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CHARLES COUNTY CHAMBER & MARYLAND INDEPENDENT LAUNCH “CHARLES COUNTY STRONG”

May 15, 2020 (La Plata, Maryland) The Board of Directors of the Charles County Chamber of Commerce, along with John Rives, Director of Southern Maryland & DC Military Publications, announce the launch of Charles County Strong, a new resource for Charles County businesses, nonprofits and individuals impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Charles County Strong is designed to embrace the needs of our community and serve as a resource for everyone who wants to share information, find answers, seek help and offer assistance,” according to Bonnie Grady, President & CEO of the Charles County Chamber. “It’s intended to be organic, ever changing, ever growing and totally unique to our region.”

John Rives explained why the newspaper has partnered with the Chamber to introduce Charles County Strong. “The Charles County Chamber and the Maryland Independent are creating a forum to bring together information from a wide variety of sources. The newspaper, along with the Chamber’s website and both organizations’ social media outlets, will serve as repositories of much-needed links and articles on a variety of COVID-19 issues.”

Government agencies and other service providers, those who want to volunteer, anyone who needs help or those who have something to offer to others are invited to visit the Chamber’s website at charlescountychamber.org and to stay plugged into the Maryland Independent at somidnews.com. Both the Chamber and the newspaper will also post news and updates on their respective social media sites.

Tom Blandford, owner of eTrepid and the current Board Chair for the Chamber, explained that the Charles County Chamber is all about helping local businesses and nonprofits. “The

Chamber currently represents 500 members and their 19,000 employees,” he said. “But this is just the tip of the iceberg. There are another 2,000-plus other businesses in Charles who are unaware of what their Chamber and their local newspaper can do in a time of crisis.”

Blandford pointed to the 2002 tornado that damaged or destroyed numerous businesses in the heart of La Plata, noting that both the Chamber and the paper played an active role in helping the community recover and rebuild.

“Newspapers and Chambers are two of the strongest advocates of small businesses, nonprofits and communities. Both provide information, they promote goodwill and they connect those who need help to those who can provide it,” Blandford added.

The Board of Directors of the Charles County Chamber decided to jumpstart the program by offering limited time Charles County Strong memberships at no cost to every Charles County business and nonprofit organization. “These full Chamber memberships will run through August 31, 2020,” said Grady. Every Charles County business and nonprofit is entitled to all the regular benefits the Chamber has to offer, including a dedicated page on the organization’s website and a listing in the online membership directory. “This will create enormous visibility for these new members at a time when it’s needed most, not only on our website, but also on all the major search engines.” New members will also be entitled to receive all member communications, something that’s especially valuable in this great time of need. Other benefits will include opportunities to take part in the Chamber’s virtual events and the ability to post news items, job openings, requests for proposals, press releases, photos and even videos about their business or nonprofit, right on the Chamber’s website and at no cost.

“Charles County Strong has the potential to fill many needs,” said Grady. “Businesses that are impacted by the pandemic can find out about financial assistance programs. Those who are out of work can tap into a variety of resources. Consumers can learn which businesses are open and how they can help support them. Families who need emergency assistance can connect with service providers.”

“Many people and businesses have asked how they can help. Others have expressed a need. Charles County Strong will be the place where everyone can come together as we work to assist and eventually reopen our community”. Grady said the Chamber wants to become “the 4-1-1 for all things COVID-19”. “This will happen,” she said, “by others posting their information on the Chamber’s website and on our social media.”

Grady cited two examples of how help is coming from unexpected sources. She referred to Southern Maryland is Hungry, the Facebook page that has become a huge hit for folks looking for restaurants and carry-outs that are still open for business. She also spoke about the local IT businesses that’s been offering free assistance to companies whose employees have been transitioning to teleworking. “Help is all around us and local Chambers are the ultimate connectors.”

The Charles County Chamber of Commerce is a private, not-for-profit organization of over 500 local businesses and nonprofits. The Chamber provides leadership in supporting and promoting the free enterprise system through business development, education, and sound ethical values for the benefit of its members and the communities of Charles County. Founded in 1956, the Charles County Chamber of Commerce is the largest private business organization in Southern Maryland.

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