



# LAC LA BICHE & DISTRICT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 2015 ANNUAL REPORT



*McArthur Place, location of the Chamber of Commerce and the Visitor Information Centre*

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## 2014/2015 Board of Directors

**Ron Briscoe** - President

ATB Financial – Business & Agriculture Advisor

**Dr. Mohammad Al-Bekai** - Vice President

Generations Eye Care – Owner

**Charlyn Moore**

Re/Max La Biche Realty – Realtor

**Rick S kyrpan**

Crude Energy Services Inc. – Owner/Operator

**Gail Broadbent-Ludwig**

Broadbent Girard LLP – Owner

**Walter Ryl**

Walter Ryl Accounting - Owner

**Al Harpe**

Ramada Inn & Suites – General Manager

## Vision, Mission, Values

**VISION:** The Lac La Biche & District Chamber of Commerce will be a unified business organization promoting a healthy economy and prosperous community

**MISSION:** We will support and lead the business community by:

- **Advocacy:** being the voice of our members and lobbying for positive change
- Being **Ambassadors** for our members, community and the region.
  - Providing a **Resource Service Center** to members on;
    - “ Information & Networking
    - “ Creative Business Solutions
    - “ Dynamic Thinking

**VALUES:** At our core **The Lac La Biche & District Chamber of Commerce** will operate with Integrity, Trust, Respect, Transparency, we will be Forward-Thinking, Community Minded and Simplistic in our approach to serving our members.

## Message from the President

The Chamber of Commerce is at a crossroads and we need your help.

Since 1922, the Lac La Biche & District Chamber of Commerce has worked hard to be the voice of local business. Think of everything that's happened in this County in those 93 years. All the ups and downs in the economy. All the oil busts and booms. All of the growth and expansion. And more recently, all the tumult around the amalgamation of the town and the County and now the rapid drop in global oil prices.

Through all of it, concerned and passionate entrepreneurs have always stepped up to become board members of the Chamber of Commerce because they wanted to help make the business environment in our region better. But we're only as strong as our membership, and we're limited only by the ambition of our board. The Chamber of Commerce is a remarkable and powerful tool for change so long as a driven and determined board of directors wields it.

That's where you come in. We've accomplished a lot over the last year but we've got a challenging year ahead of us, and the business community needs you. Your ideas. Your passion. Your energy. Your determination to wield this remarkable tool for positive change.

We need you on our board of directors.

The time commitment is manageable – just one meeting per month plus special events as your time permits – but the benefits to you, your business and the County could be tremendous.

For more information, ask any of our directors at our AGM, or you can call our Chamber manager Annette Theron at 780-623-2818 or email her at [manager@lbchamber.ca](mailto:manager@lbchamber.ca), or you can also email me directly at [ron.briscoe@lbchamber.ca](mailto:ron.briscoe@lbchamber.ca).

Help us make the Chamber of Commerce incredible in 2016.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Briscoe', followed by a period.

Ron Briscoe

President, Lac La Biche & District Chamber of Commerce

## 2014/2015 Year in review

One of the key goals of the 2014/2015 the board was to focus on simplifying operations within the organization, whilst still addressing the key challenges to the business community and being an advocate for businesses. Part of simplifying operations included removing the various committees. Instead of having different communities responsible for the organization of the various Chamber activities, the events & activities were the responsibility of the manager, who was assisted by the directors who were best suited for the specific tasks.

In theory this allowed all directors to participate based on their skill-set and schedule, rather than having one person responsible for all events. This also ensures that more than one person is aware of the protocol and history of an event or activity, so that there is continuity even when directors are done with their term. A major part of the Chamber operations, and a key focus, was to once again provide a variety of valuable events, workshops and trainings to members.

### 1. Meetings

At the 2014 AGM it was indicated that there is a need for more **general meetings**. The Chamber's first **quarterly meeting** was held in December and the focus was on the Chamber's proposed activities in 2015, and issues such as the changes in the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. The Chamber also presented their actions regarding this specific issue; this included the cooperation of various Chambers in the region to hire a lobbyist. The **second quarterly meeting** was held in April, and focussed on key issues such as the County's draft Land Use Bylaw (LUB). The Chamber presented their research findings on the issues surrounding the bylaw, as well as their suggestions to resolve the issues surrounding concerns like parking and work camps. More than that, this meeting was an opportunity to ask members which other issues should be addressed in the new bylaws. During this meeting the board also provided feedback to members on the Board-to-Board meeting with the Lac La Biche County Council.

In March the Chamber Board of Directors had met with the **Lac La Biche County Council** for a **Board-to-Board meeting**. This meeting was an opportunity to discuss the Chamber's top five concerns with Council. We used this meeting to discuss our research and suggestions on the LUB in terms of the bylaws affecting Work Camps and Parking. The Chamber also discussed concerns and possible solutions to issues such as Downtown Revitalization, Business Licensing & regional beautification. The discussion included the Chamber's findings on the bylaws of other communities, and the business/growth programs implemented by Bruderheim and Mundare. Other issues touched on by the Chamber in this issue included General Maintenance such as timely manner of snow removal, street sweeping and tree trimming; and new signs needed. A key focus for the Chamber board was that they wanted to discuss the problems with some County policies, and work together so that the issues can be resolved.

The meeting was relatively successful, and the Council indicated that they would be willing to meet more frequently to discuss the issues and possible suggestions to aid our business community.

A general meeting was held in September in partnership with Canadian Natural Resources Limited, with a focus on the future of the oil industry based on the current economic downturn.

## 2. Events

On October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014 the Chamber participated in the organization of the **Lac La Biche Regional Job Fair** which was held in the Bold Centre, Lac La Biche. Various businesses attended and participated in this successful event. If the event is held again in the future the Chamber will once again participate, since it seemed to be a valuable event to our members.

A few weeks later in November the Chamber in partnership with the Downtown Business Group hosted the **Midnight Madness' & Black Friday initiative**, which had a great turnout in spite of the cold weather and snow. The event provided benefit to both the community and participating stores. Another community focussed event was the Culture Days in September. For this week-long event the Chamber in partnership with the Lac La Biche Post and Big Dog organized an event, **Cooking with Culture**. The event involved various restaurants that offered a cultural dish for the weekend of Cultural Days. At the end of the weekend one winner won several gift vouchers to the restaurants. This partnership allowed the Chamber to participate in a valuable community event, whilst bringing value to its members through marketing and bringing in customers to the participating restaurants during and after the event. It is important to build a sense of pride in our community and supporting local business.



Also in partnership with the Lac La Biche Post we hosted 2 **candidates' debates**, one for the provincial elections in April and one for the federal election in October. The forum in April was well attended; however the forum in October was not as well attended. However, with the significance of the elections for the community and businesses alike, it was important for the Chamber to offer these events and to encourage people to vote.

This year for the first time the annual **Evening of Excellence Gala** took place before the AGM. At the gala several awards are presented to local businesses and business professionals in recognition of the hard work and dedication they give to our community. This year's gala tried new format, in which the gala is slightly smaller, but aims to be more affordable and accessible to all members. The new format also allowed the event to be organized at a lower cost, required fewer sponsors and was designed not to detract from non-profit and charitable groups in the community. The gala was sold out and was a great success, and a similar format will be used for 2016.

The Chamber was part of a group that looked at the possibility of hosting a Woman's Conference in Lac La Biche, which would in time have included a trade show. However, the initiative was not successful. The Chamber was also approached to participate in various committees, such as Interagency, Welcoming Communities and the Safety Awareness Society. Although the manager initially attempted to attend some of these committee meetings, it proved to be too many much of a time constraint, especially with the commitment to having the Visitor Information Centre open 8 hours day. The board will have to determine which committees to join, and which committees to support. The Chamber has joined a Steering Committee that is in the progress of organizing EARN (Employee Assistance and Resource Network) events in Lac La Biche once again.



*Candidates' Debate, October*



*Cooking with Culture participants*



### 3. Training & workshops

One of the Chamber's key missions is to be a resource center for members. To fulfill this mission, the Chamber attempted to present more valuable workshop and training opportunities to members in 2015. In January 2015 the Chamber had their first **Emergency Preparedness Workshop**, with presentations from an insurance company, the Lac La Biche County Fire/Rescue Services and the Lac La Biche County RCMP. The speakers aimed to provide information on how to prepare for, respond to and recover from robberies, emergencies and other disasters, based on recent concerns such as the robbery at a Petro Canada Service Station in September 2014. Attendees were also supplied with a free supper supplied by the 2014 local chilli cook-off champion.

In August 2015 we hosted a free **Marketing on a Budget workshop** presented by Kathryn Hotte from the Rural Alberta Business Hub. The workshop was well attended; it was positive to have several entrepreneurs attending who are planning on starting a business in the area. The Chamber's relationships with organizations like Alberta Hub and the Rural Alberta Business Hub enables us to have future workshops such as this one.

The Chamber also promoted and often participated in hosting workshops such as the free information session on **working with low oil prices** in March. The Chamber also participated in workshops like Stewards in Motion (bringing together community groups, industry and municipal representatives to collaborate and work together on environmental projects in the region) and other workshops in the region, as well as surrounding regions. Although the Chamber could not market and distribute all events, we focussed on ensuring any relevant workshop, tradeshow or event is listed on the Chamber's **website**, for those members who might find it interesting. At other times the Chamber aimed to bring value to members by using their services for meetings and events, such as catering. We also put relevant members in touch with possible beneficial situations, such as the Water North Coalition that was connected with restaurants and hotels with their workshop in Lac La Biche.



Emergency Preparedness Workshop



Marketing on a Budget Workshop

## Communications

The 2013-2014 board updated, edited and transferred our new website hosted by ChamberMaster. This year we tried to build on this accomplishment by continuing to update our membership data and online business directory. There was an increase in the use of the business directory by people in and outside people in the Lac La Biche region. However, this feature still relies on members updating their listings. Much the ChamberMaster database system functionality has yet to be utilised. In the future we hope to utilize functions such as the referrals, and member-to-member benefits more.

We have continued to focus on raising the profile of the Chamber in the Lac La Biche area and to make our members understand the value that we bring. We've attempted to do this through increased use of our website, social media engagement on our own Facebook page and carefully-chosen mass emails to our members. The Chamber focussed on limiting the amount of emails being sent out to members; rather aiming to send out fewer but more relevant emails. At the same time the use of social media, especially Facebook, was utilised more to share interesting articles, events and to request participation on polls and votes. This also included more participation in polls and activities of regional, provincial and national Chambers of Commerce; one such an example is the feedback on provincial wage hikes and the nominations for the Annual Evening of Excellence Awards.

## Advocacy

As part of our role as advocate for our members we have attempted to be more vocal on key issues and concerns in 2015. We have also aimed to be more available to the media, whilst making use of press releases. One of our first press releases went hand in hand with a letter to the County on a major issue affecting various members. In November we raised our concern around the issue of snow removal in downtown Main Street. A letter was sent to the County & Council regarding the delay in cleaning up a major snowfall in late November, particularly in the downtown core where businesses and the community in general is put at a disadvantage. A particular concern was the County policies not being implemented as it is set out. Our Chamber president met with County officials to discuss concerns behind the slow snow removal and to suggest possible solutions. The Chamber also took this opportunity to send out a press release with possible solutions to the problem in the future.

Later the month the Chamber directors attended both Land Use Bylaw Open houses in Plamondon and in Lac La Biche. We went with our own research based on what the draft bylaws the County has released, and similar bylaws and requirements in similar sized communities in Alberta. We also contacted local businesses to get their feedback on the bylaws and how they would be affected, since it was found that not only were the bylaws very different from similar sized communities, in some instances the bylaws could be considered as being detrimental to new development. We presented our finding and suggestions at the bylaw meetings and later the year directly to the Council in a board-to-board meeting. The manager often attended the County Council meetings, when there was a discussion on other issues that could potentially impact the business community.

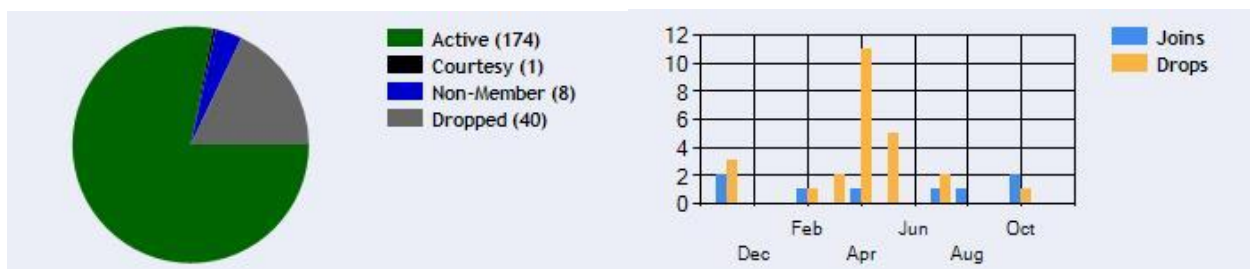
Since the Chamber president tried to be more available to members and the media, he was often contacted on issues such as the low oil prices, the new provincial budget, and moving of the Pow Wow festivities. In 2015 the Lac La Biche Post had 28 articles featuring the Lac La Biche Chamber, which is up significantly from previous years. The focus was often also more positive than previous years, and the Chamber was contacted more regularly to present the Chamber & members views on certain issues. The Chamber was also contacted for an article by the Edmonton Journal for a article on how the low crude oil prices are affecting the region.

## Membership Update

In January a revised membership package was sent out to existing and possible new Chamber members. The new package included several of the benefits to being a Chamber member, including the Chamber Group Insurance Plan and discounted costs of doing business. It also included a sponsorship package for the 2015 Evening of Excellence to allow businesses to budget sponsorships early on. The Chamber manager followed up with several businesses to update business listings and remove businesses who no longer wish to be members or that no longer exist. In 2016 the goal is to continue updating the members' information on the ChamberMaster system, so that we can use the system and its features more extensively. More importantly, this will ensure proper billing and that the correct information appear on the Chamber's online business directory.

In 2015 we had a 28.75% in membership growth, and removed 20 inactive members, bringing the membership to 175. Several businesses indicated interest in joining the Chamber, however they never committed. In the next year we will ensure that benefits of belonging to the Chamber are empathised more clearly, and that non-members have to pay an entrance fee to join in any meeting, workshop or event. In the past the Chamber attempted to bring in new members by making events accessible to all, however members will receive preference in the future.

We will keep informing members about the membership benefits and aim to improve membership engagement. Membership coordination, retention and increases in membership are necessary for resources and the credibility of the Chamber. For that reason we encourage members to give us feedback and recommendations, so that we can provide increased value to all Chamber members.



## Moving forward

At this time several of the current directors have finished their term with the Chamber and in accordance with the bylaws new directors should be brought in. We hope that the selection of about eight new Directors, in accordance with the Chamber bylaws, will bring in new experience, knowledge and ideas to keep the Chamber moving forward. New directors will also enable the Chamber to focus on a wider group of business interests and needs.

Ideally the Chamber will be able to focus on ways to help our members in what seems to be another financially difficult year ahead. This will include acting as a resource center and providing valuable advocacy. However, the new direction of the Chamber should and will be based on the needs of their members, which will ultimately be in line with the Chamber's vision of promoting a healthy economy and prosperous community based on the current business community challenges and opportunities. For that purpose members are encouraged to contact the Chamber manager or directors directly, or to attend general meetings where they can raise their concerns and suggestions.