



THE GREATER BETHESDA CHAMBER of COMMERCE

Smart Business, Bright Future

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Anna Behnam

Chair

Installation Speech

The Greater Bethesda Chamber of Commerce

Held Virtually on June 18, 2020

Good afternoon and thank you. I want to start with thanks to:

Andy Stern – whose leadership was essential to getting me to this point but more importantly, Andy is the person who has carried us for the past several months. When most of us wanted to scream, Andy stood strong and led us. Thank you, Andy.

Ginanne Italiano – Ginanne, you give so much of yourself to this Chamber. You give time even late nights and weekends. And in case you didn't know, Ginanne only eats at member restaurants. That's true dedication. Thank you Ginanne.

Monica Scisorek and Courtney DeLucia. Thank you for all the time and heart you put in what you do. You have kept our members informed and comforted so many of us in the past few months. Thank you both.

To Russell Lacey, this entire Board and our Members– thank you for your faith in me and allowing me this opportunity to lead such an amazing organization.

On April 1, 1926 four men formed what would be the first board of The Bethesda Chamber of Commerce. At that time, Bethesda consisted of 20 total businesses, 5 churches, 5 elementary schools, 1 high school and 3 private schools. In that same year, The Bethesda Chamber helped raised over \$3,000 to organize the Bethesda Fire Department. The goal of the Chamber was to help increase and strengthen business in Bethesda. They wanted the residents who lived in Bethesda to buy in Bethesda. In 1929, the president of the Chamber, Brainard Parker set out to make The Bethesda Chamber a "Going Organization". It was in that year that our Chamber was incorporated.

Here we are, 94 years later and our goals have not changed from those our founders. Today, Bethesda has over 22,000 business and our goal remains to make the Greater Bethesda Chamber of Commerce a Going Organization.

Yet, our challenges have changed over the years. It's no longer just about getting our residents to buy here. Lately our challenges have been much greater. Our challenges today are about rebuilding and re-growing. They are about redefining who we are as a community. The past several months have changed how we live, work and play. We've seen a microscopic monster turn our world upside down. We've seen injustices and prejudices tear our communities apart. It's no longer just about selling product. It's now time for us to stand tall and make a change that will affect future generations.

We cannot meet this challenge alone. We must work together. We must support each other and those that are fighting on our behalf. People Like:

Dr. Ben Wu, who is fighting daily to get our businesses reopened and his support of programs such as The Telework Assistance Fund to help our businesses continue to operate even though we cannot be in the office.

Councilmember Andrew Friedson, whom I'm sure has not slept in 3 months. He has not only continued to do his work as a councilmember but has made himself available to the people of the community with programs such as Friday's with Friedson.

Our police and fire departments whose workload has only increased and yet they do not stop or give up on our community. Our healthcare workers who have left their own families in order to heal ours.

People like **Ginanne Italiano** and her team who have worked nonstop to make sure that our businesses have the resources and information that they need in order to continue operations.

Jerome Fletcher who on many occasions has made himself available to our chamber to help guide us through to the next steps.

And everyone here tonight who wakes up every day to fight another fight to keep their business running so that our community can thrive and grow.

We are The Greater Bethesda Chamber. We've been labeled as one of the wealthiest communities in the U.S., one of the most educated communities in the U.S. Our schools are envied. We are strong and we are most certainly Great.

County Executive, Marc Elrich states in his vision: "We will reinvigorate the county's direct involvement in economic activities by re-examining our regulations to make sure they are sensible, fair, and efficient."

It's time for us to work together to make this vision come true. And it can come true. The way we stand together as a community is by working together through this Great Chamber. This Chamber is a place where our collective ideas come to fruition.

As one of our members recently wrote.... Glad to know that the Chamber has our back!

Now, for my promise and ask:

My promise to you is that I will work tirelessly to help our community continue to grow and not only thrive but come out of this even bigger and stronger. I will work with this amazing Board to reach out to our government and private sector partners. To make connections that will further our collective success.

Today I ask you to go with confidence in our future, with resilience to face our current reality and with a heart to help your fellow community member no matter what they look like. I ask you to reach out to each person on this call and hold their virtual hand. To take an oath that we shall stand together and grow together.

I ask you to reach out to every businesses owner you know and ask them to join our Chamber. Our membership is strong, but we need more brilliant minds to work together to support each other and to grow together.

I ask our government partners to work with our Chamber to make sure that Businesses continue to thrive and grow. That legislation is "sensible, fair and efficient".

I ask our private sector partners to continue to participate and support the Chamber's efforts. I know that you give a lot, but it's now time to give more so that Great companies such as Marriott, Andy Stern's Office Furniture, McKay Mortgage, SpeedPro Imaging, The Bernstein Companies, sasse agency, Capacity Partners, Dembo-Jones, Electric Advisors, The Bethesda Hyatt, Sandy Spring Bank, SpeakSkill, TDG/Silverrock, M&T Bank and so many others can keep our economy alive and kicking.

I am so very excited for what's to come. I see great potential in us as a Chamber and a community. I cannot wait to see all that we will accomplish in the coming year. I thank you for your faith in me and I promise to work tirelessly so that we, together can keep The Greater Bethesda Chamber of Commerce a Going Organization.

Now, let's raise a glass to make a toast.

Here's to a Celebrated past

A challenging yet bullish present and

A prosperous future

Here's to the Greater Bethesda Chamber of Commerce!