

# MUSKOKA LAKES CHAMBER of COMMERCE

## 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

CONNECTIONS • COMMUNITY • SUPPORT • PROSPERITY





# 2020-2021 BOARD OF DIRECTORS



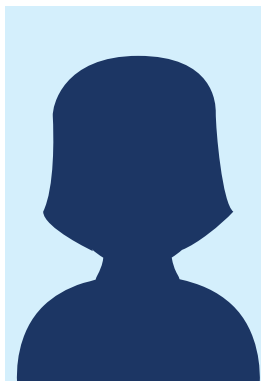
CHELSEY PENRICE  
*Past President*



SPENCER MORLAND  
*President*



GREG MURPHY  
*Secretary-Treasurer*



JEAN-ANN BARANIK  
*Secretary*



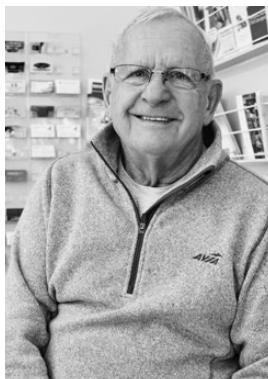
ALEXANDRA MACDONALD



PETER KELLEY



LINDA CRYDERMAN



BOB BODEN



MARCIE RODRIGUES



KELLEY COVILLE



MATT ROUSE



CHRIS NEAR



NORAH FOUNTAIN



KATELYN BROAD

## CHAMBER STAFF

Norah Fountain,  
*Executive Director*

Katelyn Broad,  
*Manager Business  
Development and  
Communications*

Report Photography Credits: Jana Rodwell (Cover Photo), Erika Hanchar (5HUNDREDS.com), Ryan Rowell, Tyler Steingard (The Lakeside Collective), Allison Milne, Norah Fountain

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Chamber Members and friends of the Chamber,  
Happy New Year!

2020 was a year like no other. It was extremely difficult to see many of our Members struggle amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Watching businesses having to close during lockdown and facing the potential of permanent closure gave us even more fuel to continuously look to support you and help move forward.

Our staff, led by Executive Director Norah Fountain, worked tirelessly to help aid our local businesses and navigate through uncharted waters.

I have highlighted some of our most important initiatives we were able to spearhead in 2020.

**Advocacy of the utmost importance:** During the early stages of the pandemic, we took it upon ourselves to be leaders in Muskoka. Whether it was assisting our members with wage subsidies, CEBA loans, or lobbying to various levels government for a Muskoka specific relief fund, we were there.

**Managing ways to safely deal with an influx in visitors:** One of the results of lockdowns and restrictions was an increase in visitors to our beautiful region. With that came the important task of finding solutions to operate while keeping people as safe as possible.

**Helping businesses adapt to the changing marketplace:** We're always looking to help our Members progress to take advantage of a more digital platform as well as find efficiencies to keep pace with an evolving world. Please don't hesitate to contact us to find out how you can alter the way your business reaches people, and innovative methods of generating revenue.

**Shopping local and staying connected to the community:** During these difficult times I call on everyone in our community to help boost our businesses and keep our commerce as local as possible. Our ability to come together and help our neighbours has never been more important.

As we move to 2021 and vaccines become more available to the masses, I hope we can start to go back to some facsimile of normalcy. Our inability to have events

and connect with everyone in person has certainly taken its toll. I honestly believe that our community is like no other and our ability to network with each other sets us apart. Despite our large geography we certainly have a small-town community feel, and with that I deeply miss being engaged at events such as at our Business After Hours, Spotlight on Muskoka, the Santa Claus Parade and more. Of course, we'll continue to find ways to connect virtually – and in the future may provide a combination of in person and virtual events. Thank you to the members who took part in our virtual Holiday Message parade that ran throughout the holidays. We also heard from families who appreciated us making virtual visits with Santa possible. A simple gesture, perhaps, but it meant a lot.

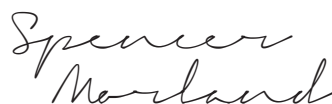
I personally cannot help but feel grateful for the simple things in life. If the pandemic has done one thing for me more than any others, it demonstrated the importance of time with loved ones, and that taking a moment for yourself can have wonderful benefits.

I want to take a moment to thank our Chamber Board Directors. Your efforts have not gone unnoticed. Many of you came on board during a difficult time and some have not even met in person yet due to COVID-19 restrictions. You have all managed to stay engaged and provided a great service to the business community.

Lastly, I want to thank Norah Fountain and Katelyn Broad directly. You two are the heartbeat of the Muskoka Lakes Chamber, and throughout the pandemic you both went to extreme lengths to reach out and help our members in any way possible. Your commitment is a shining star in Muskoka Lakes, and I am not sure what we would do without you both.

Thank you for all for being a Member of our active business community again this year. On behalf of your Chamber Board of Directors and our staff, I wish you all a prosperous New Year. Bring on 2021!

Best Regards,



SPENCER MORLAND  
President, Muskoka Lakes Chamber of Commerce

# YEAR IN REVIEW

## JANUARY

- New 5-year Strategic Plan in development with Chamber Board and regional community input gathered in December 2019
- Launched Workforce Development Video and Social Media Ad Campaign “Live Work and Play in Muskoka Lakes”
- Business After Hours – Muskoka Lakes Farm and Winery (With Parry Sound and Area Chamber of Commerce)
- Succession Planning Workshop
- Regional Innovation Strategy Group Meeting
- Township Economic Development and Grants Committee/Helped Develop New Township Economic Development Strategy



## FEBRUARY

- Business After Hours – Rosseau Retreat
- Andy's House Announcement
- Ontario Economic Report Launch
- Business After Hours – Muskoka Grown
- 100 Women Who Care Meeting
- Bala Cranberry Festival Annual Meeting



## MARCH

- Sponsored and Booth at South Muskoka Job Fair
- Advocacy Day at Queen's Park
- Business After Hours and Ribbon Cutting – Gordon Dalziel, RP, Muskoka Lakes Health Hub
- Chamber office closes due to COVID-19 order
- Began Weekly Virtual Networking Events
- Added COVID-19 Resources to Chamber Website
- Letter to Township Council Requesting tax payment deferral program due to COVID-19
- Letter to District Council requesting Bridge Financing Support (a Recovery Fund) for businesses
- 2020 Muskoka Lakes Directories Delivered
- Sent almost daily COVID resource related messages to Members



## APRIL

- Lobbied for Recovery Funds for businesses and non-profit organizations to all levels of government (specifically District & FedNor)
  - Proposal for Muskoka Economic Recovery Fund provided to District
  - “Beyond the Likes” Advanced Social Media Workshop
  - Google 360 Photo Shoot
  - District approves Muskoka Economic Recovery Fund request: commits \$750K
  - FedNor commits \$2.1million for Muskoka Economic Recovery Fund
  - Moderated Panel with MP, MPP and Mayors Phil Harding and Graydon Smith
  - First Ever Virtual Chamber Annual Meeting
  - Launched Virtual Trivia Wednesdays
  - Hosted first Virtual Regional Innovation Strategy Group Meeting
- Note: Two WSIB First Aid sessions in Bala and Port Carling cancelled due to COVID-19*

## MAY

- Teleconference meeting with Tourism Minister Lisa McLeod
- Chamber Strategic Plan approved
- Muskoka Queer Film Festival organized on behalf of Muskoka Pride
- Ordered Outside News Boxes to Display Print Marketing Materials



## JUNE

- Reopening of Chamber Office with Limited Visitor Access
- Your TV Muskoka interview, Re: Muskoka Economic Recovery Fund (*also press coverage in local newspapers*)
- Regional Focus and Pre CTV Shoot Meeting with Bala Chamber Members
- Township Economic Development Committee Meeting
- Hosted Virtual Job Fair and received Press Coverage
- CTV Ad Shoot in Bala
- Launched Customer Relationship Management System for Improved Member service
- Promoted Rosseau Farmers Market (*through to Thanksgiving*)

## JULY

- CTV Television Ad Campaign and Radio Campaigns promoting Bala as a safe place to visit to support hyper local tourism strategy
- Muskoka Economic Recovery Fully Taken Up – 17 Chamber Members were funded within Muskoka Lakes
- Cottage Country Chamber Network Meeting (*organized in partnership with Orillia Chamber*) to ensure unique needs of Cottage Country Chambers being considered by all levels of government
- Lobbied successfully for Non-Profit Organizations to have access to new RRRF (*Rural Regional Relief Fund*)
- Visitor Information Centre fully re-opened to Public
- Partnered with Gravenhurst Chamber to produce and distribute “Bear With Us” series of Mask and Social Distancing signage
- Launched Cottage Country Spirit paid social media campaign
- Township Economic Development Committee Meeting
- Presented Broadband as Essential Infrastructure to Ontario's Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs



## AUGUST

- Canada United Campaign culminating in Canada United Weekend August 28-30
- Deputation to District Public Works and Engineering Committee
- CrossFit Muskoka Ribbon Cutting
- Post Media Port Carling Ad Campaign
- Began IPAC (Infection Prevention and Control) Certification Process



## SEPTEMBER

- Social Media Campaign to promote business continuing through fall – Includes Business Profiles and Changing Hours
- Launched 3rd Annual Muskoka Cranberry Route



## OCTOBER

- Entered into Student Work Placement Partnership to provide Wage Subsidies to businesses hiring students
- Launched SantaVisits.ca
- Promotion of Township Official Plan and Strategic Plan Public Consultations
- Social Media Campaign continued – Business Profiles
- Hosted Regional Innovation Strategy Meeting
- Helped businesses access and complete CTAF (COVID Technology Adoption Fund) and Canada United PPE grants
- Small Business Week – Virtual Events Promoted
- Shop Local Social Media Campaign to counter Amazon Prime Days
- Chamber Moderates Business Round Table with MP Scott Aitchison and MPP Norm Miller
- Developed plan for ShopMuskokaLakes.com
- Engaged in Canadian Chamber of Commerce AGM and Policy Convention
- Your Backyard is Waiting Marketing Campaign
- Township Economic Development and Grants Committee Meeting
- Member, Muskoka Employment Partnership Steering Committee



## NOVEMBER

- 2020 Update to Township
- Board Training Lunch and Learn
- Give the Gift of Local Shop Local Campaign
- Dine Local Takeout Campaign

## DECEMBER

- Managing Registrations and Virtual Visits with Santa
- Virtual “Parade” of Holiday Messages from Businesses and Community Groups
- Matching Funding Support Campaign for West Muskoka Food Bank Holiday Food Drive
- Production of Embrace the Chill Winter Campaign

# 2020 HYPER LOCAL MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

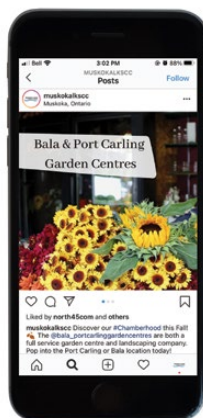
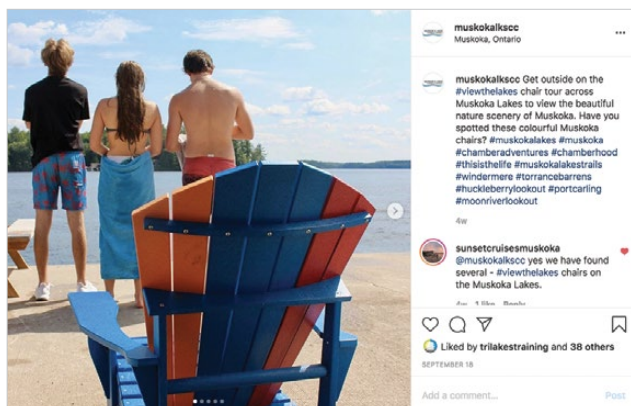
IT WAS A ROLLER COASTER YEAR IN SO MANY WAYS, INCLUDING WHEN IT CAME TO TOURISM AND OTHER MARKETING CAMPAIGNS.

When it was safe for people to visit, the focus became on travel within Ontario and the Chamber acted to ensure that businesses in Muskoka Lakes could benefit from that focus.

The focus changed to hyper local – encouraging local residents to re-discover their own backyards. After high season, the highlight was on businesses staying open – some longer than in other years – to serve the anticipated increased number of people staying in Muskoka as opposed to returning to city or winter homes.



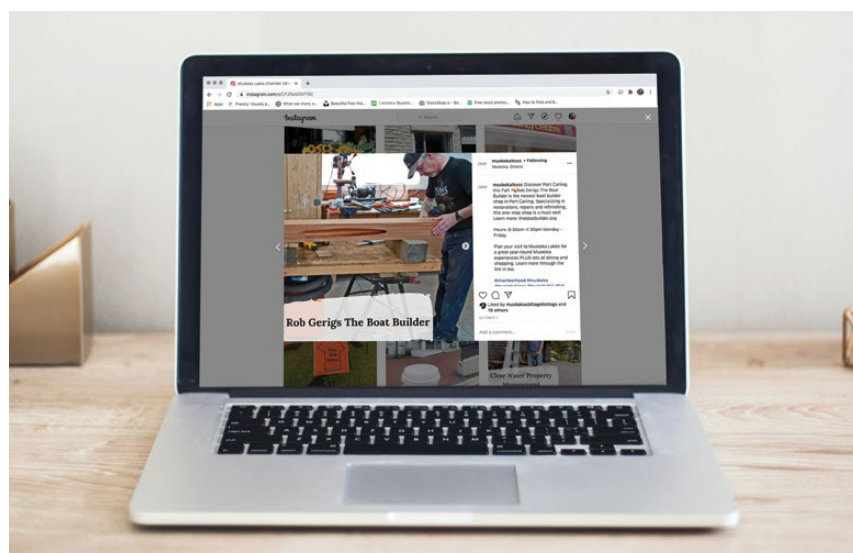
Canada United Campaign –  
in support of local businesses.



## MARKETING INITIATIVES

### CHALLENGE: KEEP LOCAL EXPERIENCES TOP OF MIND

- Discover Our Trails and Neighbourhoods Campaign
- September & October Muskoka Lakes Social Media Business Profiles (23 members featured)
- Your Backyard is Waiting #MuskokaLakes Fall Campaign
- Embrace the Chill Winter Campaign (into 2021)
- Canada United and Cottage Country Spirit Campaigns (37 members featured)

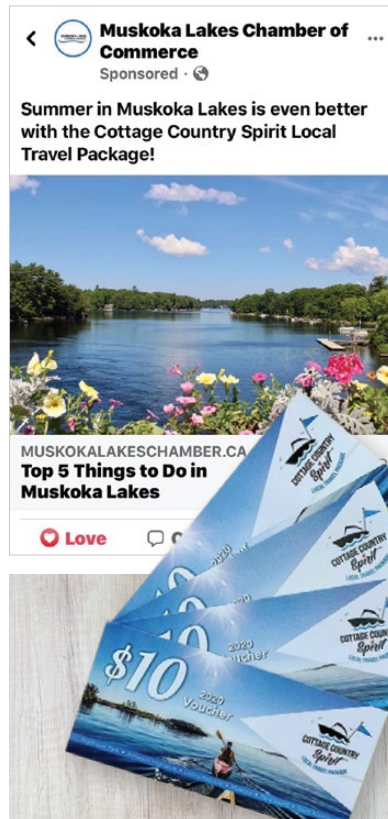
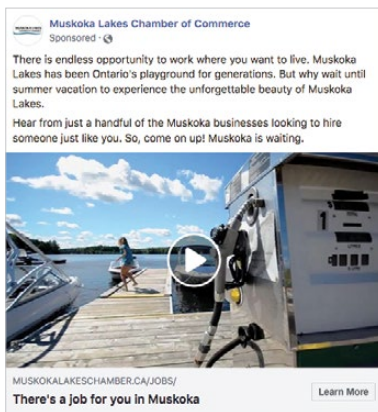
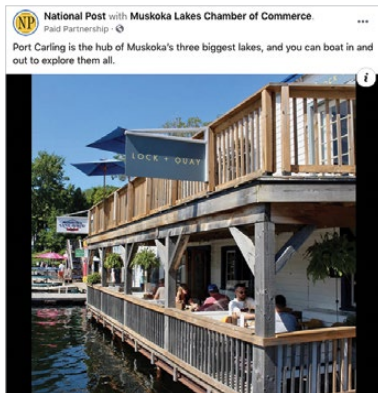
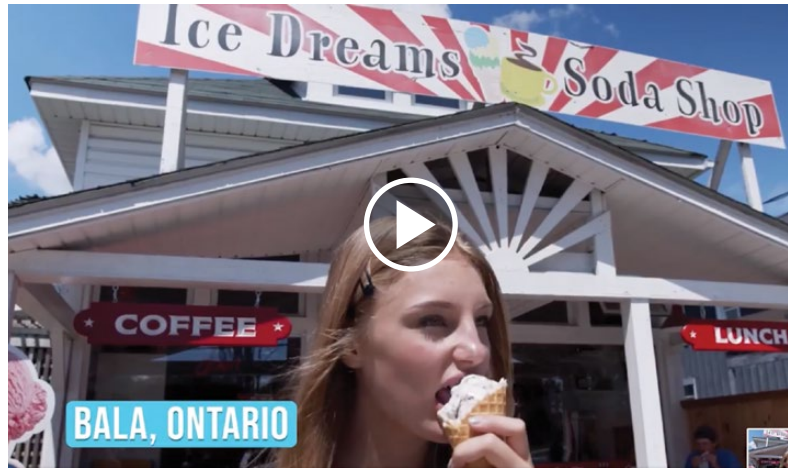




## ADVERTISING INITIATIVES

### THERE'S SO MUCH TO SEE – SAFELY – IN OUR CHAMBERHOOD

- Workforce Attraction Social Media Marketing
- Bell Media Television and Radio Buy promoting Bala
- National Post Media Buy promoting Port Carling
- Virtual Job Fair and Summer Job Highlights (30 members highlighted)
- Summer/Fall Cottage Country Spirit Campaign (Explorers' Edge voucher campaign for residents)
- 2020 Muskoka Lakes Directory
- 2020-2021 Muskoka Lakes Visitor Guide

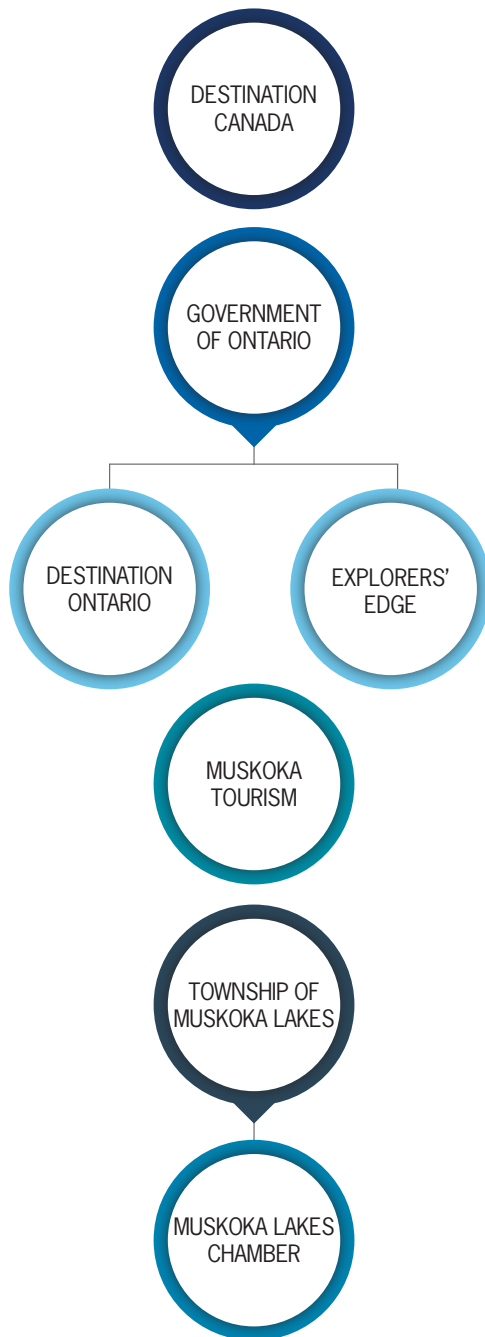


## E-BLAST MARKETING

PROVIDED COVID SUPPORT AND SHARED BUSINESS COMMUNITY NEWS.

We generally send twice weekly e-newsletters to keep members informed and up-to-date with the latest Chamber news. We also offer our members a paid opportunity to advertise their businesses or events to our dedicated contact list of over 700+ people. As of November 1, we shared 111 e-blasts to keep the community informed.

# MUSKOKA LAKES TOURISM: UNDERSTANDING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES



**DESTINATION CANADA** (formerly Canadian Tourism Commission)  
Markets Canada internationally and is funded by federal government.  
Mission: to grow Canada's tourism export revenues and support industry partners.

**DESTINATION ONTARIO**  
Destination Ontario (legally known as Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation - OTMPC). Markets Ontario nationally and internationally and is funded by Ontario government.

**RTO 12 EXPLORERS' EDGE**  
One of 13 Regional Tourism Organizations set in place and funded by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism & Culture to identify & implement regional priorities allowing for more consistent marketing of Ontario's Tourism Regions. It normally markets the RTO12 region (Muskoka, Almaguin Highlands, Parry Sound, Loring-Restoule, Algonquin Park) internationally and supports product development, investment attraction, and workforce development. During pandemic, RTO 12 supported hyper local tourism efforts.

**MUSKOKA TOURISM MARKETING AGENCY**  
A not-for-profit membership association funded by both the District of Muskoka and private sector members. Mission is to market Muskoka, primarily in Ontario and northeastern U.S. It also engages in some localized product development with partners, such as the Township of Muskoka Lakes and Muskoka Lakes Chamber of Commerce. Its Muskoka Visitor Guide has a dedicated Muskoka Lakes section provided by the Muskoka Lakes Chamber.

**TOWNSHIP OF MUSKOKA LAKES**  
The municipality has an Economic Development Strategy that recognizes tourism as a primary economic driver. It partially funds the Muskoka Lakes Chamber of Commerce as its tourism marketing and delivery partner for Muskoka Lakes and engages with the Chamber and other partners in tourism product development and promotion.

**MUSKOKA LAKES CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**  
A not for profit membership-based business association funded by private sector members, the Township of Muskoka Lakes and through fundraising (advertising and events). The object of the corporation is to promote and improve trade and commerce and the economic, civil and social welfare of the Township of Muskoka Lakes, an object which aligns with the Township's economic development strategy.



## THE CHAMBER'S TOURISM ROLE

The Chamber provides frontline visitor information and hyper local tourism marketing services. Its goal is to guide visitors to attractions and businesses in Muskoka Lakes and surrounding environs with a view to increase tourism spend and time here. The Chamber employs a variety of marketing tactics: in person information services, digital response via 24/7 website and mobile

chat, merchandising and distribution of marketing materials and marketing campaigns including targeted media buys.

It also markets Muskoka Lakes to a wider Ontario audience through visitor guide publications and advertising campaigns. The Chamber partners with the Township on some of these initiatives and is requesting Township funding again in 2021 for its tourism, marketing, business and community support efforts.





## VISITOR TRAFFIC

Yes, we run a Visitor Information Centre, too!

## WELCOME TO OUR CHAMBERHOOD WE WELCOMED 49 NEW MEMBERS IN 2020

- Ask4Design
- North Granite Ridge Golf Course
- Art on Stone + JDN Photography Canada
- BASK Insulation
- Portside Fusion
- Trinity All Saints Anglican Church
- Apex Construction Muskoka
- Rosseau Bakery & Variety
- Susan & Stephen Brown, Forest Hill Real Estate
- Gordon Dalziel RP Psychotherapist
- Environmental Pest Control
- Creative Muskoka Cards
- Design North Inc.
- Namas'tay In Muskoka
- Beachside Cottages on Lake Muskoka
- House on the Hill B & B
- Martin Weber
- Fowler Construction
- Interiors on the 45th
- Murray Mckeown – Keybase Financial
- Action First Aid Inc.
- Northern Reflections Contracting
- ECCM Electrical Contracting
- The Cottage Butcher
- Ice Dreams Soda Shop
- Duff's Cottage
- Kettering
- CrossFit Muskoka
- Ontario Mould Specialists
- Smiths Property Care
- ARD Trade & Consulting
- Touchstone on Lake Muskoka
- Lakeshore Manufacturing Services Ltd.
- Rob Gergis The Boat Builder
- Marigold Unique Flavour
- Lead Stop Specialists
- Aspen Valley Wildlife Sanctuary
- True North MVMNT
- Muskoka Lakes Hotel Suites
- MBA Mediation
- David Sword
- Let's Get Physio Muskoka
- 5Hundreds
- Ice Cream & Bean
- Genova Ceramic Tiles Corp
- Rosewood Cottage Care
- Campbell Construction
- Xplornet Communications Inc.
- Live Edge Forest



### TOP REASONS FOR VISITORS DROPPING IN

INFORMATION (everything from trail information to where to eat to where to get a plumber) • WIFI • OFFICE SERVICES (computer use, printing, fax, scans) • WASHROOM MAP/DIRECTIONS • ACCOMMODATIONS (often staff housing related)



**DID YOU KNOW:** The average visitor to our region spends \$141 (down from \$165 in 2016). If even just 200 of the visitors we advise spend that amount, we are helping to put \$28K into the local economy. The drop in spend is also an opportunity to work harder to drive visitors to buy local. \*2017 statistics

## WHAT OUR VISITORS SAY.

The following are sample comments from our 2020 guest book.

“Very informative staff.”

“Love all the stores, you guys offer everything imaginable.”

“Your staff was informative and most helpful. Thank you so much!”

“Excellent service and so essential to help me at the last second today. Katelyn was great!”

“I teach advertising/marketing and creativity at OCADU (university). This work is great. You have made a terrible pandemic something that attracts attention, memorable and very, very interesting to all age groups. (Re Bear With Us/Social Distancing Posters)”

“Will have to come back for sure!”

“Glad to be here. Looking forward to getting to know the area. Thanks for your help!”

“What a charming town! Stay safe!”

“Beautiful Country.”

“Beautiful town as much as I remember from my childhood trips on the 169 to Sudbury.”



# WHAT DOES THE CHAMBER DO ON AN ONGOING BASIS?

## BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

- Workforce attraction and job matching
- Writing grants for business related projects (RED, Broadband)
- Business consultations in partnership with funding and other business members, such as Muskoka Small Business Centre and local banks
- Custom one on one business support, e.g, Help businesses with business plan development, websites and grant applications
- Sponsor, organize and participate in Muskoka job fairs
- Produce Muskoka Lakes Directory highlighting members
- Share social media posts promoting local businesses
- Muskoka Lakes information booth at events
- Staff housing availability on website and at the office
- Provide group benefits providers and business discounts
- Direct businesses to labour/business environment statistics
- Organize and market Shop Local Initiatives, including targeted media buys
- Host or participate in regional innovation strategy meetings
- Assisted business to gain OCE funding – \$75,000 for one business
- Assist businesses in connecting with the Township
- Run business development workshops
- Obtain funding from Federal and Provincial sources for staffing to support Chamber initiatives including visitor information centres
- Highlight member businesses with brochures and business cards in the office.
- Provide list of members to public seeking services, e.g, builders, hairdressers, real estate agents etc
- Represent members at community events such as Impact Awards and member group AGMs.
- Host or organize Chamber meetings with Political Leaders





## EVENTS

- Business After Hours
- Manage events, such as the Bala Santa Claus Parade and Port Carling Midday Madness
- Support special community events
- Trek to Bethlehem support including meeting space
- Bala Cranberry Festival support
- Muskoka Lakes Christmas Market (*attracting 1000+ visitors*)
- Promote community events with events calendar, e-blasts, social media sharing
- Provide volunteers and promote Township events
- Host Municipal All Candidate Meetings

## COMMUNICATIONS

- Muskoka Visitor Guide: help with editorial, photography and distribution of 141K
- Produce, print and distribute Muskoka Lakes Directory
- Maintain events calendar on website and post blogs
- Weekly e-blasts to members
- Share social media postings promoting businesses and non profits
- Provide information about local services such garbage pickup and transportation
- Regular Social Media Shout Outs highlighting Chamber members (*30+ businesses highlighted during summer season alone*), where to dine and takeout, where to shop

## ADVOCACY

- Participate in Regional Innovation Strategy
- Represented local businesses at Queen's Park Advocacy Day, meeting with Ministers and policy staff

- Member of Canadian Chamber of Commerce and Ontario Chamber of Commerce and provided input into policy directives of both organizations (*e.g., Broadband, Flooding Mitigation, Small Business Support, Housing*)

## TOURISM

- Operate Visitor Information Centres in Bala and Port Carling (*not in Port Carling during pandemic*) and maintain info kiosks throughout area
- Recruit and train "Tourism Ambassadors" to staff info centres
- Run familiarization Tours of Muskoka Lakes
- Track visitor statistics with custom built capture system
- Provide information to visitors using multiple communications channels (*in-person, 24/7 chat, social media, etc*)
- Develop tourism products with focus on all season events (*presently new Embrace the Chill winter campaign and All Season Contest campaign in production*)
- Produce Tourism Marketing campaigns and Media Fam Tours

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- Provides meeting space for community groups
- Provide WiFi, scan, fax, photocopying and computer support to anyone requiring it
- Provide temporary working space for cottagers and traveling business people
- Collect donations and promote fund-raising events such as Andy's House, Food Bank and Legion concerts among others
- Only public washroom in Bala north of Bala Falls Rd.
- We are the face to face Google for everyday questions





# OUR BUSINESS CCASE



**OUR VISION:** Drive economic prosperity through connectivity, education, and advocacy.  
#Chamberhood

## Strategic Plan 2021-2024



### CONNECT



- Local network building and action planning
- Business connections
- Township connection
- Connection to members



### COMMUNICATE



- Clear Chamber benefits
- Refine marketing
- New digital tools
- Target messaging
- More Check Ins



### ADVOCATE



- Pandemic support and recovery
- Identify member needs
- Implement new and innovative tactics
- Champion change



### STRENGTHEN



- Partnerships
- New revenue streams
- Define membership value
- Increase member revenue
- Succession planning



### EDUCATE



- Identify educational needs
- Technology/digital training
- New formats for training
- Member mentorship
- Source local experts



Learn more about the Chamber and Muskoka Lakes by visiting our website: [www.MuskokaLakesChamber.ca](http://www.MuskokaLakesChamber.ca)

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