

Harbor Happenings Chamber Newsletter Interview with incoming Board Chairman Michael Kernicki

Michael Kernicki will be installed as the Chairman Harbor Springs Chamber Board of Directors at the chamber's Annual Meeting on January 21st. Here is the full interview conducted via email. Excerpts were published in the January 7th Harbor Happenings newsletter.

Q: You just retired from True North Golf Club. Tell us a bit about what you are doing.

I was the General Manager and Director of Golf. We have grown successfully and added over 80 new members in the past 24 months. I felt it was time to hand over the reins to some very capable people, so I could spend more time with my family. The owners have asked me to continue to handle Membership, so I am now the Membership Director and Director of Golf Emeritus. I'll be playing more golf with my son Cooper!

Plus, I have founded a consulting company with three 'icons' of the Golf Industry called Golf Guidance Group. We help private golf and country clubs with strategic direction and represent dynamic, innovative companies that can ensure successful operations for these clubs. www.golfguidancegroup.com

Q: As Vice Chair of the Chamber Board you were integral in the hiring process of Bonnie Kulp as the new Executive Director of the Chamber, and then the Pandemic hit. Give us your thoughts on the past 10 months?

The past year has been interesting to say the least. We have a strong Executive Committee and along with the Board we had no idea what the future would be. The cancelling of events, shutdown of businesses, and the immediate need to hire an Executive Director.... It all seemed unreal. However, in the search process, it was crystal clear to the Executive Committee that Bonnie was an outstanding choice. Actually, the Pandemic helped the process because Bonnie needed some time to get her affairs in order before starting with the Chamber. The issues caused by the Pandemic (cancelling Chamber events) gave us both that needed time. We knew we were in capable hands with Angie Savard, our Administrative Assistant, and the advice of Jim Baumann, who had served in the past as an Interim Director. I believe Angie's idea for the "Support Small Business Auction" last Spring turned out to be a welcome success for local business during that uncertain time. Frankly, it was a home run!

Bonnie has been a blessing to the Chamber as well as the Harbor Springs Community. When someone is passionate about their job, they never feel like it's a job. Bonnie has that passion. Her ideas to help local businesses, to help replace some Chamber revenue since events were cancelled, and her warm and welcoming personality was just perfect for what everyone needed in 2020! I know our Chamber and the Community are better off since Bonnie came to town. I know the Chamber Board shares my enthusiasm for the future with her at the helm.

Q: What are your thoughts on your Board and leading the Chamber forward?

I am honored to Chair the Board and follow the outstanding leadership of the past Chairpersons. There is no question that it is easier when you have a Director like Bonnie Kulp. As for the Board, we have some really good thinkers who offer a unique perspective to what we are here for. I was very pleased to see several individuals that were interested in joining the Board and I look forward to working closely with our four new Board Members, all of which were outstanding candidates. The Chamber is in a very good position!

The Chamber's role is to assist commerce (all our local businesses) as best we can and play a significant role in enhancing our Community. Everyone knows our "All American" city is unique and wonderful. We have excellent leadership at the City level, DDA, Historical Museum, Harbor Inc., etc., and together with the Chamber I believe we all work towards common goals. Plus, I believe our relationship with the Petoskey Chamber is stronger now more than ever.

I must admit I am concerned with the number of storefronts downtown that are unoccupied and there is a possibility of more. It seems to me that the long-term private owners of these buildings may need to get a bit more creative financially to allow new business to enter our city. These open storefronts need to be filled with quality businesses to preserve the commerce side of the equation and enhance the community.

Plus, no one knows the total outcome of how badly affected financially our local businesses have been hurt by the issues caused by the Pandemic. We will be here to support them as best we can and try to think outside the box to offer whatever new ideas as a community we can give to assist in their recovery.

I know Bonnie Kulp and the entire Board of the Chamber will be front and center in the promotion of new business owners and all businesses within the community. With any luck when the summer season is about to begin, we can be more normal again in

Harbor Springs. If so, the 4th of July Parade and Fireworks will return, and hopefully businesses will recover more strongly than ever.

I would like nothing better than to have our Annual Harbor Stars event this fall to celebrate all those in our community who deserve recognition. We need a celebration this year more than ever!