

What is The Chamber of Commerce? Bob Thomas, Michigan Association of Chamber Executives

At the heart of the local economy and the backbone of virtually every great community you'll find a chamber of commerce celebrating and promoting the diversity and uniqueness of their community. Chambers of Commerce help form the fabric of America. Their efforts result in business attraction, job creation, improved education, beautification and more. Despite all of this, the question is still often asked, "What is the Chamber of Commerce?"

Technically, chambers of commerce are business associations generally incorporated as a 501(c)(6), that work diligently to improve the economic, cultural, and overall business climate for the areas they serve. They are typically private, not-for-profit corporations. Chambers are governed by a volunteer board of directors and employ professional staff to accomplish their mission. While that is impressive, it is the daily work of chambers that moves communities, the state and this nation forward.

Today's chambers of commerce focus on a broad range of activities and support for both business and the community at large. From community and workforce development initiatives to information dissemination and legislative advocacy, chamber professionals and members work with other talented leaders in business, community and government to create a positive environment and to make the community a better place to work, live and play.

The beauty of chambers of commerce is that they truly embody the spirit of entrepreneurship, ingenuity and innovation of their communities and the businesses they represent; therefore, specific programs, products and services vary by chamber and are tailored specifically to the needs of the local community. These programs often include:

- Business development and growth programs for large and small businesses
- Custom research, local/regional economic forecasts, or other analysis
- One-stop shops for information or services related to starting a business, getting elected to public office or finding a job
- Fighting for pro-business as well as important community relevant legislation and to form public and private alliances

This list goes on. Whether it is economic development, tourism, community events, or those mentioned above the chamber of commerce is the "go to" resource for information. It is the convener of people and a place where things get done. In short, chambers of commerce provide the community leadership necessary to develop the economic well-being of their region.

As you see, chambers of commerce are involved in many facets of the community (sometimes quietly) to help create places we call home. October is Chamber of Commerce month in Michigan. This month is set aside annually to reflect and show our appreciation for the work of many dedicated individuals and organizations across the state.

Now that you have a better sense of what the chamber is, you can better understand the role they play in your community. With this new knowledge, take a moment to stop in and meet your chamber of commerce staff and learn more about the powerful work they do and the contributions they make on behalf of you, local businesses and the community. If you already know them (and chances are you do), drop in, say thanks and tell them how much you appreciate them for their work!

Interested in becoming a Royal Oak Chamber member? Contact Christine Perez Thompson at ChristineP@RoyalOakChamber.com