

“Being an active Chamber member gives us a higher level of credibility in the eyes of our colleagues and customers.”

*—Dawn Collins
Century 21 Executive Realty*

In fact, the Leadership Academy has graduated over 100 leaders since its inception. Many go on to work with the Chamber or serve in leadership roles in the community, such as graduates Martin Sonnenberg, Task Force Tips (2006), Natalie Connors, Purdue University North Central (2009), and Doug Klemz, Home Mountain Printing (2008) who all serve on the Valparaiso Parks Foundation today.

“Much like our Chamber membership, the Leadership Academy seeks candidates who represent a cross-section of the community and its institutions,” says Susan Antoszewski, marketing and communications specialist and Leadership Academy liaison. “Leadership Academy creates a space both to learn and to make a commitment to developing our community through service.”

Promoting Partnerships

Chamber events are opportunities for budding partnerships, like the one between Growing Kids Learning Center and 1st Source Bank, according to Carla Putrich, marketing director for Growing Kids Learning Center, located at 3400 Campbell Street.

“Through the partnership, 1st Source Bank passes information about us to its employees and, in return, Growing Kids gives 1st Source employees a discount on tuition,” she explains. The unique arrangement is the result of an idea suggested at a recent Chamber Network Night.

“This partnership between 1st Source Bank and Growing Kids Learning Center wouldn’t have happened without the networking function,” says Putrich.

Valparaiso University, 1700 Chapel Drive, also appreciates the partnership opportunities the Chamber provides—for students and faculty alike.

“These partnerships provide internships and work opportunities for students,” says Dr. Mark Heckler, president of Valparaiso University. “They also give faculty contacts within the business community, engage students with research projects, and illustrate pressing issues and ways in which the university can advance business in the community.”

Advocacy Connects Members and the Community

Another of the Chamber’s key roles is advocacy. “We truly value serving as an advocate for the community and our members,” says Chamber President Rex Richards.

The Chamber’s strength as an advocate may stem from what the Chamber isn’t: The Chamber isn’t supported by taxes and it isn’t a political organization. Rather, it gets its support from its members and works cooperatively with local government to support positive public policy.

Jon Schmaltz, attorney at Burke Costanza & Carberry LLP, 156 Indiana Avenue, serves as the Chamber’s Chairman of the Board and helps lead the advocacy efforts.

“Serving as an advocate for our members begins with listening—truly hearing members’ needs and ideas for the future,” he says. “We keep our ear to the ground to see what the emerging issues will be and how we can serve as a liaison between our members, community and legislators.”

One example is the Chamber’s role in supporting legislation that promotes the Illiana Expressway.

“After working with our members to determine their viewpoints, we took a position supporting the development of the Illiana expressway and the legislation that would allow it to proceed,” says Schmaltz. >>



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 Angie Reyes
 Growing Kids Learning Center

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>> “The Chamber was interested on behalf of our members because it very much affects the future of the community. We saw this issue as a great opportunity to communicate with legislators and engage with our members.”

Strengthening Valpo through Economic Development

Valparaiso remains successful in large part because of concerted efforts on the part of business and community leaders to encourage

and enhance economic growth in the community.

Major corporations, like Valparaiso-based Chester Inc., 555 Eastport Centre Drive, help with economic development through efforts like the Eastport Centre Development project. The project began in 1992 when Chester Inc. turned what was once 180 acres of crops into the headquarters for community institutions like Sensit Technologies, 851 Transport Drive, and Ivy Tech Community College, 3100 Ivy Tech Drive.

“Our relationships with other businesses and the community are important, and enhancing Valparaiso through economic development is a great way to serve people,” says Pete Peuquet, president and CEO of Chester, Inc.

Keeping Valpo Current

“The Chamber is an important, integral part of the community, especially from a business perspective,” says Wayne Welter, Valparaiso civic leader, who first joined the Chamber in 1980 and served as the Chamber’s Chairman of the Board in 1987, when he led what was once First National Bank of Valparaiso, which was sold to 1st Source Bank. “It’s more than a great way to get to know people,” he says.

“My era, back in the early 1980s, was similar to now in that it was economically challenging. Back then, the Chamber took the lead in bringing businesses to town, and it continues to take