

Celebrating 50 years

Howard Chamber



**Advocacy
Networking
Information**



Advocacy, connections and access

The mission of the Howard County Chamber is to provide advocacy, connections, and access to timely information to advance the growth and success of the business community.

The Chamber is the county’s premiere business organization with more than 730 businesses of all sizes and from all industries as members.

The Chamber provides value in three ways.

People

The Howard County Chamber connects business owners and their employees with the region’s most influential community leaders, business executives and elected officials. The Chamber also connects members to business opportunities and important information through networking events, seminars, and participation on Chamber committees.

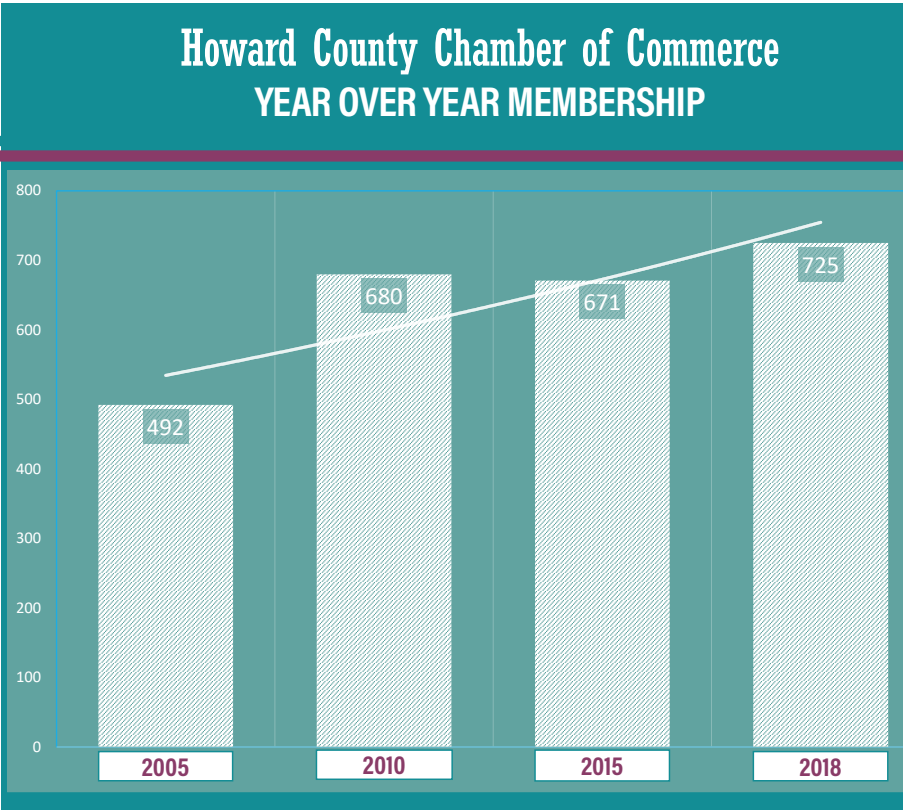
Policy

The Chamber keeps members up-to-date on legislative and economic developments. As an advocate for the

business community, the Chamber’s legislative agenda is driven by the Legislative Affairs Committee which meets regularly to discuss legislation on the horizon and the impact it could have on businesses.

Prosperity

Chamber members have access to marketing, referral, and cost-saving programs simply by joining.



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The advocacy begins here

The Howard County Chamber works year-round to make sure that its members are up-to-date on legislative and economic developments. But the Chamber also is a strong and well known advocate for the community.

The Chamber's legislative agenda is driven by input from members. This includes the Legislative Affairs Committee, comprising members that meet regularly to discuss upcoming legislation and the potential effects for businesses.

As a force for Howard County

advocacy, the Chamber represents the voices of many different businesses. Because of that, it is able to get attention from our elected leaders that an individual business owner might never be able to achieve on his or her own.

Each year, the Chamber hosts several Legislative events including the Business Day in Annapolis, the Legislative Wrap-Up Breakfast, the Elected Officials Meet & Greet, and the Legislative Preview Breakfast.

People, Policy and Prosperity

With its strategic location, diverse and educated workforce, extraordinary standard of living, and business-friendly policies, Howard County was made for business.

With a "members first" philosophy and exclusive networking benefits, the Howard County Chamber was made for business.

The Chamber's value-added services are driven by three ideals: People, Policy and Prosperity.

Also, the Chamber is known for hosting events. Informative member luncheons and engaging legislative events help members stay current on policy issues, gain perspective on economic trends and develop insights into new opportunities.

There is strength in a business community that works together to ensure the voice of business is heard on public policy issues.



The Howard County Chamber Young Professional Network is flourishing. The group hosts bi-monthly networking events that often bring together more than 100 leaders and staff members of the business community.

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Q&A With Leonardo McClarty

President plans for chamber's future

You have been president of the Howard Chamber for nearly five years. How has your view of the county changed during your tenure?

I have a greater appreciation of why people care so deeply about this community and why it is a special place. I also have a greater understanding of the challenges that in the midst of our community accolades go hidden from the general public but that must be addressed for continued prosperity.

Even though Howard isn't the largest county, our Chamber is the largest in the region. What makes the Chamber so successful at bringing in members?

In 2018, we were recognized as being the largest in the Greater Baltimore region. I believe we have experienced success at member recruitment due to a member focused agenda, solid programming and a desire to constantly evaluate ourselves so that we can continue to get better.

As you look ahead, what are the major priorities of the Chamber now?

Our priorities will always be first and foremost membership recruitment and engagement. We also want to do more to support our small business members, thus we will look closely at what we are currently offering and need to offer to add more value to

small firms.

We will also do more in the marketing and communications arena using more video and social media to promote our offerings but more importantly to highlight our members.

Lastly, we want to do more in regards to community impact. Thus, the reason for our inaugural Intercity Visit to Somerset County, New Jersey, in September.

I believe now, more than at any time before, when you attend a Chamber event, you see yourself whether in gender, race, ethnicity, business size, business location or time in business.

What are the biggest challenges facing the Chamber today?

The Chamber is constantly challenged for people's time and money. People are busy and often don't have time to participate in things as they once did.

Further, the I-95 corridor has a host of opportunities for those just seeking

You don't survive without being battle tested and scarred. To be here 50 years means that we are doing right by the Howard County community.

networking and business development. As a result, you don't need the Chamber if just want to network.

The Chamber is also challenged by mergers and acquisitions frequently taking place in this region.

We have lost members through no fault of our own. It was simply a member company being bought or in some instances two member companies coming together.

The final challenge is that of image. For some, the Chamber continues to conjure up the image of an exclusive "good old boys club." We are aware of this persona and the staff and board are constantly working to create an atmosphere where diversity and inclusion is welcome and valued.

Business evolves at a rapid pace. How is the Chamber keeping up with the changing needs and desires of its members?

For us, it is listening, observing, and being open to feedback. It is taking on new roles.

For example, one way to add value is to be a resource and conduit for members as they seek information. Our members may be able to obtain information on their own but if we can get them that information quicker thereby saving them time, that's value.

It's looking to see if we can do more technology such as Webinars, Livestreaming, etc. Things that will allow members to benefit but not always feel they have to drive somewhere.



Leonardo McClarty

Howard County is very diverse and so is the business community. How is the Chamber responding to embrace the diversity and make it a strength?

We are responding to the diversity of the business community by recognizing that diversity is a strength. We are also doing more to reach out to groups that we have never worked with before. We are also making sure diversity is reflected in our staff, our board, and programs.

I believe now, more than at any time before, when you attend a Chamber event, you see yourself whether in gender, race, ethnicity, business size, business location or time in business.

The Chamber is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, 2019. What does 50 years of experience mean to the work of the Chamber?

50 years reflects the dedication of the men and women that first saw the need to start a Chamber and then were committed to support it during the start-up years and then in some of its darkest days.

You don't survive without being battle tested and scarred. To be here 50 years means that we are doing right by the Howard County community.

As you look ahead, what role will the Chamber fill for the business community in the future?

It is my goal that we will be seen as an influencer and convener. Beyond stellar programming for events, we want to influence decision making and be seen as a group that can bring people together whether they have similar or disparate views.



Leonardo McClarty, president and CEO, leads the Howard County Chamber as it celebrates 50 years serving as the "voice of business."

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Gina Abate, Edwards Performance Solutions GovConnects Chair



Alyssa Auerbach, Maryland Association for Justice YPN Chair



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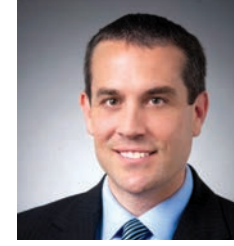
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Andra Cain, Cain Contracting



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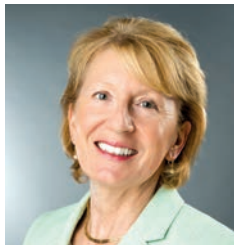
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Natalie Whyllie, Paragraph 2 Media, LLC

What we say about our chamber

"I attended a 'Coffee with the President' earlier this summer and shortly after this meeting, and after exchanging business cards, the host stopped by one of my hotels at the Courtyard Columbia and I was able to secure meeting space for his trainings. It was such a great example of how the Chamber brings our neighboring companies together to support one another in the market."

Tori Haro, sales executive, Marriott

"As always, the event began w/ being greeted by the great HCC staff! Thank you for bringing a smile to my face the minute I arrived. The food, agenda, awards and entertainment were one of a kind, not to be duplicated! Well done, thank you very much!"

Ian Riddle, The Columbia Bank, on Signature Event

Each and every experience with the HCC team has been positive, informative, cheerful and rewarding. They are quick to avail themselves and always have a positive solution or remedy anytime you go to them for assistance. I am looking forward to a continued relationship with the team and have had the pleasure to work one-on-one with Ronni especially, and could not ask him to be more accommodating and available to us as members. Thank you.

Lorrita Matthews, State Farm Insurance - Alexander Brown

Lincoln College of Technology has benefited tremendously from our partnership with the Howard County Chamber of Commerce through the community resources provided, introductions made, relationships built, business exposure, and increase in brand visibility. We have evolved from members, to advocates of the chamber, and our campus is respected as the community staple it has been for over 60 years."

Tafia L. Allah Pringle, director of Career Services, Lincoln College of Technology

"What a great event today! I was so impressed with how you improve the Women's Leadership Conference every year! I made some excellent connections. You all are onto something."

Tracy Turner, Executive Director, Howard Tech Council

"Leonardo - the women from Edwards who attended today's event came away refreshed and inspired. They just don't have enough positive words to say about the day! Thanks to you and the team for putting on a great event!!"

Gina Abate, president/CEO, Edwards Performance Solutions

"This was a great investment of a day. Topics... presentations... networking."

Daniel Benjamin, American Public University System on Cyber 8.0 Conference

"ABSOLUTELY amazing. This is one of the best meetings that I have attended ... and I have attended a lot."

Terrance MacGregor, Bytelion on GovConnects BizBreakfast



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HOWARD COUNTY CHAMBER BOARD OF DIRECTORS**Board member builds community****By Susan Kim**
Staff Writer

"Howard County is my home and I grew up here." That's one of the first thoughts Linda Sorg Ostovitz shares when asked about her choice of where to live and work.

Ostovitz, principal and practice group director at the Offit Kurman law firm in Maple Lawn, has based her entire professional career in Howard County.

"I was a prosecutor here. I had my own solo private practice here," said Ostovitz, who identifies herself not just as an attorney but also as a businesswoman and an entrepreneur.

Over 38 years in legal practice, her workplace context has changed – she's now part of a large law firm with almost 200 attorneys – but her sense of being "home" working in Howard County has been a constant part of her life.

Her circles of acquaintances have grown in what she describes as a "constant building" of a sense of community. "I know people from school [University of Baltimore School of Law], from professional organizations, from my charitable work, just from living here."

After losing her husband way too early to cancer in 2013, Ostovitz threw herself into even more professional and charitable activities. "I like to walk into a place where I am not a stranger, and people around me are not strangers," she said.

A recent recipient of a Maryland's Top 100 Women award from The Daily



Pam Long, who normally takes pictures for Howard Chamber events, takes a turn on the other side of the lens with Linda Ostovitz (right).

Record, Ostovitz sees her membership in the Howard County Chamber as a natural extension of building her community. "It's one thing to be a businessperson out there by yourself. It's another thing to be in a group with other businesspeople and with people who are advocating for business."

Though her own needs as a

businessperson have changed over the years, she has continued to find the chamber a valuable resource.

For example, she finds that attending legislative breakfasts and discussing hot topics – such as minimum wage – helps her gain a leg up on what's happening in Annapolis.

Her involvement in the chamber

also exposes her to many types of businesses.

"You meet people you might not otherwise form a relationship with," she said.

In fact, those relationships are at the heart of why Ostovitz remains committed to the chamber. "The way we rely on each other, it's not just walking into a networking event," she said. "It's seeing each other regularly. It's building trust. The reason I joined the chamber is that I feel like I can make a difference with how people are treated when they walk into a room."

As a board member for the chamber, she added, her goal is to make people feel comfortable. "It's not to hang out with my friends. When I see somebody walk in, I want them to feel like they're welcome."

From a leadership perspective, Ostovitz said she'd like to see the chamber give people who attend events an even greater opportunity for visibility. "I think people come to events to see and be seen," she explained. "One of the things we are instituting is being a little more deliberate about identifying and welcoming new members of the chamber."

An introduction can be as simple as calling out the name of a business and having the representative stand up.

"It's an important part of what we do and I would like to see us continue to do that," she said. "I'm an existing member and I want to see who the new people are. I want to be able to greet them. Again, it's all about relationships and I'd like to see us build them even better."

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YOUNG PROFESSIONALS NETWORK

Breakout Games manager values time with young professionals

By Susan Kim
Staff Writer

In his business, Michael Makar wants people to break out. When supporting the chamber, he wants to help people break in.

Active in the Chamber's Young Professionals Network (YPN), Makar is also leading a fun and entertaining business, Breakout Games, in Columbia, which he manages.

With eight different themes, small groups try to escape from rooms in under an hour at Breakout Games.

Room themes in Columbia include Do Not Disturb, Hostage, Island Escape, Kidnapping, Museum Heist, Mystery Mansion, Operation: Casino, and Runaway Train. Participants sign up in groups – from two people minimum to seven or eight maximum – to crack codes, discover clues and solve puzzles. The cost is \$23.99 - \$33.99 per person, with bigger groups receiving a discount.

Mystery Mansion and Kidnapping are the most popular rooms, Makar said. "In Kidnapping, everyone gets handcuffed to the wall first thing."

A little over half of the groups who

sign up are actually able to "break out" on their own, said Makar (but, truly, they get to go home anyway).

With eight different themes, the Columbia location

The Columbia location, which opened in September 2016, is one of 43 Breakout locations across the nation. Howard County was an attractive location because it's situated between Baltimore and Washington, D.C. and only a few minutes off of I-95, Makar said.

"The affluence of Howard County is also great for our business," said Makar, who has been the manager for two-and-a-half years.

After graduating from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh a few years ago, Makar joined the chamber when he became manager of Breakout Games. "I've mostly been to the Young Professionals Network [YPN] events, and they are always well-planned and very fun," he said, adding that he especially enjoyed a recent YPN gathering at the Main Event entertainment venue in Columbia.

"I really enjoy seeing who else is a



Photo by Emily Calkins
Michael Makar, manager of Breakout Games, is active in the Howard County Chamber Young Professionals Network.

I really enjoy seeing who else is a young professional in Howard County. People don't generally move to Howard County until they have a family and want to settle down here.

Michael Makar

young professional in Howard County," Makar said, adding that, before he joined the chamber, he wasn't connecting to as many local young people. "People don't generally move to Howard County until they have a family and want to settle down here," he said.

Through YPN, he learns about local jobs and businesses, and, in turn, explains why Breakout Games is so much fun. "People have heard of escape rooms but they don't always know about Breakout," he said.

With about 34 team members, Breakout Games in Columbia is busier during the summer, and plans are in the works to add a submarine-themed escape room.

"It can be very fast-paced here," said Makar, "but I'd still call it less 'white knuckle' than retail or a restaurant."

Makar described his job as "incredibly fun." He oversees a team that performs upkeep on the rooms, tweaks escape codes and sits in a master control room issuing hints for groups that need them.

When families sign up for a Breakout adventure together, Makar said, they seem to either work well together – or not. "In the family situations, I've noticed it's really sink or swim," he said, adding that businesses also use Breakout as a team building exercise.

In the coming year, Breakout Games in Columbia plans to rent additional space at its current location to add three more selections for escape room adventurers. "Our tech and design capabilities, which are at our headquarters in Lexington [Kentucky], have skyrocketed," Makar said.



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GOV CONNECTS

Aronson nurtures government resource

By Susan Kim
Staff Writer

Aronson, an assurance and tax consulting firm, joined the Howard County Chamber of Commerce in 2012 to help create the chamber's GovConnects program.

Mike Muscatello, a partner at Aronson, describes GovConnects as "an active program that provides opportunities for contractors to network and develop industry relationships in addition to providing valuable information on contracting opportunities."

Muscatello added, "It has been great to have the support of the chamber behind us to continue to grow the program."

In addition to GovConnects, the chamber also has what Muscatello believes is "a strong legislative advocacy presence in the county and state" that provides opportunities to its members to network and learn about the local business and non-profit community.

As he was taking stock of the Howard Chamber's assets, he said,

"We live our mission statement of providing opportunities for our people, contributing to the success of our clients and enriching our communities."

Mike Muscatello
"The Young Professionals Network "is unrivaled in the state."

Muscatello urged companies to understand all of the programs of the chamber and to encourage their employees to participate.

Why Howard County?

When Muscatello considers the unique aspects of doing business in Howard County, at the top of his list is access to a highly educated and talented workforce.

The county, while in close proximity to Washington, D.C. and Baltimore,

is still what he calls "a distinct local community," and he values "being a part of a community of business leaders that are passionate about local causes in addition to business in Howard County."

As he meets fellow businesspeople, Muscatello said the information he gathers and the people he meets continually build on his knowledge and understanding of his industry and increase the value he brings to his clients.

"On a personal level," he added, "there are so many opportunities to give back to the community and business leaders who are willing to do so, and taking advantage of these opportunities enables me to meet some talented people and to continue to grow my leadership profile."

What's next?

Aronson, now more than 55 years old, has more than 250 team members, and Muscatello said he is proud that "we live our mission statement of providing opportunities for our people, contributing to the success of our clients and



Mike Muscatello

enriching our communities."

He said he envisions Aronson continuously growing to provide greater opportunities for its people. "We will be the dominant firm in each of our chosen industry specialties – including government contracting – and service offerings," he said.

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“This is the purpose of our civilization — the only valid, ultimate purpose of any civilization — to grow better people; more creative, more productive, more inspired, more loving people.”

JAMES ROUSE

March 25, 1966

Columbia Association (CA) salutes the Howard County Chamber. We look forward to continuing to develop our partnership with the Howard County Chamber to bring value, guidance and support to our community.

