 was an exciting and successful year for the Sweet Grass County Chamber of Commerce. We hosted several events, oversaw increased visitation at the Big Timber Visitor Information Center, partnered with numerous agencies, effectively fundraised, developed exciting new materials, created successful marketing and buy local campaigns, and supported Chamber members through a variety of methods. I encourage you to read this report to learn more about the Chamber's 2017 accomplishments.

II. Accomplishments

2017 Accomplishments

Hosted or Sponsored: The Inaugural Crazy Mountain Fiber Fest, The 2nd Annual Kickin' The IRS Barn Dance, Sweet Grass Fest, The Halloween Parade, Crazy Mountain Christmas, and the Hometown Holiday Lighted Parade.

Partnered with: Sweet Grass Technical Institute and Crazy Mountain Fabrication to make Christmas decorations. The MSU Jake Jabs College of Business & Entrepreneurship to conduct a SWOT Analysis with the Chamber Board of Directors. Sweet Grass Community Foundation as a participant in the Raw Deal Run Community Fundraiser. Yellowstone Country Montana to host social media influencers from Food Travelist.

Developed: Exciting marketing material including ads in Explore Yellowstone, Raised in The West and The Bozeman Daily Chronicle 2017 Summer Daytripper. The *Give Big, Shop Small* Buy Local Challenge and Ladies Night to Shop. The Buttons Fundraiser to raise money for Christmas decorations. The Lunch and Learn series. An extensive Marketing Plan.

Acquired: A security system for the Visitor Information Center to ensure the safety of staff.

Updated: The Chamber bylaws and the Visit Sweet Grass County Brochure.

Launched: The Visit Big Timber and Sweet Grass County promotional video.

III. Membership

7 Members joined from 1/1/2017 to 12/31/2017. However, 24 Members dropped during that same timeframe. Most of these businesses dropped because they closed or were unable to pay membership dues or they had joined during the first year free promotion but never followed through. Only two members dropped due to dissatisfaction.

Current member satisfaction has been steadily going up. The Chamber has received very positive feedback from current members and engagement has increased. The Chamber board of directors increased from 11 to 14 members and those members have been very active in the organization. Regular Chamber meetings vary in attendance but have seen an overall increase.

Membership growth is a goal for 2018. 2017 was a very busy year in which membership growth was not a high priority. The plan for 2018 is to actively invite all local businesses who are not members to join as well as relevant businesses from neighboring communities. For example, since Big Timber does not have a car dealership it makes sense to invite car dealerships from neighboring areas to join as Sweet Grass residents have a high likelihood of being their customer.

IV. Marketing

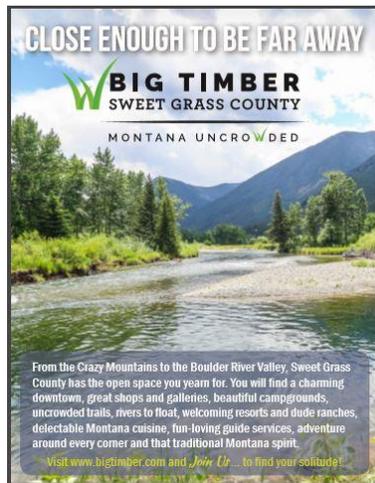
Logo Creation

A logo for tourism marketing was created.



Print Ads

Print ads were published in three magazines: Explore Yellowstone, 2017 Summer Day Tripper, Raised in the West Magazine.



Marketing Video

The Chamber hired a video production company, Sly Dog Productions, to create a 1-minute video promoting the Big Timber area as a place to live and visit. The company spent a full day capturing footage throughout the county that the Chamber has unlimited rights to and use of. The video was distributed on Facebook and is on the Chamber website.

Influencer Trips

The Chamber partnered with Yellowstone Country Montana Inc. to host social media influencers from *Food Travelist*. The influencers stayed at Homestead B&B which featured local food from Pioneer Meats for breakfast. A Chamber representative took them on a guided hike at Natural Bridge with a picnic from The Big Timber Bakery, on a tour of a local ranch showcasing holistic grazing practices, to a tea tasting with the owners of Tumblewood Teas, and to dinner at The Grand Hotel. Sweet Grass County received publicity on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Social Media

The Sweet Grass County Chamber of Commerce Facebook page saw an increase in total page likes over the course of 2017.



The following graph shows the impact the marketing video had on post reach. The video was posted in November which shows a huge spike.

Post Reach

The number of people who had any posts from your Page enter their screen.



Additional Marketing

- Activity Guides: 6,000 printed, distributed throughout Sweet Grass County and visitor information centers throughout Montana and Wyoming
- Pleasure Way Ice Cream Social: Ice cream social hosted by the Chamber thanking the Pleasure Way guests for holding their annual rally in Sweet Grass County
- Chamber Monthly Newsletter: emailed to 192 contacts
- Visitor and relocation packets
- Welcome to my business signs during events
- Event marketing for all Sweet Grass County events (Facebook, website events calendar)
- Continued work with National Forest Service to design new panels for the VIC kiosk
- Staffed a booth at the Spring MEDA conference promoting Sweet Grass County as a vacation destination

V. Website Statistics

The Chamber has put a lot of time and effort into making the Chamber website better and starting tracking performance in December.

December performance for your website vs. previous month

Users

840 ↓ 8%

Sessions

993 ↓ 10.3%

Bounce Rate

62.13% ↓ 0.02%

Average Session Duration

00:01:45 ↑ 11.86%

How did you acquire your users this month?

Percent of Sessions by Channel

Organic Search

68.48%

Direct

23.36%

All other sessions

8.16%



VI. Events

The Chamber hosted six events in 2017: The Inaugural Crazy Mountain Fiber Fest, The 2nd Annual Kickin' The IRS Barn Dance, Sweet Grass Fest, The Halloween Parade, Crazy Mountain Christmas, and the Hometown Holiday Lighted Parade.

Crazy Mountain Fiber Fest was a first-time event held on May 6 – 7. The festival was a fun educational experience for visitors to learn about the fiber industry, sheep culture, the important role of agriculture and how animals contribute to rural economies. The event offered a host of activities, including vendors, classes, and presentations, providing a cumulative festival experience. There were vendors showcasing products such as clothing, quilts, blankets, rugs, looms, spinning wheels and more. There will be workshops on spinning, felting, dying, weaving and more. There was a sheep shearing demonstration as well as tours of Big Timber's historic Wool House and the Crazy Mountain Museum. Attendance was not huge due to it being a first year event but feedback from attendees was very positive.

The 2nd Annual Kickin' The IRS Barn Dance was held on Saturday, April 22 at the Sweet Grass County Fairgrounds. The barn dance saw a drop in attendance this year but had positive feedback from attendees and still made a profit. The band was the same band as the year before, The Pretty Good String Band. The food and drinks were donated by local businesses.

Sweet Grass Fest was held on Saturday, June 24. The festival grew in both attendance and activities. The parade was larger, the car show had more participants, there were more vendors, and the kids area had new additions such as the crash car. This was a very successful year.

The Halloween Parade ran smoothly and was similar to previous years. **Crazy Mountain Christmas** had an increase in vendors and Mrs. Clause joined Mr. Clause. **The Hometown Holiday Lighted Parade** saw an increase in parade floats and activities downtown.

VII. Downtown Beautification

Banners

The Chamber continues to maintain the Join Us banners and add more to additional light poles.

Flags

The Chamber raised money to purchase 8 sets of American and Montana flags for light poles on McLeod St. Additional funds were raised to add more in the summer of 2018.

Christmas Decorations

The Chamber raised money for new downtown Christmas decorations. Eleven snowflakes were commissioned to be built by a local business, Crazy Mountain Fabrication, and Sweet Grass Tech. In addition to the snowflakes lights and a Grinch costume were purchased. The Grinch costume was used at Crazy Mountain Christmas and the Lighted Holiday Parade. Additional funds were raised to purchase more snowflakes and decorations for 2018.

West Exit Trash Cleanup

The Chamber hosted another trash cleanup day at the VIC and west end exit. Turnout was poor in 2017, however, a great amount of work was still completed. Much needed maintenance was done including weeding the welcome sign garden, trimming tree branches, and staining the bench.

VIII. Buy Local Campaign

The Chamber has made a very concerted effort to encourage residents to spend more money within their community. The Chamber hosted the buy local challenge and Girls Night to Shop, administered an extensive Facebook campaign showing the benefits of spending money locally, and provide Chamber Bucks which encourage local spending.

Buy Local Challenge

The first Buy Local Challenge was a huge success. Twenty five businesses participated and every participating business had an increase in sales. The event ran Friday, November 24 (Black Friday/Crazy Mountain Christmas) through Friday, December 1 (The Holiday Lighted Parade). Individuals who purchased a product or service from a participating business were entered into a drawing to win \$100 in Chamber Bucks which could be spent at any of the 100+ businesses who accept Chamber Bucks.

The purpose of the challenge was to create awareness and emphasize the importance of our local independent businesses on our local economy to hopefully shift local consumers out of town retail spending during the busy holiday season to local spending as a way of supporting jobs and boosting communities.

Girls Night to Shop

The first Girls Night to Shop event was put together to encourage people to shop local during the Christmas season. Women were invited to go to any of the nine participating businesses, shop for what they want for Christmas, write those gift ideas on the wish list provided, and give that list to the gift givers in their lives.

IX. Visitor Information Center

There were a total of 2,962 people who stopped at the Big Timber VIC between Memorial Day 2017 and September 30, 2017. In 2016, there were a total of 2,849 people who stopped at the Big Timber VIC between Memorial Day and Labor Day. The Big Timber VIC stayed open longer in 2017 than in 2016, so the though the numbers were up there were more weeks in 2017.

Montana was once again the top visitor by state. Minnesota and Washington took second again this year. Canada jumped up a spot, dropping Colorado down a spot. California, Missouri, Illinois and South Dakota made it on the top 10 list, none of those were not on the list in 2016. Wisconsin, Wyoming, Texas and Florida were on the list in 2016 and did not make the list this year. Oregon stayed steady at number 7.

The Big Timber VIC was open from Memorial Day weekend to September 30 from 10 am to 4 pm Monday through Saturday and 1 pm to 4 pm on Sunday. There was talk of not opening on Sundays in September, but we decided to continue opening that day through the month. Next year we are considering opening at 9 am as the VIC was busy between 9 am and 10 am almost daily. This trend was noticed by the director of the Chamber who was at the VIC most days by 9 am.

A large majority of visitors were on their way to Yellowstone National Park or Glacier National Park. We did seem to have more visitors asking for information about the Sweet Grass County area than in the past. Most of those individuals were looking for camping sites and/or hiking trails. Natural Bridge in the Boulder Valley and hiking in the Crazy Mountains continue to be the most popular destinations. There were also more inquiries about Prairie Dog State Park than in the past. Because it is right off Interstate 90, it is an easy quick stop for people traveling through. The picnic table is also a very popular reason people stop. A lot of travelers are packing lunches to save on traveling costs and our picnic table is easily seen by those stopping for gas. It should be noted that the Big Timber VIC location is ideal for attracting visitors who are passing through as it is right off one of our two exits. The Big Timber VIC has great visibility.

Top 10 Visitors By State:

	State	Number of Visitors
1	Montana	952
2	Minnesota	198
3	Washington	172
4	Canada	145
5	Colorado	119
6	California	115
7	Oregon	81
8	Missouri	79
9	Illinois	69
10	South Dakota	68
	Total	1998

X. Economic Development

ED Building Blocks



Leadership/Civic Development and The Role of Public Policy

The Chamber actively participates in civic development and public policy by

- Attending City Council meetings
- Being on the Economic Development Committee
- Co-hosting events like the Rural Economic Development Summit
- Participating in public policy discussions taking place within the community (i.e. Infrastructure Roundtable with Senator Tester)
- Having the Chamber Executive Director sit on the Yellowstone Country Montana, Inc. board of directors

Quality of Life

The Chamber has worked to increase quality of life by

- Implementing downtown beautification projects

Infrastructure Development

The Chamber has worked towards infrastructure development by

- Supporting the Old High School Committee
- Hosting events like the Small Business Road Show
- Offering a venue for local developers to address zoning concerns

Existing Business Development

The Chamber supports existing business development in the following ways

- Advertising members on the Chamber website
- Increasing tourism to the area which brings in outside money
- Offering a venue for businesses to promote their product/service
- Providing education such as the Lunch & Learns
- Compiling resources for businesses
- Encouraging people to shop local with an extensive buy local campaign
- Hosting ribbon cutting ceremonies for existing businesses
- Hosting Business After Hours for existing businesses

Entrepreneur Development

The Chamber works to increase entrepreneur development by

- Working with local internet providers to increase connectivity
- Offering education opportunities
- Providing business resources
- Providing venues for entrepreneurs to connect with each other

Recruiting New Business

The Chamber has worked to recruit new businesses by

- Hosting a website with relocation information
- Sending letters to Bozeman tech companies inviting them to consider Big Timber as a viable location to move to
- Creating a business relocation brochure

XI. Committees/Representation

The Chamber Executive Director has represented Sweet Grass County and the town of Big Timber by

- Member of Yellowstone Country Montana, Inc. board of directors – currently Vice President
- Member of the following committees
 - Economic Development Committee
 - Farmer’s Market Committee
 - Marketing Committee
- Acting as an ex officio board member of the B Bar T Rodeo Company
- Member of Rural BEAR - the leading Business Expansion And Retention program in Montana
- Attending the Governor’s Conference on Tourism and Business Development
- Attending the MEDA Conference
- Attending the Innovate Montana Symposium
- Participating in an infrastructure round table with Senator Tester
- Attending multiple events as the representative of the Chamber