CHAMBER DISTRIBUTES $2.78 MILLION IN SMALL BUSINESS GRANTS
From the CEO

Thank you for your support of the Salina Area Chamber of Commerce in 2020! It has been a year of firsts and uncharted territory for so many businesses, organizations, and individuals, your Chamber included.

There was significant economic momentum entering 2020 and for the first 60 days of the year, it would have appeared that the momentum would continue. However, March came in like a lamb and out like a lion with the exception that the proverbial lion was the COVID-19 pandemic and it hasn’t left yet. There is cautious optimism with the vaccine but also an understanding that the pandemic altered the operations of many businesses and industries.

During the Governor’s Stay at Home order, your Chamber changed its focus from our traditional events and related training efforts into an enhanced role of communication and support for all things pandemic relief and health/safety related. As a trusted source of information and knowledge, we did everything in our power to ensure information was accurate and timely and all in one place on our www.salinastrong.com website. Your Chamber continued our advocacy efforts at the Federal, State, and local levels related to COVID-19 topics. The Chamber setup video conference calls with both State of Kansas leadership and elected officials, and local governmental bodies to discuss and advocate on behalf of businesses on topics including PPP, PPE, Mask Mandates, Stay at Home Orders, and inclusion on essential business lists to name a few.

In September 2020, The Chamber’s Foundation formed a partnership with Saline County to assist small businesses seeking capital in response to the negative economic impacts of COVID-19. The Chamber Foundation received and subsequently granted $2,693,765 to 163 qualified small businesses in Saline County. Without the Chamber stepping forward and being willing to take on this role for the business community there was no guarantee that those funds would have been distributed into the business community.

Amid the pandemic, there continues to be high levels of capital investment from numerous employers in our community including the large expansions planned by Great Plains Manufacturing and Schwan’s and the reinvigoration of Downtown. All of these projects take a collective effort from all of the community economic development partners to support, research, and advocate, in order to give Salina the opportunity to remain competitive and also give individuals and employers the tools necessary to make it easier to say yes to moving to Salina. That is what our Imagine Salina initiative is geared to do! We invite all members to visit www.imaginesalina.com and utilize this resource to help us showcase Salina.

The post COVID-19 recovery phase is very important to the Salina Business Community, and your Chamber will be focused heavily on this during 2021.

Thank you again for your continued support. It is our pleasure representing the business community of Salina!

Best,

Eric L. Brown
President/CEO
Salina Area Chamber of Commerce

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Chamber Foundation administers ‘crucial’ help for small businesses

By TIM UNRUH
Special to the Salina Journal

Shopping was spirited and brisk in downtown Salina as Christmas deadlines loomed a few weeks ago. During a typical slow time at PB&J women’s boutique, 110 N. Santa Fe, store manager Casey Keller scurried to wait on customers, wrap gifts and find ways to bolster sales through enhanced customer service.

“I definitely think sales have been better. I have been so busy. It’s amazing,” she said. “People are trying to do local shopping.”

Other than masks and home deliveries, the bustle seemed like the old normal. “We’re helping people stay in quarantine,” said Keller, a native Salinan. “I’m willing to get in my car and drop off a package, so they can feel safe,” she said.

PB&J store owner Chrisi Pierson said she was blessed that her business was open and keeping five others employed, given the pandemic challenges they are battling this year. A good deal of that is thanks to government help — times two.

PB&J shared in nearly $2.7 million in federal grants that were gifted to 163 recipients of the Strengthening People and Revitalizing Kansas (SPARK) Small Business Grant. “It meant survival,” Pierson said. “It took a load off my mind to get some help at this particular time.”

The grants were part of nearly $11 million that trickled from the federal government to the state of Kansas to Saline County this fall. Equal portions of the money went to municipalities, and education, i.e. school districts, as well as approximately 25 percent each to nonprofit organizations and for-profit businesses. The Salina Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation took on the task of distributing to the latter two groups.

Response was amazing, said Eric Brown, Chamber president and CEO. “We had voicemails and thank-you cards that were very nice, very glowing,” he said. “There were folks crying on the phone because it will help them get through the winter season.”

And how, said Mike Haug, co-owner of Sandstone Saloon in Brookville in western Saline County, with his wife, Ann Haug. “It’s what’s keeping the doors open,” he said. “If it wasn’t for that, we’d still be shut down.”

The Sandstone was shuttered from March to mid-June. Today, the popular bar and restaurant is producing about one-third of normal.

“If we didn’t have that grant to cover expenses, we’d be in a helluva shape,” Haug said. “I can’t tell you how much I appreciate the opportunity. It has taken tremendous stress off of me and allows us to still be here for our great guests to be served by wonderful folks. They make Sandstone Saloon special.”

Being open this time of year is vital for PB&J, Pierson said. “Doing what we do around the holidays is what carries us through,” she said.

Back in the spring, Pierson benefitted from the Paycheck Protection Program — forgivable loans — through the federal Small Business Administration. “That all kind of got used up within three or four months, and we were kind of right back where we were, with no other relief in sight,” she said, “until the Chamber announced the (SPARK) grant funds. It was like perfect timing for us, really a lifesaver.”

But early on in that process, PB&J didn’t meet the criteria, requiring proof that the business revenue had been cut by at least 25 percent this year. Pierson calculated 18 percent. “There were days full of stress with my stomach in knots, continuing down this path with no end in sight,” Pierson said. “It was very dark at that point.” Then came an angel named Ashley Finan, the Chamber’s membership recruitment and retention director — and a regular at PB&J — bearing good news.

“Ashley said ‘Hey, did you see they lowered the requirements for the grants?’ Then we qualified,” Pierson said. “From talking to other business owners, it was crucial. We had breathing room again.”

The Chamber had received 191 applications for grant assistance, and 28 still didn’t qualify. “There was a lot of suffering with this,” Brown said. “We know there were other businesses that could have used the funding as well.” Approved applications represented 782 employees, he said, or an average of 4.79 workers per business.

“We felt like we were able to do a good job of adhering to the federal guidance,” Brown said. “I also would like to thank the County for putting trust in the Chamber to administer these funds out to the small business community.”

More than government assistance has come forward. PB&J Manager Keller reported that at least two local businesses added to downtown traffic late Friday afternoon. In lieu of a Christmas party, the company managers gave money to staff members to shop downtown.

“It was a nice gesture that will make all the shops a little more blessed and grateful,” Keller said. “It’s been great to see people downtown.”

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New Stimulus Package in Process
At press time, another round of stimulus assistance was being determined by the Legislature. As details become available, the Chamber will feature that information at our website www.SalinaStrong.com so watch for that in the coming weeks.

Expand your Marketing Footprint with a Chamber Banner Ad
The Salina Area Chamber of Commerce website, www.SalinaKansas.org, offers numerous marketing opportunities, designed to help members maximize their advertising power. From enhanced business listings to home page leaderboards, we offer packages at all price points.

Did you know that members who advertise with www.SalinaKansas.org banner ads have are shown to have at least double the number of referrals to their website? Referrals drive traffic to your business listing, social media pages, and website.

If you’re interested in marketing your business with the Salina Area Chamber of Commerce, please contact Ashley or Tiffany by phone (785) 827-9301 or e-mail afinan@salinakansas.org, tbenlien@salinakansas.org
Imagine Salina Progress Report

Two years into a five-year campaign, and despite several staff transitions and COVID-19 disruptions, Imagine Salina has made significant progress with its objectives and goals so far.

The Imagine Salina campaign was created to focus on the goals of both workforce and economic development—with a major emphasis on retaining and attracting both talent and business to the community. The campaign task force recognized that a key component in this charge would be to market and tell Salina’s story better, and to create a clearinghouse of content to access important information. With this the imaginesalina.com website was born, with a simple and user-friendly format to learn about what makes Salina an ideal place to live, work, learn, and play. This year saw 22,500 new individual visitors to the website, with 22 resumes submitted and 94 requests for more information.

Further website development was put on hold for a brief period, but with the hire of Renee Duxler in August as the Economic & Workforce Development Director, the campaign has re-emerged with a significant amount of time being focused on aggressive digital marketing efforts, and high-quality content creation. A ‘sizzle video’ was shot in October to draw attention to the many different arts and cultural facets, local attractions, family-friendly venues, outdoor spaces, vibrant downtown infrastructure, and eclectic local businesses that make Salina the ideal hometown that it is. In early December, ‘testimonial’ video footage was also shot, highlighting the stories of both transplants and boomerangers of Salina on their experience of moving here for family and career.

These components, along with a revamped relocation packet that includes vibrant and colorful information that mimics the website, will all serve in the branding, messaging, and marketing of the Salina experience.

The website now also features pop-up windows that encourage visitors to reach out for more information or submit their resume. Future goals for early 2021 include adding a social media feed and a blog to the site in order to provide further content for those wanting to learn more about the community. Organic internal marketing efforts are also underway to boost local civic pride, and external digital marketing will continue to evolve with accessible info and visuals to attract and reengage visitors.

Priorities for the upcoming year also include:

• continued work with virtual career fairs and presentations (until it becomes safe to participate in-person again)
• creative pivots with our schools and post-secondary educational institutions to connect students with business and industry locally
• enhancement and expansion of the Customized Tour and Trailering Spouse programs
• more robust summer internship programming
• creation of an online dashboard and further resources and content for local employers
• expansive content that focuses on the vibrant arts and cultural community of Salina

We invite you to visit the website to see what is already available there, and to continue to stay abreast of new developments by following Imagine Salina on Facebook and Instagram.

You can also reach out to Renee Duxler at rduxler@salinakansas.org or by calling (785) 827-9310, ext 127
**CHAMBER NEWS**

**The Mid America Farm Expo** is scheduled March 23-25 at the Saline County Expo Center and Tony’s Pizza Events Center.

For more information about being an exhibitor, contact LaCrista Brightbill at lbrightbill@salinakansas.org or (785) 827-9301

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**Smoky Hill Silver Shop LOCAL**

**AVAILABLE IN $10 & $25 GIFT CERTIFICATES**

**CALL THE SALINA AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AT (785) 827-9301 TO ORDER!**

The holidays are always a busy time for the Chamber’s Smoky Hill Silver (SHS) program, which is designed to guide consumers to member businesses to spend dollars. This year, due to pandemic related group size restrictions and overall concern for their employees’ comfort, some local companies opted rather than gather to celebrate the holidays with staff to instead gift employees with Smoky Hill Silver. In December 2020, the Chamber sold more than $140,000 in SHS, an increase of 18% in the $25 certificates, and 53% in the $10 certificates.

What a great way to celebrate, say **THANK YOU**, and keep dollars local!

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**Salina Family Healthcare Center** (SFHC), 651 E. Prescott, celebrated the arrival of their new mobile health unit with a ribbon cutting! SFHC’s new mobile unit will be used for mobile COVID-19 testing, as a COVID-19 care area separate from non-COVID-19 positive patients, an immunization center, and dental outreach vehicle over time. The team is especially excited to use the mobile unit as a tool to continue helping the community with its pandemic response and testing.

**District Eat and Play**, celebrated their grand opening at 2259 S. 9th Street with a Chamber Ribbon Cutting! Go visit to see Indoor Go-Kart Track, Axe Throwing, Arcade, Gelly Ball, Mini Bowling, Restaurant, Bar, Pinball, Darts, Billiards, Sports Simulator, Events, Birthday Parties, & More!
1.) Can you please give us a three-sentence summary of your personal background?

My name is Mike Cooper and I am from Belleville, KS. I came to Marymount College and finished with a degree in Commercial Art. I have been married 39 years and have six sons and one daughter.

2.) What is it about your business that is unique or special? What separates you from your competitors?

We use all 3M High Performance Vinyl for our vehicle lettering, the best for longevity and color brightness. Not only do we do customer vinyl vehicle lettering, banners and signs, we also have a screen printing department where we print on hoodies, t-shirts and DryFit products. We have an art department that can design most anything you need for your company.

3.) In general, how is demand for your product or service?

Demand can sometimes be overwhelming. Because we do both shirts and vinyl graphics for businesses and schools, we can take on all aspects for that customer. We can supply them with shirts for their business and also put their company logo on any vehicle, trailer or banner they might need.

See the entire interview, and others, posted at:
https://www.salinakansas.org/take-5.html
In The News

Cathy Boos has been promoted to the position of marketing and sales director for SALINA PRESBYTERIAN MANOR, 2601 E. Crawford. Boos first joined the senior living community as its life enrichment director in March 2016. A native of Victoria, KS, Boos earned a Bachelor of Business Administration degree with an emphasis in marketing from Fort Hays State University. Congratulations Cathy!

We are excited to announce that SUNFLOWER BANK, 3025 Cortland Circle, provided the highest total amount of SBA 7(a) loans by a bank lender in the Kansas District in FY2020, according to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). Their commercial banking team in Salina is led by market president, Cheryl Campbell. The team provides SBA lending expertise to local businesses for business acquisition, owner-occupied commercial real estate, equipment financing and working capital needs. Congratulations Sunflower Bank!

AUNTIE RITA’S JAMAICAN CUISINE is now open in their new Downtown location at 145 S. Santa Fe Avenue, Suite 100. Stop in and enjoy a taste of Jamaica in the middle of the Heartland! From sweet, to savory, to spicy - there is something for every palette. The menu is friendly! Congratulations to Auntie Rita’s!

GOT NEWS?
Do you have news to share about your business or organization? Email srice@salinakansas.org and we’ll publish it in an upcoming issue of Chamber Connection.

OCCK TRANSPORTATION, 1710 W. Schilling Rd will resume fare collection for all public transit services, including CityGo, 81 Connection, Paratransit, City of Abilene and KanConnect starting February 1, 2021. Monthly passes for CityGo will be available to purchase starting January 27th at several locations, including the OCCK Transportation Office, OCCK Corporate Office, Bennington State Bank – both locations, Salina Senior Center, the Salina Regional Health Center Human Resources department, and on the OCCK Transportation website. See www.salinacitygo.com for info on fares for other services.

Congratulations to Gina Wilson on her new real estate business, GATEWAY REAL ESTATE AGENCY, 527 S. Broadway. As an experienced Salina area real estate agent, Gina is ready to help you with all your real estate needs. Contact her at (785) 819-3491. Congratulations Gina

SALINA DENTAL ARTS, 1829 S. Ohio will provide a free cleaning, exam, x-rays, sealants and fluoride treatment for children on Friday, February 5 as part of give kids a smile. Call (785) 823-2472 to make an appointment.

Continued on page 8
The COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT SALINA, 3020 Riffel Drive, welcomes their new General Manager Jason Elliott. Jason has been in the hotel industry 13 years and with Marriott for ten. Properties have included the 4,004 room Aria Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas and the 5-star/5-Diamond St. Anthony Hotel in San Antonio, TX. During three years at Marriott Corporate, he served as a Senior Revenue Manager for hotels across the country, with a portfolio of $45 million a month. He is originally from Salina with a Bachelor Degree in Journalism from KU, and a Bachelor Degree in Hotel Management from UNLV. Welcome home Jason!

In The News

Continued from page 7

Globally, there is arguably no industry harder hit by the pandemic than the tourism industry. From hotels to cruise lines, airlines to restaurants, and entertainment destinations of all kinds, COVID-19 has been devastating. For many, it meant immediate loss of and near stoppage of business. As the pandemic led to stay at home orders, social distancing, and loss of convening, tourism businesses did what they could to survive. Massive cancellations of events, conferences, and groups meant staff cutbacks and loss of not only the immediate economic influx of the overnight stay and space rental, but also the peripheral spending by those visitors at retail shops, restaurants, and entertainment sites.

Major destinations are not on the radar for a great number of people who historically have travelled. At the same time, some people are desperate to leave the four walls of their home and have some level of experience. Thus, the potential of the ‘staycation’ is attractive. What is a ‘staycation’? Simply, it is a vacation taken near where you live. A family from the Salina area plans a weekend – a safe weekend – to enjoy time together. Safe experiences could include an overnight at a local hotel, where extreme measures are being taken to protect guests. Add in a trip to the zoo, which can surely be a socially distant day. Follow with a little retail therapy in stores where the mask mandate and cleaning rituals are being followed. Take a masked tour of the SculptureTour Salina exhibit downtown, enjoy a performance at the theatre. Plan great dining experiences which can be outdoors, weather permitting, in safe numbers indoors, or with curbside service for take-out back to the hotel.

Salina is so fortunate to have so many tourism-based businesses keeping as many employees as possible and being open in creative ways, following the necessary restrictions, all as a part of providing warm hospitality and great memories. Think about it. You deserve to ‘get away’, and you can do that safely, right here in Salina. At the same time, you are supporting the local economy and local jobs. For more ideas about how to plan a safe Salina Staycation, go to VisitSalinaKS.org or contact the Visit Salina staff at info@SalinaKansas.org or (785) 827-9301.

Giraffe Mama Billie gave birth December 17 to this beautiful little guy! We congratulate Billie and everyone at Rolling Hills Zoo and can’t wait to meet him once he’s ready!

Potential of the Salina Staycation

Love the arts.
Downtown SculptureTour

Walk in the wild.
Rolling Hills Zoo & Wildlife Museum

Play around.
Multiple Golf Courses

VisitSalina.org
Download the FREE Salina 67401 App or call 1.877.725.4625 for more visitor information.
BASEBALL/SOFTBALL TURF ON SOLID GROUND

Under the direction of Byron Tomlins and Kenny Hancock, Baseball Enterprises is excited that the Dean Evans baseball and South High softball renovation projects, are on schedule. A baseball/softball enhancement project has been in the works for the past three years. Originally an $8 million project, and days away from a contract partnership with the City, the renovation project was placed on hold when COVID-19 struck in early spring. So to not lose project momentum, Baseball Enterprises decided to proceed with a scaled down project for which they had already secured funding. The new project is still very significant in terms of improving the future for baseball and softball in Salina. By continuing with the project, Baseball Enterprises has renewed future opportunities for more games, tournaments, and events to take place locally.

The project will provide three entirely turfed fields: one field at Dean Evans for baseball and two fields at South High School for softball. A concrete pavilion and patio addition will provide premiere viewing opportunities at Dean Evans. There will also be a food truck concession area at the Evans complex. At both venues, restrooms, umpire rooms, concession areas, fencing and aesthetic upgrades will be made. Completion of the projects is set for early February 2021 with the season beginning and usage of the new facilities starting in mid-February.

All monies (around $4 million) for the new projects have been raised privately over the past three years. However, the group still has intentions to return to the full project when economic recovery allows. There are also some potential grants to be secured by the Baseball Enterprises group that would allow more renovations in the future. If you would like to help, contributions can be made to the Baseball Enterprises Stadium Fund – Baseball Enterprises, PO Box 1936, Salina KS 67402-1936.
THE 2020 PEOPLE’S CHOICE AWARD will soon be announced! Watch Social Media! Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Insta!

The Salina Area Young Professionals Steering Committee wants to thank all the members and sponsors that helped to make 2020 such a success during a challenging year. We look forward to expanding existing and creating new programming in 2021!

For information about SAYP, contact LaCrista Brightbill at lbrightbill@salinakansas.org or (785) 827-9310, ext. 124.

Congratulations to the STIEFEL THEATRE!

“This beautifully illuminated spire announced the Stiefel Theatre’s year-long renovation project to the community. The project included a new green room, new stage, ticket window marquee, dressing room upgrades, new sound system and redesigned Watson Room. Congratulations!”
As of press time, the following youth sports events are “a go” in 2021. Please keep in mind that capacity limitations, social distancing guidelines and other changes could be implemented by event organizers or by local health officials based on changes in the local COVID-19 status.

**MarqueeWelcomes**

**JANUARY**
- 23-24   Sky Gymnastics Competition (TPEC - Tony’s Pizza Events Center)

**FEBRUARY**
- 6-7    Prestige National Talent Competition (TPEC)
- 13-14   HOA Valentine’s VB Tourn. (SFH)
- 20    MAYB Basketball Tourn. (SFH)
- 26-27   KSHSAA State Wrestling Tourn. – Girls DII Class & Boys 4A Class (TPEC)
- 26-27   HOA Volleyball Border Series Tourn. (SFH)
- 28    6-Under Kids Wrestling Tourn. (TPEC)

**MARCH**
- 6-7    HOA Volleyball March Madness Tourn. (SFH)
- 11-13   KSHSAA 4A State Boys’ and Girls’ Basketball Tourn. (TPEC)
- 13    Sharp Performance Football Combine (SFH)

**NOTE:**
- All events at the Salina Fieldhouse have been cancelled or moved through at least January 29, 2021.
- KSHSAA has made changes to many of their state championship events. Please see [www.KSHSAA.org](http://www.KSHSAA.org) and KSHSAA social media pages for continual updates.
- The Salina Wrestling Club Kids Tournament of Champions has been cancelled for 2021; however, they are scheduled for January 2022.
An inexpensive direct mail marketing tool for Salina Area Chamber of Commerce Members

**NEXT ChamberNET mailing is MARCH 1**
*Your DEADLINE to deliver flyers to the Chamber office will be,*

**Monday, February 15, 2021 @ 5pm!**

Here’s how it works:

You deliver to the Chamber office **1,100** pre-printed 8.5” x 11” flyers advertising your product or service by or before noted deadline. Your Chamber will then mail the flyers to the entire Chamber membership the 1st week of December.

Here are the details to participate:

- Provide **1,100** 8.5” x 11” flyers (not folded) to the Chamber office, 120 W. Ash by Friday, November 13, 5pm!
- **Cost is $125** per first page, **$50** per additional attached pages, and **$60** per separate additional pages. New members get their first ChamberNET mailing free.
- The Chamber reserves the right to refuse information, if necessary.

Plan ahead and avoid the rush to market your product or service to Chamber members and reach a powerful business group with your Chamber’s low cost direct mail.
For more information, please contact your Chamber office at 827-9301.