On Thursday, January 23, 2025, we celebrated our 56th Annual Meeting and Recognition Awards for the Northfield Area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism!

2024 was an incredible year of growth, connection, and community impact. Let me start by expressing my gratitude to our stakeholder members who support and believe in Northfield. A special thank you to Merchants Bank, Community Resource Bank, Sol IS Technologies, Neuger, Rebound Partners, The City of Northfield, NCC Builders and our newest stakeholder who joined us on Tuesday - Aurora Pharmaceutical.

Our stakeholders believe in our community, and they trust the powerful connections and opportunities that the Chamber creates for businesses, both large and small. We are very grateful for them.
We are also grateful for our Leadership-level members: Carlton College, Post Consumer Brands, Saint Olaf College, Hometown Credit Union, and Wings Credit Union.

This year, we've achieved remarkable milestones. First and foremost, we provided our dedicated chamber staff a 10% raise, bringing them into the competitive market. They have the skills, the dedication and the expertise to provide the valuable services needed for a successful chamber of commerce. I'd like to thank the board again, for understanding the value of investing our team's professional development and recognizing their contributions to our organization's success.
Though, if I could truly pay them what they're worth, I'd give them each $1,000,000 …. in chamber bucks of course!! 😊

We hosted 90 events this year—networking, educational, and informational; We hosted 4 membership luncheons, 5 signature events; We toured the state capital with our leadership group. We had 19 ribbon cuttings and are blessed to see new businesses and milestone anniversaries being achieved!

Our Leadership Northfield Program is now in its fourth year, and we'll graduate another 15 students in May. This program has been transformative, it is designed to cultivate local skilled professionals who can drive our community growth. These sessions enhance participants' leadership qualities, foster collaboration, innovation and effective decision-making. It gives students the opportunity to see Northfield from the inside out, as well as

provide in depth leadership training on topics such as communication, personal assessments, civic opportunities, education, economic development, government, law and justice, arts, history, culture and diversity. We are now taking applications for our 2025-26 cohort.

Workforce development has been our cornerstone in 2024. If you were at the 2024 dinner, you will recall Kim Purscell introducing workforce development efforts to Northfield. Together, Kim, Workforce development Inc; Mark Ensrud (Northfield High School guidance counselor) and our Chamber collaborated to enhance workforce efforts in the high school and these efforts are soaring! The high school has a part-time Workforce Development Inc employee who connect students to local career pathways right here in Northfield. We've conducted three local workforce tours in 2024. The first tour was a smorgasbord of industries and included 40 students who were unsure of their plans after they graduated from high school; the second tour had a focus on healthcare and explored 8 different local health care opportunities with 40 students; and the third tour was focused on manufacturing and STEM opportunities, again with 40 high school students. The purpose of these exploration opportunities is to educate the students about their options in Northfield following graduation from high school. We will be hosting a community wide meeting in

We've built connections with numerous local businesses in the area of industry and manufacturing: Cardinal Glass, Engage Print, Mechanical Systems Inc, Post Consumer Brands, Aurora Pharmaceutical, Above and Beyond CDL Driving School, and Better Air HVAC. In healthcare, we're creating career pathways with Allina Clinic, Northfield Hospital and Clinic, Minnesota Orthodontics, River Valley Eye Professionals, Laura Baker Services Association, Haugen Chiropractic, Cannon River Acupuncture, Three Links Health Services and Northfield Hospital EMT's.
Let me know if you'd like to be included in this initiative!

Be Local Buy Local: On the retail front, we gave away a grand at The Grand in May. And we plan to do it again this year! Watch, join, sponsor Girls Nite Out on Friday, May 9!
We organized our first community-wide Crazy Days and had participants from over 20 businesses off Division! We organized Winter Walk, drawing over 3,000 people downtown. We did not beat last year's attendance but Mother Nature is hard to compete with!

If you've walked downtown the past few years, you'll notice the beautiful cross walk cobblestones starting to deteriorate and unfortunately become a hazard. Those cobblestones were going to be a part of the Bridge Square project. But those cobble stones could not be put off. Because of the effective communication from our retail committee and the reception of the city staff, the dangerous cobblestones at the intersections have been upgraded and safely redone.

Candidate forums: With the help of our Board Chair, Laura Stelter, and KYMN's News Director, Logan Wells, **we hosted our first two candidate forums**. Our Northfield records showed there were thousands of views following the live forums.

Kyle and I are working with the city staff, the EDA and Friends of Downtown Northfield surveying businesses about their experience with the community and their aspirations for future growth. Our goals are to help solve immediate business concerns, build community capacity to sustain growth and development; to develop and foster relationships with existing businesses and to improve local businesses' ability to compete regionally and nationally and beyond. Please let me know if you would like to participate in the survey and please say yes, if we call you to set a survey date!

Our partnerships with local colleges have been transformative. Both Carlton and Saint Olaf have new leadership—Dr. Rundall Singer and Dr. Byerly—who are committed to community collaboration. We have representatives on our Chamber board, we have participated in move-in weekend resource fairs, and even worked with St Olaf's marketing class which helped grow our own chamber Instagram following by 20%. Our retailers have just been invited to host pop-up shops in Buntrock Commons, a win/win opportunity! Let me know if you would like more information about these St. Olaf pop-up opportunities.

And I'd like to share with you our new board members for 2025:
Alex Baraniak – Rebound Partners
Cathy Carlson – Carleton College
Michael Kyel – St Olaf College
Jonny Weaver – Jonny Weaver Storytelling

I'm looking forward to working with these 4 individuals! Thank you for agreeing to serve as board members.

Looking ahead to 2025, we have ambitious initiatives:

1. **DEI and Workforce Efforts:** A greater focus on DEI and workforce efforts. Chau Truong, owner of Tin Tea is taking the lead on this, aiming to dismantle systemic barriers and amplify diverse voices, transforming our workforce and economic landscape. The Chamber is committed to help inform and help build an inclusive future where every community member has equitable access to opportunity. If you would like to join us in these efforts, please let me know.
2. **HR Network for Small Businesses:** This is a free, comprehensive resource for local businesses without dedicated HR staff. You can access expert guidance on state and federal employment laws, participate in interactive Q&A sessions, and leverage up-to-date compliance resources—all designed to simplify HR management and empower small business owners with critical workforce knowledge. Again, if your business is interested in receiving communications regarding the HR network please contact me.
3. **Women in Business Network:** We are designing a Women in Business Network with a focus collective expertise, fostering mentorship, inspiration, and creating powerful professional connections. We provide a collaborative platform for women entrepreneurs and professionals to share insights, overcome challenges, and accelerate career growth through peer support, skill development, and strategic networking opportunities. Our first step is determining a set day/time for these ongoing gatherings.
4. **Chamber Forums**: Connecting local businesses directly with city leaders to discuss budgets, expansion codes, and collaborative opportunities. Our forums aim to provide access to critical municipal insights—connecting local businesses directly with city leaders. Engage with decision-makers, gain comprehensive understanding of city budgets, navigate expansion codes, and collaborate effectively with city engineers. These sessions are your strategic platform for informed business development and municipal engagement. Our first forum will be a meet-n-greet with Mayor Zweifel at the end of February. Stay tuned.

Speaking of vibrant and thriving businesses and people, let's get on to our awards:

This year's nominations for Businessperson of the Year include: Jim Westlund – Knecht's Nursery and Landscape; Jennifer Bailey – Vintage Etc; Amy Peterson – Owner of Monarch and The Measuring Cup; Greg Storlie and Christopher Hentges – Owner – Storlie and Hentges Real Estate Group/Edina; Adam Favro – owner Bridge Square Barbers; Tracie Vranich – Owner Chapel Brewing; Malcolm Watt – Owner Junk Truck MN; Noah Hoyer – employee Post Consumer Brands

This year's Businessperson of the Year is Elizabeth Spaulding, owner Soulstice Boutique! Congratulations!

2025 nominations for Business of the Year:
Northfield Ace Hardware; Trekk Properties; Vintage Etc; Gong Loco; Fine Fettle; Witt Brothers; Rebound Partners; Post Consumer Brands; Reunion

This year's Business of the Year is Petalina Mercantile! Congratulations!

Let's move on to Hospitality.
Rachel and I are lucky enough to be able to promote Northfield to visitors. What a great job! This town literally sells itself! We just help propel it forward! And sometimes those opportunities for coverage comes in unexpected packages!

**In April, Money.com voted Northfield Best 50 Places to Live in the US. And I quote: "It isn't just about numbers. Northfield MN was one of 50 cities and towns that offer affordability, good schools and strong job markets. But more than that, these are places with a palpable spirit, nurtured and sustained by engaged citizens and receptive public officials." I didn't make that up. Money.com's methodology can be found on their website. This is a tremendous honor! Congratulations to all of you, especially our front-line workers, who make everyday life here pleasant, warm and welcoming.

**I just received an email from Brad Ness, chair of our Tourism Advisory Board saying that according to WorldAtlas publication, Northfield MN was top 7 safest towns in Minnesota for senior living! I'm not surprised!

**Who remembers December 12, 2024? Besides being my birthday, was the day that someone cut down the magical tree that was decorated for Winter Walk on Bridge Square. It was a clean cut and it could have been a real downer, ultimately brought warmth, caring and unity to our festival! Although it was not a ploy set up to bring statewide coverage to Northfield… We caught the attention of the Minneapolis Star Tribune, KARE 11, Bring Me the News, and even the Alexandria newspaper posted the story!!! It turned out to be a heartwarming story about a community that was not going to let that grinch-like act ruin our holiday spirit!

**And just today, I read in WorldAtlas that Northfield was ranked in the 8 Best MN Towns for a Weekend Trip! It says we are a destination packed with charming river, cultural, historical and natural delights, we offer the perfect weekend getaway!

NOW

Hospitality awards!
We recognized many front-line workers who were nominated by their peers or employers for their exceptional service, attention to detail and their drive to make Northfield the best place to visit. There are 3 categories to celebrate: Attractions, Lodging and Restaurant.
The nominations include these fantastic individuals:
Adrian Gomez from Gran Plaza; Chelsey Weiland from Country Inn and Suites; Todd Harvey – Fireside Orchard; Sarah Spaulding – The HideAway Vault; Joy Feilen – The HideAway Coffeehouse and Winebar; Jorge Peralta – Perkins; Hanna Meuller – Tin Tea; Shawn and Gayle Lorence – Lorence Berry Farm; Chad and Colleen Almen – Windy Willow Farm; Beth DeMann Sannes – Northfield Golf Club; Elizabeth Sanberg – The Grand Event Center; Max Heil – Reunion; Tyler Dickerson – Fielder's Choice

For 2025 Best Attractions goes to Windy Willow Farms
For 2025 Best Lodging award goes to Chelsey Weiland – Country Inn and Suites
For 2025 Best Restaurant – Sarah Spaulding – The HideAway Vault

Our evening ended with our keynote speaker, Steve Grove, Publisher and CEO of the MN Star Tribune. He shared his vision for the publication, and his love of Northfield, and his passion for his work! Well done, Steve.

And well done YOU, if you've read this far. I appreciate YOU, your support, your business and your dedication to the Chamber!

Jane Bartho