



Ignite 2018 Conference

Our inaugural **Ignite 2018** Conference held Tuesday, April 3, laid a strong foundation for the Chamber to build upon. The vast majority of the feedback so far, has been positive.

We unveiled a new name, new format, new features and new partners that provided us the ability to create a conference atmosphere where area experts spoke on a crucial issues facing our employers, while still dedicating space for a businesses to promote themselves, network with other businesses as well as seek hiring opportunities.

Our new feature, a five-part speaker series, focused on workforce issues because the need for skilled workforce dominates conversations I am involved with across Maine.



ESL Residents - An Untapped Resource

Olesya Shkut, HR Generalist for Growers Express, Biddeford

The topics included: English as a Second Language - An Untapped Resource, Retaining & Recruiting Volunteers, Thrive in a Multigenerational Workplace, Cultivating Internships, and Enriching Community Transportation.

All these subjects are areas we need to have dialogue on and do strategic planning so that the Biddeford+Saco Region is seen as attractive and progressive to the workforce we need and desire.

The Chamber has been focused on workforce for more than two years, forming a 50-member workforce/education committee.

One of the early goals developed by the committee was to better connect the business community with the educational community throughout the region. The committee has organized career fairs, promoted internships and job shadowing as ways of enhancing everyone's knowledge of the career opportunities in our area.



Ignite 2018 was the Chamber's attempt to shift away from its 13 years of hosting a business expo in the Fall. We listened to feedback from expo attendees and our members who suggested that shifting the date of the event to Spring would help our hospitality and tourism businesses find much needed labor.

The Chamber felt that it was our duty to our members to include a job fair segment and encourage job seekers to attend. We reached out to local schools including colleges and universities. We reached out to adult ed and employment services. We partnered with the Biddeford School system, the Biddeford Regional Center of Technology and the York County Career Center.

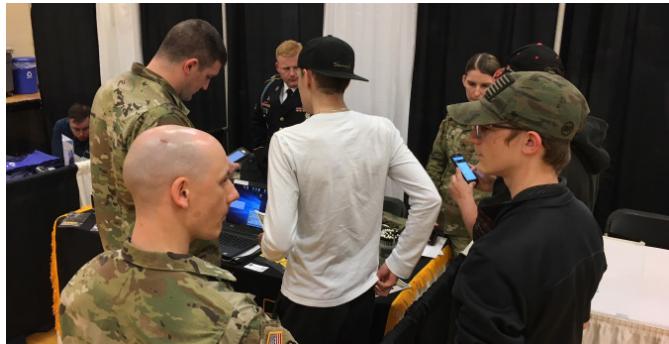
A core goal of this collaborative effort was to bring students from across the area, who potentially

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could be entering the workforce, to the event and have them experience a very well-rounded conference where they could meet local businesses and hear guest speakers.

And finally, the trade show portion of the event was designed to highlight the diversity of businesses that operate in our communities. Exposing the students and the public to the business community is a great way to build relationships.

How many times have we heard the saying, "All business starts with a relationship?" One-on-one conversations lead to a greater understanding of what service can be provided, what products are made and sold, what there is to do for fun and where to get a great meal to name a few.



We embrace the change required to expand this event into something more professional, more engaging and more beneficial to our members. We feel confident that the new format was great and as we look ahead, enhancing the conference style will be key as we address important issues impacting our communities.



I want to thank everyone who took the time to play a role in the event.

Thank you to our speakers. Thank you to our volunteers who always are willing to lend a helping hand. Thank you to the generous donations of food from Subway, Portland Pie and Aroma Joe's.

Thank You to the Chamber team who put in many hours, made hundreds of phone calls, sent hundreds of emails and made the event as good as it could be.

Thank You to the Center of Technology for working closely with us and making it come together. Thank You to the Biddeford School System leadership for allowing us to hold the event at Tiger Gym and to make many accommodations for the set up and take down of the event.



Thank You to the York County Career Center for helping spread the word to a larger non-chamber member business community.

Thank You to everyone who participated for making the day as wonderful as it could possibly be.

The Chamber will continue to focus on workforce issues while promoting our region and its businesses.

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Years Strong!