

Getting engaged and making your voice heard

During the past several weeks, I've had the opportunity to meet face-to-face with numerous business leaders. During these conversations, it's been shared that nearly every industry whether it be healthcare, manufacturing, automotive, trades, education, childcare, police force, hospitality, or retail; they're all experiencing a labor shortage. At our most recent chamber luncheon, President and CEO Mike Phelps shared that there are 200 job openings at Ridgeview. In addition, a manufacturing company shared that they recently had a brief moment of staffing relief by having employees back after high covid cases, only to once again be challenged with supply chain issues. Furthermore, there's uneasiness in the recent global and humanitarian crisis that will have impacts on our businesses as well. While difficult issues continue to emerge, sharing your stories matters to us.

Advocating for MN UI Trust Fund relief

We take these real-life cases to our elected leaders to advocate for issues that are important to your business at all levels. For example, the Waconia Chamber of Commerce is part of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce federation group. As part of this group, we've been advocating for our legislators to pass a bill that provides the \$2.73 billion needed to restore the Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund by March 15. The state currently has a \$9.5 billion surplus. The bill has been passed in the Senate (thank you Senator Coleman for your vote) and now we're urging the House of Representatives to also pass a clean bill in order to avoid double digit UI payroll tax increases. Thirty-one other states across the country have repaid unemployment surplus dollars, taking the burden of massive payroll tax increases off of our employers in our community.

Advocating locally for community connection and CTE course funding

At a more local level, our Business Education Network group presented to the ISD110 school board this past Monday evening. The group is composed of business leaders in the manufacturing and trades industry. The purpose was to gain support and express how important the role of the superintendent is not only within the district, but with our business community and community at large. We emphasized the value of Career &

Technical Education (CTE) courses and business-education partnerships in the district. These partnerships are not only valuable for students' future careers, but critical to the future workforce of Waconia businesses. One of the pillars of the Waconia Chamber is in economic development, including workforce. The programming and CTE courses at ISD110 guide in supporting the jobs in high demand for our area businesses. We asked for support from the board as we continue to build a strong community of growth and future development.

What's ahead in advocacy work

We're going to assist in facilitating discussions with the upcoming downtown construction projects. We're also getting ready for the Career Exploration Fair on Friday, April 8 for WHS students; and the Community Expo (formally Business, Home, & Family Expo) on Saturday April 9 for the community at large. We have a lot to be proud of in Waconia, and I continue to meet people who grew up here and have recently moved back. There's a lot of opportunities in the workforce, and the opportunity for growth and advancement is now.

Be good at being you.

In a keynote presentation this week at the Explore Minnesota Tourism conference, Minnesota Gophers head football coach PJ Fleck reminded us that there's a lot that we cannot control and encouraged us to, "Be good at being you." We want to encourage our business community to keep doing what you do best. At the chamber, we'll do the same...being good at advocating and supporting you, our members!

Keep sharing your stories, stay engaged, and make your voice heard.

-Christine