

# **LOCAL CHAMBER BEST PRACTICES**

**Open Forum  
2003 AGM**



**The Manitoba Chambers  
of Commerce**

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

**Dan Overall, MCC Director of Policy:** Good morning everybody. As you know, the theme of this year's AGM is 'The Company You Keep'. Similarly, when Larry talked about the power of the chamber movement, the first strength he identified was the people that devote their time to the chamber movement. Today this forum on Best Practices is all about tapping into that strength, the power of the company you keep.

Although there is an incredible diversity in the size and location of our local chambers, the challenges each of those chambers face - membership, funding, economic development - are remarkably consistent. That means there are 74 chambers in this province that are coming up with ideas, gaining valuable experience as to what to do, and what not to do, that can help your chamber. Today's forum signals a new commitment by the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce to harness and share this information. As part of this commitment it is my great pleasure to announce some changes to our website.

We have enhanced the portion of our website that is devoted to local chambers. You can access this new area by one of two ways. You can go to the top of the left-hand sidebar where it says 'Who We Are' and a menu will pop up that includes 'Member Chambers'. You will find the new features under 'Member Chambers'. Alternatively, you can go down the left-hand side bar just beneath where it says 'Is Strong' and you will find 'Local Chambers'. The new features are also listed there.

The new features are broken down into three categories: a list of our local chambers, a 'How To' section; and 'Chamber Chat'. The 'How To' section currently features information on 'Directors: Duties, Legal Risks, Legal Liabilities', 'Starting & Operating a Vibrant Local Chamber', 'Sponsoring an MCC Resolution', 'Bidding and Holding An MCC AGM' and 'Best Practices'.

The 'Best Practices' section will feature our 2001 Local Chamber Survey, which provides basic information about the local chambers – how many have staff, how often their Board meets etc. It will also feature our Best Practices Report and a transcript of today's conversation.

The section entitled 'Chamber Chat' provides a forum that will enable you to have electronic conversations with other chambers about the challenges and other issues that will arise during the year where you would like to gain input from your fellow chambers. The conversations will be 'streamed' so that even if you come into the conversation in the middle, you can still see what everybody has said.

Now, we realize that you don't have time to regularly check to see if there is a new posting on the chat room, so we will bring the site to you. Whenever there is a new posting we will advise you in the MCC Weekly Omnibus – our electronic newsletter.

This year's edition of the Best Practices Report, our first, looked at reports of Best Practices from chambers across Canada. Of course, it also features ideas from

Manitoba's chamber movement, specifically the local chambers that responded to our survey. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the local chambers that did respond to our survey. As a token of our appreciation, we will undertake a random draw amongst those chambers. The winner of that draw will have their chamber and their community profiled in a cover page story in an upcoming edition of the Focus. As you know, the Focus has a circulation of 9,500 across the province.

In terms of how you should use the Best Practices report, I know some of you are already doing some of the ideas contained in this report. If you are, don't leave it at that, contact the other chambers that are listed and talk about their experiences. You may learn something that will enhance your activity or, alternatively, you may help them.

As I said, today is about your ideas and your thoughts. So I want to open the discussion up as soon as possible. To get the discussion started I just want to quickly highlight some of the ideas contained in the Best Practices report.

On page 10, at the bottom, the Headingley and District Chamber of Commerce sent in their idea about a 'Gold Membership Fee'. A fairly high percentage of their community are already members, so raising money through new memberships is not much of an option. For this reason they have created Gold Memberships. You pay a bit more for membership but you are acknowledged at their Annual Dinner as a Gold Member and you also receive other extra profile throughout the year.

Advertising can be expensive, so promotion is often a challenge for local chambers, and communities. The Falcon/West Hawk Lakes Chamber of Commerce did a deal with CJOB: if they brought in a certain amount of 'major players' (twenty-second spots), CJOB would allow the chamber to tack on a five-second spot, at a discounted rate, that promoted the community. The 'major players' agree to do it so as to help out the community at large. The initiative really worked. What a clever idea for approaching the challenge of not necessarily having the advertising dollars to promote the community and tagging on the major players in the community who do have the dollars.

The final idea that I would like to highlight before opening it up to a broader discussion comes from our host today, the Portage la Prairie Chamber of Commerce, and that's on page 12 – it's actually the last idea on the page. Now, I don't know if Liz is here, I hope she is or at least someone from the Portage la Prairie Chamber. The idea is a 'Christmas Cheque Program'. It's an extraordinarily unique idea. What they have done is, they are working with their local Credit Union to offer people cheques, essentially lines of credit, that you can then go to your local store and use.

Now, of course, people want to get the cheques because they can essentially access a loan interest free for six months. But the condition is that the cheques require you to go shop at local communities. So, again, there is a 'win win'. Through the Credit Union you are now encouraging people to access money that they wouldn't normally be able to access through this chequing program, and you are also mandating them to buy local.

In speaking to Portage la Prairie, some businesses absolutely swear by this. And, of course, they time it for the Christmas Season which is one of the crucial times during a local community's business season.

Of course, you have to go through the realities and practicalities of the Credit Union formally vetting the people to make sure that they are worthy of that line of credit, but, again, it's a really clever idea. Having gone through 'Best Practices' from across this country, from B.C. to Ontario, and listening to some ideas within our province, I have never come across this idea. Again, this is just one example of what I am saying in terms of the amazing ingenuity that local chambers are using to tackle some of these problems.

Now, does anyone from the Portage la Prairie Chamber want to add to that in terms of how the program is working or actually how you got the idea?

### **THE 'CHRISTMAS CHEQUE PROGRAM':**

**Dennis Brownlee, Portage la Prairie and District Chamber of Commerce:** I cannot speak to how we came up with the idea. I believe, and Irene maybe you can help me, \$450,000 has been approved in loans. What the Chamber does is those cheques can be used in any participating chamber member or any participating business and they have to pay a participation fee and when they accept the cheque they pay a discount fee similar to the credit card and that offsets a portion of the interest expense for the Credit Union. So it is a 'win win' for the Credit Union as it expands their customer base and the people are encouraged to shop in Portage.

**Dan Overall, MCC Director of Policy:** These are just some samples of the ideas that we received. I encourage you review the other ideas in the 'Best Practices' at your leisure. What I would like to do now is focus on actually opening up the discussion, seeing as we have these great minds in the room, to discuss not only necessarily ideas, but if you have a challenge that have you found particularly difficult, by all means, throw that on the table. Given that we have so many leaders from so many chambers from across the province we can discuss it and see what other chambers have been doing in order to meet that challenge. Does anybody want to kick it off?

**Susan Eyolfson, Riverton & District Chamber of Commerce:** Just a quick question on the Christmas Loans Program. We do that too. We call ours the 'Santa Cash Program'. It has been about ten years and it is because of the Credit Union that it works. We are trying to think of something that we can do in the summer, because we find people so quickly leave a small community, you don't want to hear this in the bigger cities, but they will so quickly buy something – the bigger ticket items like lawn furniture, stuff like that. So if anybody has any ideas as to how we can make it work in the summer too, we would love to hear them. Our Credit Union manager thought it was a good idea, but he wants me to do some more work on its first.

**Dennis Brownlee, Portage la Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce:** We are in the second year of a shop local campaign that we carry through the summer. We call it 'License to Shop Portage' and it is an initiative that promotes shopping locally, but it is just a contest for participating businesses to enter into. We have looked at expanding the interest free program for the summer, but our concern was diluting it and losing the impact that we have during the short period that it is on.

**Beth McNabb, Minnedosa & District Chamber of Commerce:** We also have the interest free loan and, again, I think it is the Credit Union that certainly is the source of the success of the program. I have to agree with Dennis' comments, it would be nice to look at a summer program but I would be afraid of it losing its punch if you paralleled it. But, it would also be nice to come up with some type of concept for the summer.

**Dan Overall, MCC Director of Policy:** Susie, if you do try to expand the program for the summer can you keep us abreast in terms of how it goes.

?: Just on the Christmas Cheque program, what denominations are the cheques in? Are they like a cashier's cheque? Can people cash them in?

**Dennis Brownlee, Portage la Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce:** It is a pre-approved line of credit and it can be in any amount up to the approved line of credit. It's not like a cashier's cheque, it's a true cheque drawn on a true line of credit. But you can't cash them in, you can only use them to buy merchandise.

**Pam Hansen, Roblin & District Chamber of Commerce:** We do the same thing. The loans are set anywhere from \$500 to \$1,5000. But we are looking at expanding that this year to businesses like plumbers and in-home reconstruction, that sort of stuff - trying to promote more of our non-retail businesses to join the Chamber and take advantage of the program. That money can be used for anything they want, as long as it is somebody that is participating in the program.

#### **WORKING WITH GOVERNMENT (reps on chamber boards, funding etc.):**

**John Pittman, MCC 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-Chairman:** I would be interested in hearing how some of the local chambers of commerce deal with the prongs of the dilemma about funding coming from their municipal governments, the provincial government, and then have to turn around and lobby. Are there any issues around that, because money is always an issue and it seems you could be biting the hand that feeds you.

**Dan Overall, MCC Director of Policy:** I would also like to expand on that issue. It is actually a very good point. I found, in going through the 'Best Practices', that when it gets to the lobbying issue, a lot of chambers actually have municipal people on their Board – or, at least, have them attend Board meetings. So, if people could not only

discuss the possible conflict of interest issue, but how you actually avoid problems if the municipal authorities are actually on or engaging with your Board.

**Ray Elliot, Russell & District Chamber of Commerce:** We have both the R.M and the Town sit on our monthly Board meetings, and many of the Councilors are also members of the Chamber. Part of the way we see it is we get funding from them, it is a portion of the Business Tax that comes back to us, and we haven't worked to eliminate that because it would be a considerable amount of funding that would potentially disappear. Things aren't always rosy with them, because we are lobbying against them. But I don't think the two parties get to the point where there is a serious conflict in the lobbying even though they do some funding for us because essentially that money is coming out of the Business Tax anyway. So it is money that we put out there and they are kind of giving it back to us.

I think it is a key to have them at those meetings so they know what we're doing and we know what they're doing. Then you sit down like adults and discuss things and occasionally someone storms off and leaves the room. But those are realities. What makes it work for us is continual discussion of everything and putting our differences aside when they have to be put aside.

**Barry Cullen, Brandon Chamber of Commerce:** Up until recently we did have members on the Board that came from the City and Brandon University and, for that matter, our local community colleges. We have since changed that over the last few years so that those positions were removed from our Board because of the conflict that we were having. They were actually voting members within the Chamber so that the discussion was being led in a direction that wasn't necessarily a business direction because of their presence around the table. I mean, they were fine individuals and we really appreciated their advice, and it was great to have the other side of the story, however, we found that it actually diminished our effectiveness when we tried to vote at that table.

We send a member of the Brandon Chamber of Commerce to each one of the city council meetings. Every meeting they have we have a representative there that reports back to our Chamber Board. We also do the same thing with the School Division. We have a meeting with the entire Council once a year and the entire School Board once a year. We are now up to meeting with the School Board three times a year given the problems of taxation and the problems that they are having with the Province where we try to sort out the numbers. We were getting one set of numbers from the Province and one set of numbers from the School Board. Now we actually force them to get into a room together and explain their numbers – that was very interesting.

**Louise Tanguay, Winkler & District Chamber of Commerce:** We have a representative from City Council that sits in on our meetings as a liaison. We normally ask at every monthly meeting if the City has something on the burner and they provide us with a short update on what is happening within the City.

One of the other things that we started quite a few years ago – one of my predecessors started it - is, on a monthly basis, we try to meet with the Mayor for coffee for fifteen or twenty minutes and establish a relationship so that both the City and the Chamber benefit. He will advise us as to what they are working on and we will advise him what our issues are.

**Steve Wiebe, Plum Coulee & District Chamber of Commerce:** Some years ago we had a fair amount of conflict with our Town Council. I think the key was that they had to realize that we are all on the same side, and that we are all trying to build a stronger, better community. Once we got over that hurdle we weren't at odds with them and things started to run a lot smoother.

**Jack Wilson, MCC Vice-Chairman, Capital Region:** I am just curious, how many chambers get funding from their municipality and does that cause conflict if they don't like what you're saying and go to pull your funding?

**Ray Elliot, Russell & District Chamber of Commerce:** When we asked to have the Business Tax eliminated, they said 'Be careful what you ask for, you may get more than you expect.', because if the Business Tax was eliminated they wouldn't fund us, and it would have been interesting trying to get that amount of dollars from our membership.

**Laverne Siemens, Altona & District Chamber of Commerce:** The Altona Chamber has for years received a portion of their funding from a portion of the Business Tax. A couple of years ago the Town had reason to question the effectiveness of the Chamber. So they really made us take a second look at our goals, our objectives, and our long-range plans. And while it probably was never said in so many words, what we doing was justifying our funding. Once we came back with that and gave them a good plan they, in turn, gave us our funding.

**Dan Overall, MCC Director of Policy:** The MCC was looking a putting some plans from local chambers on our website. Because it is a common challenge, periodically chambers will update their plan or they will be called upon to do a plan. Would you mind sending Altona's plan to me?

**Laverne Siemens, Altona & District Chamber of Commerce:** Sure, I can get you some of that.

**Barry Cullen, Brandon Chamber of Commerce:** Just for comparative purposes, Brandon has no business tax and we get absolutely zero money from any level of government.

**George Klassen, MCC Regional Vice-Chairman, Pembina Valley:** In Winkler years ago the Town Council eliminated the Business Tax and we as the business community got together and asked for it to be put back in. We now have a committee that has a representative from City Council on it, we appoint the rest of the members ourselves, and

then we go and assess ourselves how much we want. We have total control over the money and we put it where we want to put it. It's just a matter of there being a collection agency for the business community.

**Dan Overall, MCC Director of Policy:** A classic example of the rebuttal to the stereotype that the chamber movement is just about lowering taxes. We are in fact about building communities. Certainly the tax issue is important, but there is a healthy balance, and few organizations you look at actually shoot for that balance.

## **FUNDING/MARKETING THE CHAMBER:**

### **a) General:**

**Gord Peters, MCC Chairman:** One of my concerns all along has been how we are funded. It is in a poor state the way we are setting up where we try to send out memberships ever year and ask people to buy another \$500, \$1,000 or \$100 membership and try to justify it all the time. It's a lot of work. I relate it to governments and what would happen if each year they had to go and say, 'Can I get that amount of taxes from you this year?', and then, every year, you said 'Explain it to me.' That's what the chambers are facing when you look at it. It's fundamentally flawed.

The other observation I would like to make is it seems to me today that business people and their groups are being called upon to raise millions and millions of dollars for things that typically used to be in the government's domain: hospital foundations, universities and things like that, and the business community responds by willingly donating millions of dollars. Yet, we sit here as a Manitoba Chamber, try to run a \$450,000 budget, and we won't fund ourselves.

To me, what got us here, as business people, was the chamber movement. It's a lot easier to come to Cando and get a check for the University than it is to get something from us for the chamber movement. When you start thinking about it that is a really odd thing. That awareness has to be brought forward.

It may be a 'sell thing' – I think there are a number of people that feel very passionate about the chamber movement that are willing to fund it, same as there are people who are very passionate about providing legacies to the universities that they attended. You go to a university and you're alumni. It's a great game, you graduate and the letters start coming in: 'How's life treating you, if it's going great, how about starting to send us back some?' And that goes on for your life. They've all learnt that, they've all learnt how to do it, and they collect millions in IOU's. Why should the chamber not expect some IOU's back from the entrepreneurs that succeeded over the last twenty-five years? And I am not saying that you don't give institutions like the hospitals and schools anything, it's a matter of a balanced approach. The approach today is unbalanced, and we have to get that balance back.

I really believe the onus is on those people who are successful through business to stop quibbling over what the fees are and volunteering, and somehow come up a formula. We tried over the last two months to develop a legacy fund or something that all levels of chamber can use. I have gone to Canadian Chamber of Commerce meetings and I can tell you that the discussions are exactly the same as at the local level, the provincial level and the national level. We all talk about the same thing.

We were in Vancouver a couple of months ago and the Canadian Chamber, at a \$5 million Budget, wanted to cut out a \$12,000 travel bill for Directors coming to the meeting. Everybody kept saying 'this is wrong', but they kept looking at the expense side of this thing and how to cut that, not at how to grow the other side, the revenue side.

Another observation, I find it humorous looking at it, the Headingley Chamber has 'Gold Members' because they contribute more and they are proud of those people so they celebrate them. Wouldn't it be a novel idea if the governments of the day - if the high taxpayers of the province were 'gold members' - where you got some recognition out of it, rather than being somebody that was looked down on and they wanted to kick out. To me it just makes sense, and everybody knows where the government gets their money from, take the top 20% of the slice - shouldn't we celebrate those individuals?

It's all over what is easy, it's easy to hit the guy at the top, or the guy who is generating the money. We really have to look at ourselves and figure out what we want to celebrate. If someone in the chamber movement gives us some extra money for a membership, they are heroes, and that's the way it should be. Encourage that behavior, that is the behavior we want. And yet, in our governments, we can't do that.

I don't think membership rates are the be all and end all. I go to the concept of university fund raising. You walk out of a university and they really don't ask for money until after ten to fifteen years, after you've been a little bit successful. We get the new business coming into the community and the first thing we do as a chamber of commerce is hand them a bill. Whether it is \$50.00 or \$300.00, I don't think it matters. You have to ask yourself, maybe they deserve a bit of a holiday? Even a young person in the taxation system gets a few breaks.

You also have to look at the cost of your delivery. I know Graham has studied that. We feel, as the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, that any member costs us between \$200 to \$300 in 'real costs' in terms of the services and products they receive. So, if you charging less than that you aren't having cost recovery. Which can be fine, if you have a good reason for that. But you have to be careful, even though you may have a lot of members because your rates are low, if the cost recovery isn't there you will be in trouble.

## **b) Free Memberships**

**Dan Overall, MCC Director of Policy:** Gord, I thought your point that younger people or start-up businesses aren't necessarily in a position to provide fees was interesting. Going through the survey there have been a number of chambers that have experimented with the idea of a temporary membership. I think the most extreme example of that, for want of a better word, was the Assiniboia Chamber. The Assiniboia Chamber tried the broadest initiative where all local businesses received a free one-year membership.

**Jim Forrestell, Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce:** We offered the free membership for one year to every business in our area that we could identify, approximately 3,500 businesses. We had an increase of about 100 businesses the year after that, and that has dropped off to 80. Still, it is a significant increase and most of us felt it was well worth it. There were a few people who thought the cost of doing that, in terms of getting those 3,500 free memberships out, the mailing expense and so on, was considerable. But, overall, as an investment, even if we keep 50 or 60 of those members for three or four years, it will have turned out to be a good deal.

It was certainly easy and it wasn't even our idea, we learned it from Winkler.

**Pam Hansen, Roblin & District Chamber of Commerce:** In Roblin we give out one free membership every year, for the whole year, to the newest business in town. And it works, they come back every year after that. It's been doing well for us.

## **c) Engaging Our Youth:**

**Dan Overall, MCC Director of Policy:** One common challenge relates to the difficulty in finding talent and new blood for the chamber movement. In reviewing the initiatives across the country, as well as some of the stuff from our local chambers, there don't seem to be a lot of initiatives in terms of accessing youth and involving youth in the chamber movement. Are there any local chambers here today that do have initiatives that get youth interested or at least informed about the chamber movement?

**David Hnatiw, Pinawa Chamber of Commerce:** On the issue of youth, yes we have had a number of initiatives trying to get youth involved through youth entrepreneurial programs and we have a lot of our businesses talk to the high school students in the business classes.

**Doug O'Brien, Flin Flon Chamber:** Going back to the issue of youth, of course the school division belongs to our chamber of commerce, but we also invite somebody from the student council to be a member of our Board and they attend our regular meetings and so on. We found that that gave a good feedback to the young people, especially at the high school, as to what the chamber is trying to do and what they are doing to the community. It has worked well for us.

**Pam Hansen, Roblin & District Chamber of Commerce:** What we are looking at tapping into this year is our high school students and seeing what they can bring to the Manitoba business sector. We get feeling that they are an untapped market that is just waiting to happen.

**d) Centralized Marketing Program:**

**Robert Kreis, Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce:** I sat in on the Manitoba Volunteer Sector Initiative. Some of the issues that are surrounding non-profits in terms of their administrative workload, if you will, is mailing. The company that I own is part of an international organization and they have just set up a centralized marketing program with a media company where, if you have a large number of small groups doing mailings to other members or otherwise, you can set up a program with that marketing company that would use your data list.

Essentially they would keep your information on file, your brochures on file, and your marketing material on file, for a web-based application. You can send them the members that you want to contact and they distribute it from there. You are not producing and storing a lot of brochures. You are not having to tie up people doing the mailings themselves, it's done by the company for you, in a 'one of' or a 'multiple of'. That might be something that the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce can look at in terms of providing some efficiencies and some cost reductions, but also freeing up valuable time to do other marketing. And maybe some of the money that is saved can be used to send out more marketing to potential members.

**e) Regional Salespeople:**

**Graham Starmer, MCC President:** One of the things, as the Manitoba Chambers, that we have been looking at since a recent meeting we had in the Pembina Valley was one of our major weaknesses, marketing. We do a lot of good things, we do a lot of positive things for the community, but some businesses and people are unaware of this, even in the communities in which they serve.

We discussed at the Pembina Valley meeting what we could do to assist the local chambers in their marketing endeavors. It became very apparent during those discussions that, of course, there are quite a number of chambers that do not have sales staff, they are managed solely by a volunteer President and Board. These volunteer Presidents also have a business to run, and frequently they are unable to go out and market or to develop interest within their own business community in selling memberships. That was a challenge.

One of the concepts that we came up with was to look at a particular region. We sort of unilaterally chose the Southwest, and we talked to our Southwest Vice-Chairman to see if we could find somebody in the Southwest that was a natural salesperson that might look

at banding the communities within that region and becoming a salesperson for that region. We would then get together with the communities and produce a nice little brochure, very similar to some of the ones that we use in the Provincial chamber, and try to instill in the salesperson some sort of history as to what goes on in the individual communities and in the provincial organization, and then sort of set them loose in the region to assist the individual chamber Presidents in selling memberships. We found that that is where the critical point seems to be, in selling those memberships. A lot of the Boards or Executives on the chambers are just not able to get out and sell memberships within their community.

I would like this opportunity to get some of feedback on that concept. We were looking at a pilot project. We just started in the last three weeks to look at the feasibility of it.

**Susie Eyolfson, Riverton & District Chamber of Commerce:** How would the person that is doing this be paid? If it is by commission, would not what the individual chambers charge for membership become an issue?

**Graham Starmer, MCC President:** If you are charging \$25.00 or \$50.00 for a membership within your community, it becomes problematic for a salesperson to make any money on commission. There is going to have been a lot of discussion amongst the chambers within the region as to whether their rates or costs are appropriate for the services they provide.

#### **f) The MCC Needs To Help The Local Chambers In Marketing:**

**David Hnatiw, Pinawa Chamber of Commerce:** Just a comment on Graham's idea, I would welcome the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce to develop more promotional material so that smaller chambers can take it, bundle it up with their information, and send it out to potential members. Because, as a small chamber, we just don't have the resources nor the time to do a membership drive. It's a lot of work.

Just as an example, I had somebody email me that was interested in the chamber. I didn't really know where they were from, ended up they were from Winnipeg but they were doing business in the Whiteshell. I probably spent two hours of email time, back and forth, trying to convince him to join a chamber. It was tough because I don't always have all the information and it is difficult to pull things from here and there. But if it was all in a package and all ready I could have just sent it out to him saying "Here is the stuff from the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, here's our rates, come join us. This is what we do and this is what we are about." So I would encourage the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce to focus more on the members. If we all had standardized marketing material, even for the larger chambers, I think it would help.

Our membership rate is \$25.00 because we are not a big chamber with any real overheads or anything, and he said "That's it, that's your rate, is that per month or per year?" I got the feeling that he expecting a lot more from our organization. But when an organization

doesn't have any paid staff, you don't have a lot of overhead. On the other hand, you are not visible; you don't do a lot either because it is all volunteer-based.

**Dan Overall, MCC Director of Policy:** David, on your point, would you prefer an electronic format where you can insert stuff and print it yourself or printed material that you insert local information into?

**David Hnatiw, Pinawa Chamber of Commerce:** I think electronic, because the nice thing about electronic is, if it changes in six months, you don't have any printing costs.

**Barb Mathews, Selkirk and District Chamber of Commerce:** If you go with the electronic version that has a lot of color, can you give us the option with plain stuff otherwise we are no going to spend five hours printing one page. Plus, those color print cartridges are expensive.

#### **g) A New Way of Thinking: Marketing the Chamber As A Group of Business Leaders/Mentors**

**Gord Peters, MCC Chairman:** Just picking up on Graham's comments, I would like to get the feeling of the communities. Graham is on that side of the table and says "work on membership"; I'm kind of a believer in coming at it from the other side. I say we get a poster boy on a railway car and charge corporations a \$1,000 a ticket to come spend an evening with Larry McIntosh, riding through downtown Winnipeg. The concept here is you are mentoring youth; you're taking the best practices of an individual that has the skills sets and values and understands the meaning of entrepreneurship. That is what I see in the value of the chamber, that's why I pay for it – quite frankly – and that's what I get out of it.

I think we should look at duplicating that type of scenario. They did a Past Presidents event in Brandon on Thursday night and some of that discussion focused on what 'economic development' is. To me, 'economic development' is grabbing a couple of young kids, taking them home, sitting them on the back porch, serving them a steak and talking to them for two hours.

We looked around the room during our Past Presidents meeting and talked about how many major corporations there are, you know, the big box stores and that, and we have none of them. Our community in Brandon has always been made up of local entrepreneurs. We have had the big ones come in, Maple Leaf and companies like that. But, for a lot of years there have been a lot of businesses that hire five to ten people. I try to practice that, I have three young kids in Brandon that I support, help them with financials, help them with this, and help them with that. And I know a lot of you out here do that. We have to profile that type of work because it's powerful stuff.

I read a while ago that someone in Vancouver or wherever, had the same idea regarding auctions for time spent with people. Successful people would put up their time for a

barbecue or whatever and talk to them for a few hours. Perhaps a young entrepreneur can't afford that, but maybe I will sponsor them. I will put up the money to sponsor the young entrepreneur so they can go talk to the poster boy and find out what made him successful.

If you think about how we can get more memberships, do we pay a commission or do we go from the other side of the coin and lead, and charge for our leadership, and charge those that can afford to pay for that leadership. There are people that are sympathetic to the business cause. Universities and hospitals get money because they approach people that are sympathetic to their cause.

**Barry Cullen, Brandon Chamber of Commerce:** You sit back and you watch Gord, and Gord and I have know each other for quite a few years, and the presentation that he is giving on chamber membership, that is the thing that we should bring together as a package piece. I mean, we are all in this room, and you are preaching to the converted. The new memberships that are trying to justify that \$25, \$50, \$100 or \$200 unfortunately are not in this room so they are not getting that message. If we want to get their buy in we need to use those in the chamber movement who think like Gord.

The other thing is, I am noticing when we get into the room with, say the people from the Manitoba Taxpayers Federation, and they are polished. They come in and they are professional sales people at this point. Now, not everybody in this room sees them as a competitor, I have talked to lots of chamber members in Brandon that hold both memberships. They are, in essence, the same price. In fact the Canadian Taxpayers Federation open ends it to make sure that it is almost like, 'Well, what do you feel the value of our organization should be to you?' and it starts at the 'low ball' value and works its way up. And very rarely is the lowest amount chosen.

I mean, we have a little bit to learn as a provincial chamber – that's where you guys can take the leadership and sort of figure out how we are going to do that. Especially for some of the smaller chambers that do not have the resources to do those pieces on their own.

**Gord Peters, MCC Chairman:** Just quickly, of that fee, half goes to a guy in Calgary. It is like the kid that comes to my door selling chocolates for the school. Of the \$2.00, only 20 cents makes it to the school. I would rather just give the \$2.00 directly to the kid. We should want to avoid the kind of situation that the school is in. I mean, as a chamber movement we can hire salespeople, but it is awfully expensive, and will eat up a lot of the revenue that we would generate.

#### **h) The Need To Brand The Chamber:**

**Dave Angus, Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce:** Picking up on one of Robert's comments, and as someone who is a staff who used to be a volunteer, I think there is a huge amount of confusion about, and I hear this even from our Board members, the way

the chamber actually operates in terms a lack of coordination and consistency which really is funneled from the national chamber on down. It just seems so disjointed. What I think we have an opportunity to do through the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce is provide a lot more coordination and consistency with how we are presenting the chamber.

We, as the Winnipeg Chamber, went through a process where we were trying, and I am doing the process nationally, to look at how we can drive the chamber brand. When you ask people to, in two or three words describe the chamber, you would be hard pressed to a response from the average person. It is very tough to articulate exactly what the chamber is. I think we have a lot to do to drive that two or three word response or even a one-sentence response about what the chamber stands for.

We have been trying at the Winnipeg Chamber, and we would love to coordinate provincially for sure, to really drive the three elements that we think are the reasons why we exist, which is: public policy influence, community leadership and member business support. And all things we do need to be tied to those three icons. I think we have an opportunity to drive that kind of consistency so that all the chambers are presenting a consistent line. If you were a member in Roblin you can expect the same kinds of things from your chamber that you would if you were a member in Winnipeg or Ottawa or wherever.

I just don't think that from a branding standpoint, when it comes to 'the chamber', which is an internationally recognized brand, we have done enough to provide some meat behind what that brand really means. That is where I think there is a lot of need.

#### **i) The Value of Being A Chamber Member:**

**Robert Kreis, Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce:** I am just going to pick up from that with two things. I have a friend who has been approached several times by the Canadian Tax Payers and the comment that he made is that, when you talk to the Canadian Taxpayers, you know exactly what they represent and supposedly what they are lobbying for. The chamber is a little bit more intangible, it's a little bit further down the road in terms of its thinking. I think that is why it is important that we send a very clear message and have a clear understanding of what it is that the chamber does. Then, when we are confronted with the comparison to other business organizations we know what it is that we do, and it becomes more tangible rather than less tangible so that people don't really have to be big thinkers to get it.

The other thing is that we need to have enough confidence to ask what we are worth. There is no point in trying to sell ourselves for a nickel. We are worth a lot more than that. We are worth a great deal of money to every business, every citizen, that is in this province and we can't be afraid to ask for what's fair. So don't start using low membership fees as a means of attracting members, because now you are selling a fee, you are not selling what you are all about. That is very important for us to remember when we are talking about membership: what is it that we are doing and that is worth a lot more than just a few dollars.

**Dan Pona, Morden & District Chamber of Commerce:** We also have some concerns about memberships and how we articulate to our community what the chamber of commerce actually does. For just over a year we have instituted morning breakfast meetings where we invite both members and non-members, and we talk in a very open ended fashion about what more they want to know about the chamber, what things are we doing successfully and what things we are not doing successfully.

The data we collected was very clear. They want to know exactly what the chamber provides for their membership fees. It has been very successful for us and it is something we are going to continue to do. When they ask us, 'What do we get for our membership fees?' the first thing we tell them is 'You get a free breakfast.'

**John Pittman, MCC 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-Chairman:** I really believe that Gord has got the 'hearts and minds' idea that we are at here. The idea is not to sell a membership fee, the idea is to sell what we do and it's damn well worth it. It's not money we are talking about spending here; it's time and effort. It's what Gord talks about when he mentions sitting down with someone on your back stoop, having a steak, and saying to them, 'I'm a member of the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce and here are some of the things I have learned. There is the road of hard knocks and you can chose to make the mistakes that I did or you can chose to follow the smooth road that I have found on my own. Here are some of the keys to my success. One of them is listening to the sages of the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce and the poster boys and getting on with it.'

The value that comes from the discussions with those people is significantly more than the money they will ever put in. For us, the long-term value is what they give back. If you look around the room, how many people that are here and committed to the organization quibble about the fee? They fight with their Boards to make sure it is paid and they pay more because they believe what we are doing is correct, correct for business, correct for community, correct for the province and right on through to the country. That is the message that we are selling as the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce.

It's clear, and you have your three points David. We should all have them rolling off our tongue and we should all be prepared to speak from our heart to somebody who is new and young or someone who is questioning our value to say, 'Look, we have got the formula, but we need you with us to make this work.'

**Brad Ritchie, Thompson Chamber of Commerce:** Touching on what Gord and John have mentioned, and the gentleman from Morden, I get asked that all the time when we do our membership drives and I think 'value' is what is important in terms of getting new members. I can go on and on about Affinity Programs and we have done this and we have done that, but I always end it off with a message of you can get into it what you put into it. I think for most of us in a business organization or in anything in life, inclusion is important, being part of an organization.

If I can offer one piece of advice, for me what has been successful in getting members in Thompson, it's not just saying what they are going to get, but inviting them by saying 'And we want what you offer' and making them part of your group that way.

**Daryl Jackson, MCC Regional Vice-Chairman, Southwest Region:** Two points. I can see problems already with the pilot project we were disusing for the Southwest Region because, in that Southwest, we have Brandon who have 900-plus members. Since I been on the Board they have had two excellent young managers, Lee Jebb and then Scott Dyke at the present, who do a tremendous job for that chamber. So I don't think we have to worry about their membership.

When it comes to the other thirteen or fourteen towns in the Southwest, there is a wide range of membership dues. We are talking about a salesperson on commission, I don't know how we are going to get all those chambers together on the same page with the same fee and make it worthwhile for that salesperson. There is a hurdle there that we are going to have to cross before we go much further.

The other point is about the chamber of commerce, what it does for you and so on. I have been on the Board for four years now and I think the four Chairmen that we have had, Gord Peters, Julie Turenne-Maynard, Larry McIntosh and back to Don Forbes have done a great job of getting their face and the chamber movement out in front of the public with interviews - radio, TV, newspapers, going back to the 1999 spring session of the Legislature and all the labour issues and what have you. I think we are doing a pretty darn good job of telling people who the chamber is.

**Dan Overall, MCC Director of Policy:** Of course, it could be better. I am getting a signal to wrap this up. Thank you very much for exchanging your ideas. Again, today's conversation will be on the website, we will also share it with those chambers that do not have web access.

Please consider this as the beginning of the process. I cannot emphasize this enough; throughout the year we will drop the ball, but let's have this as an ongoing process throughout the year. Don't wait until the AGM, if there are challenges such as certain pages on the website being difficult to print up please let us know and we will do our best to rectify them.

Thank you.