

2020 Year in Review

2020 was a year of change and pivoting…

Our Vision is to be a premier driving force for business and community prosperity in Central VA.

Our Mission is an organization of community leaders working together to serve the interests of our members by providing programs and services, which improve the economic vitality of our community.

We have been in business since 1939 for the Bedford Business Community, now 82 years of service! We are here to serve and make sure that our businesses have what they need to grow and prosper.

When we started the year in 2020, we had great expectations of really getting into our full stride and momentum because we had just come out of 2019 and our focus had been on cleaning up our AR and getting our events and procedures in order to start flying in 2020. We had planned on making some needed changes in a different direction but we did not know what changes were going to be needed until later. Like everyone, we did not know what was coming and then COVID-19 hit. We had to move fast and change everything we were focused on like events and become a communications center and hub for our businesses in order to receive the needed information on where to go for their financial assistance and advice. We rose to the challenge and created the webinar series Connect 40. We had our special guest speakers on to talk about HR information, tax information, financial aid, job assistance, marketing in a crisis and much more. Each week we would have our panel on from our local businesses to talk about all these subjects and give our business owners a chance to ask questions.

We, as a Chamber, changed and evolved and did what our business had to do and that was cut expenses, furlough some staff, close offices, and do everything that we could possibly do to help and assist our businesses in their time of need. We did as you should do and put on our oxygen mask when the plane is going down so you can help someone else,….and in this case – help others and their business to survive.

By doing so, we wanted to still offer events in order to help our businesses market what they needed, so we began by keeping all of our events on the calendar except for one at the schools due to schools being closed to public. We moved most events outdoors and our Annual Dinner was pivoted to an Annual Awards Show produced by WFXR and put out to honor our Excellence in Business Award Winners for 2020.

We had a few wins for 2020 and one was being able to award our businesses that won the Excellence in Business Awards.

They were as follows:

Our Winners were in 7 categories –

Non- Profit of the Year – Bedford YMCA

Small Business of the Year – Beale’s Beer

Large Business of the Year- Wooldridge Heating Air & Electric

Agri- Business of the Year- Brook Hill Farm

Citizen of the Year- Sissy Parker – Centra Hospice

Outstanding Service Award – Forest Fire Dept, Bedford County First Responders Fire & Rescue, Bedford Fire Dept

New Awards – Rising Star – Business of the Year – Simply Vanilla Gourmet Cheesecake – Jessica Kercher

Another win for 2020 was our graduating class of 2020 from Leadership Bedford with our Certified Leadership John Maxwell leader, Monique Minnick with 15 students completing the course with flying colors. What started out as our first class on a team building course at the Y, where we learned from day 1 how to act in a crisis when one man is down, and in this case, it was a woman on a course that broke her ankle. We had to quickly go into motion and come to her aid and get her help expeditiously. This class training was invaluable. I was glad that I was able to take the class along with our students and graduate with them. I am looking forward to our next Leadership Class, as we will be celebrating our 25th year with our Leadership program. We will be adding some “extra surprises” into this session because of this special year!

We were able to host our 8 Big Events: including Chamber Day at the Capitol, Legislative Wrap Up, Summer Job Fair – Outdoors, Annual Business Expo -Outdoors, Speed Networking, Annual Awards, Monster Mash 5 K, and Christmas Market.

The theme for 2020 was that we were able to give more with less and still provide the services and programs that were needed. We rose to the challenge to meet our business’s needs.

We hosted webinars and created a new website for our Chamber in 2020 during COVID. We gave away not one, but 3 scholarships from our Foundation to 3 wonderful students attending VA Tech.

We did more with less for 2020 and this was only done by the help from our Board, Ambassadors and Staff that never stopped and all became essential workers overnight.

We never worked from home for any length of time, other than a few days here and there because of internet issues. We found that we needed to be available for our businesses during this time at the office as we were more efficient.

We continued our community visibility with our partnerships with 3 newspapers. Lynchburg News, Bedford Bulletin and the SML Eagle.

Our big win was a toss up between our new website and our Annual Membership Guide that went above and beyond to produce more content than ever before in previous years.

We still held many ribbon cuttings and held 7 Networking Before 9 meetings – now called Align Before 9 and 7 Business After Hours – now called – Business Connect @ 4.

We held 78 Leads Group Meetings with 3 groups generating leads for each member.

We gained 74 members for the year.

We partnered with more organizations for strength including the Farmer’s Market, Bedford Town Economic Development, Bedford County Economic Development, VA West Business & Legislative Coalition, Small Business Development Center, VA Career Works, Virginia Chamber, US Chamber of Commerce, BFRRI and the Bedford County Sheriff’s Dept for business trainings for protection and self -defense, just to name a few.

We did more with less and were happy to serve the entire region of businesses in the midst of a pandemic and health crisis. We will continue to be here to make a difference and to provide the services needed no matter what circumstances arise.

We may buy more first aid kits, hand sanitizer, along with toilet paper to be prepared in the future, but we will prevail by planning to win for our businesses! We are here to serve and are excited about the future of business in Bedford! We are grateful to all of our businesses who supported us, our Board, our partners and our staff, because without you, we could not accomplish any of what we do every day.

You help us to succeed.

We are Certain and Grateful for Better Days Ahead!

We are here for you!

We look forward to serving you throughout 2021!

Wende Gaylor

President/CEO

Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce