

From the Desk of Matthew Mahood



Any Size Matters: SJSV Chamber Provides Common Ground for Large and Small Businesses

Recently, 60 board members of the San Jose Silicon Valley Chamber have been meeting to help the chamber re-engineer its work product to become more effective as it engages across the region on critical businesses issues. The reason is that we can no longer think provincially. Our Silicon Valley is competing with the rest of the world for skilled workers and for new business. Not only that, we are competing with other regions when our own local businesses begin looking at expanding their operations.

During these working meetings, it was invigorating to see how the board, when asked to engage and interact, became sympathetic to the wide variety of services our members want from their chamber. Out of these sessions, came a deeper understanding about our members—no matter how small or how large, no matter the industry, no matter their geographical location, they share similar goals and face similar challenges—just on different scales.

In our board break-out groups, individuals who work for large businesses learned how the chamber's many networking events connect small businesses together, helping them to support one another and provide leads and referrals. Small business owners, in turn, realized how the chamber's advocacy work is vital to confronting local, state and government on issues of taxation, fees, permitting and the like. If a large employer leaves our region, the jobs go with it—and so do the customers of a lot of small businesses who populate our various business districts and downtowns.

What became evident from the board engagement and ensuing collaboration is that the San Jose Silicon Valley Chamber is truly the

one organization in our region where small, medium and large businesses in all sectors, of all kinds can meet as equals, and can work together to address our region's challenges.

Like the chamber membership, our region's business community is diverse. They say small business drives the economy on Main Street, but our region is equally dependent upon our largest employers whose thousands of employees spend money on gas, groceries, clothes, dry cleaning, health care, etc. And they spend this money at small family-owned businesses located throughout our communities in Campbell, Los Gatos, Willow Glen, Evergreen and Palo Alto, just to name a few. They help to create the "there" in these downtowns and business districts that make our region so livable.

Given that our members want the chamber to focus on creating a strong local economy, for 2012 you will see the chamber reaching out across Silicon Valley to assess what the business needs are, principally in economic development—issues to improve the speed of business expansion and job growth and help local businesses stay in business. We'll also be striving to impress upon public officials that they need to be the facilitator for business growth, not an impediment—committing to "get their customers to success."

It has always been the province of a chamber of commerce to be a fulcrum for action to create a better place to live. The directors of the chamber board—from both large and small businesses—are standing together, united in their commitment to serving all size businesses in the region—and good things are on their way.