



5702 McPherson Road Suite 8B Laredo, Texas 78041

FY 2021 - 2022

ANNUAL REPORT





It is with great pleasure that we welcome you to the Laredo Chamber of Commerce, the strongest and oldest business organization in the city, representing the interests of businesses of all sizes and sectors in Laredo and the surrounding areas.

At the Chamber, we pride ourselves in hosting valuable business development programs catered exclusively to the local business needs; hosting productive networking events, to expand the clientele portfolio and our members' revenue stream; and educate business owners on alternative sources of finance and many other unique opportunities for growth.

This year marks exciting times for our community. After almost 50 years of calling 2310 San Bernardo Avenue our home, in July 2022, we marked the final month to be housed in this historical building that witnessed many important business endeavors. The new chapter began at 5702 McPherson Road 8B, on August 1st, 2022. While this might be our new official address, we know that our strength as a group happens all throughout our community.

We have also retooled our service delivery and have added important business development features, such as Business Spotlight, where we promote our members, their products, and services; the Business to Business (B2B) matchmaking, where we match buyers with suppliers for contracting opportunities, and many more services. This year we also launched a new website, with tools to scale small and local enterprises, such as the Procurement HUB, and promotion opportunities to maximize sale transactions of our members' products and services. I invite you to take a moment to familiarize yourself with our staff, our programs, committees, and the wide array of services the Laredo Chamber of Commerce delivers.

Our business community is the core of those entrepreneurs who contribute to the economic vitality of one of the most important commercial hubs for international trade in the US-Mexico border and the Americas. We thank you for your commitment, your investment, and I welcome you to reach out to our offices to foster a mutual beneficial dialogue.

With gratitude ,

Gabriela Morales

Gabriela Morales
President & CEO

Mike Marasco

Mike Marasco
Chairman of the Board of Directors

Mission Statement

We are a membership organization that provides leadership by connecting, building, and growing the economic interest of the business, tourism, and educational initiatives of the Laredo / Webb County Metropolitan area by being a politically proactive advocate, providing professional development, and serving as a catalyst for emerging trends.

Membership

The Laredo Chamber ends this fiscal year with over 700 members -- 85% of these are business firms, 4% are individual memberships, 7% are nonprofit organizations, with the rest constituted by associate memberships. There was an increment of over 100 members compared to last FY.

Accreditation

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce in 2018 attained the highest level of accreditation offered by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce -- 5 stars. It was first accredited by the national Chamber in 1997 and has maintained an accredited status over the past two decades. The U.S. Chamber reports that there are approximately 7,000 chambers in the United States. Of these, only 200 are accredited. These represent less than 3% of all chambers across the country. In Texas, the Laredo Chamber is one of only 23 chambers with 5-star status. In January 2023 the Chamber will submit the re-accreditation.

Governance

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce is completely autonomous. Although it maintains active membership in the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Texas Association of Business (TAB), it is governed at the local level by a board made up of 30 elected and 10 appointed directors' representative of its membership.

History

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce is the longest running business organization in the Laredo/Webb County area. Formally registered with the Texas Secretary of State in 1915, it celebrated its 100th anniversary in April of 2015.



Membership Services & Business Development

The service delivery for the membership at the Laredo Chamber of Commerce has been retooled starting FY 2021 – 2022. The membership has now an interactive experience with the Chamber, delivered through a brand-new CRM system, brand-new www.laredochamber.com website, added membership benefits, and an enhanced social media promotion program named “Business Spotlight”. We have also delivered in-person quarterly networking mixers where businesses can meet their next client in a friendly business environment. The membership numbers have increased to 685 as of July 2022, having as a monthly goal to add 20 new members in this FY2021-2022.

- **Business Development Certification Program.** Through this program, our members get empowered with education on critical topics such as: innovation and entrepreneurship, human resources law, retaining employees, cybersecurity, and many more. The series of modules finalize right with the fiscal year with a breakfast ceremony and awarding the Certification to those who attended at least 6 of the modules. This program has educated over 60 businesses in the locality.
- **Business Spotlight.** With the Business Spotlight, businesses can leverage the Laredo Chamber of Commerce’s social media following of 50K combined through the several platforms and promote their products or services. We align the spotlights with traditional festivities or holidays to fulfill the client demand that comes with those particular dates. A weekly Business Spotlight has been coordinated since the beginning of the fiscal year to date.
- **Business-to-Business matchmaker (B2B):** The B2B is a new service delivery where a member buyer is match with a member supplier for potential contracting opportunities. These matches are done either in person or electronically. Members have recorded testimonies of this new benefit that the Chamber has brought to their company and secured contracts in the construction industry.
- **Chamber Weekly Electronic Newsletter.** On average, the electronic newsletter reaches under 2,000 unique subscribers to disseminate information to the community. Members have unlimited number of posts that can be incorporated into this communication on a weekly basis. The Newsletter goes out on Friday, recapitulating the business opportunities of the week, promotions, calendar of events, jobs postings, community fairs, and many more. The Membership Unit strategizes on creating the most relevant content to maintain a healthy 40% opening and readership rate. Over 40 communications have been coordinated and sent out to the community from the beginning of the FY as of today.
- **Procurement Hub.** Within the www.laredochamber.com website resides a live Request for Proposals (RFPs) page to infuse contracting opportunities to our members. The site posts RFPs from the Laredo Chamber of Commerce, and many other private and public organizations that are in need of products or services.
- **Ribbon Cuttings and Groundbreakings.** This in-person Chamber service provides logistical and event planning support, coordinate invitations and participation of local stakeholders, media and

elected officials. It is done through the coordination of volunteers who service in the Bienvenidos Committee and who allocate community hours to the success of the Chamber.

- **Websites.** Laredo Chamber: www.laredochamber.com; Cola Blanca: www.colablanca.com; and Visit Webb County: www.visitwebbcounty.com websites provide relevant information to out-of-town visitors, puts heads-in-beads, retains and attracts membership and act as promotional tools to local restaurants, hotels, retail, and entertainment.
- **Social, digital, and traditional media for Laredo Chamber and Cola Blanca.** Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube from both entities combined reach over 100,000 unique accounts, answers virtual inquiries channeled through these outlets about the County, the Chamber, membership benefits, and creates an interactive relationship with businesses locally and interested parties from all around the world.
- **Quarterly Mixers.** The Chamber hosts quarterly mixers to provide a relaxed opportunity to our Chamber members and potential members to come and join business conversations in a casual environment while enhancing their clientele portfolio. These opportunities are brought at no cost to Chamber members to ensure we build a network of resources within the community.

Regresa a Laredo Campaign Launched in October 2021

In October 2021, the Laredo Chamber of Commerce launched the “Regresa a Laredo” campaign as a result of the planned re-opening of the U.S. border for fully vaccinated non-essential travelers after 19 months of having the U.S. – Mexico borders closed. These 19-months were devastating for most downtown shops that had already suffered from the economic downturn brought by the pandemic. During this period of time, the non-essential traveler could not cross the border to shop in Laredo, therefore, some local businesses faced the hard decision to having to close permanently.

The purpose of this campaign was to stimulate the Laredo economy by bringing back the Mexican national and feature four segments of the economy: retail, hotels, restaurants, and entertainment. The city-wide campaign requested the participation of every business in Laredo to offer a discount, a promotion, or a free item, and package that up into one flier publication.

The Regresa a Laredo Campaign was promoted across the country of Mexico, kicking it off with a press conference in Mexico City. 1,000 of the promotional flyers with discounts and coupons were printed and distributed during Black Friday weekend at Bridge One. Other electronic distribution venues were utilized as well, such as the Chamber website, that registered about 2,000 electronic flyers downloaded just in the month of November 2022. The Regresa a Laredo Campaign is now a seasonal campaign planned for periods with most Mexican national visits, such as Easter Week, Back to School, and Black Friday.

Vision Conference - Economic Outlook in 2022

The Vision Conference has been coordinated by the Laredo Chamber for over 30 years. This year, the Vision Annual Conference - Economic Outlook featured Secretary of State John B. Scott on April 26th, 2022 at the IBC Annex, raising over \$73,573.25 this FY. Additional speakers, such as Former Mexican Ambassador to the U.S. Geronimo Gutierrez Fernandez, President & CEO of Kansas City Southern, Patrick J. Ottensmeyer, Daniel Covarrubias, PhD at Texas A&M International University Texas Center, and Frank Mastrapasqua, Ph.D., Chief Investment Officer, at M. Capital, provided insight on the latest economic outlook, global supply chain challenges,

the economy, and the U.S. – Mexico bilateral trade relationship. Title sponsorship from International Bank of Commerce assisted offsetting costs by providing the venue, catering, and other expenses. The event registration tallied about 200 participants from South Texas, Mexico, and beyond, generating heads in beds and economic activity in the region.

Bola Blanca Chamber Classic / Fundraiser

This year's Bola Blanca Chamber Classic was held on Saturday, May 21st 2022. The tournament hosted over 100 golfers, who enjoyed the two-person scramble held at Casa Blanca Golf Course, promoting Webb County and its outdoor recreation / facilities. Total fundraising revenues raised from the Bola Blanca Chamber Classic were \$30,760.86.

Cola Blanca Big Buck Contest

Held during the fall and winter months, the Cola Blanca Big Buck Contest attracts over 400 hunter registrations on an annual basis. In October of 2021, the contest hosted 355 hunters with 73% from cities outside of Laredo, generating heads in beds. This same year, the hunter's Awards Banquet was held on August 27th and attracted over 400 attendees and 16 local vendors at the L.I.F.E. Downs Pavilion, totaling \$83,408.00 in profit. With the enhanced social media, print, and billboard advertising, the estimated projection is to increase the registrants and awards banquet attendees to 500. The future projection is also the need for a greater venue. The Cola Blanca Big Buck Contest is now a renowned outdoor activity sought after prominent hunters throughout the U.S. and Mexico.

Education & Workforce

The Youth Leadership Laredo (YLL) program, under the guidance of Adrian Zapata, graduated a total of 35 seniors, who completed a 5-year commitment. Each one of them was presented with a \$500 scholarship. A total of \$17,500, which were raised by the students and volunteers throughout the year, were distributed. Students in YLL are recruited from 8th grade classes of local private and public schools, and participate in the 5-year program organized by a team of volunteers.

The Education Committee, chaired by Michael Gonzalez, delivered the School Bell Awards, where distinguished educators received a recognition for going above and beyond in and out of the classroom. The 12 exemplary educators, are representative of all levels in the private and public-school setting. Recipients also received \$500 dollars check co-sponsored by Killam Development and Sames Laredo Chevrolet as part of the prize.

On Friday, June 17th, the Education Committee presented scholarships to three graduating seniors, winners of the *Spirit of Laredo* competition. The three high school students who placed first, second and third place received scholarships of \$2,000, \$1,000 and \$500, respectively, for winning entries. Killam Development matched the Education Committee in funding the scholarships.

Advocacy

This year, the Chamber's role as voice and advocate for the business community was put to a test with the enhanced Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) inspections that took place on April 13th for all inbound commercial traffic coming from Mexico through the Colombia Solidarity International Bridge. The enhanced DPS inspections created delays on what is usually a speedy processing of cargo. This delays of hours if not days, created a negative economic effect on Laredo's most prominent industries, the State of Texas and the Country in general.

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce advocacy efforts assisted in mobilizing forces within the trade community and created a systematic communication channel with the Texas Secretary of State and the Office of the Texas Governor Abbot. This channel of communication was put in place in order to provide the latest in-land port data to these two offices. The operation went back to normal and trade flows up to speed after a press conference from both Governors, Texas and Nuevo Leon's took place to agree on a pre-vetting of the cargo agreement prior to entering the U.S. The Chamber continues to advocate for free trade, the flow of goods and services, infrastructure, and technology in the region and surrounding areas. Breakfast with the Mayor is another Chamber effort that has successfully allowed for the Mayor and other public officials to interact with the largest employers in the South Texas area to address timely challenges and opportunities. This advocacy effort is done in order to foster a greater understanding and strengthen the relationship between public and private sector. The business community has benefited tremendously from these engagements as they have provided answers to some of the most pressing issues such as COVID vaccines, water conservation, city management, emergency preparedness, among many others.

Lights, Camera, Auction! Fundraiser and Building Relocation: 5702 McPherson Road Suite 8A

After 45 years of the Laredo Chamber of Commerce making 2310 San Bernardo Avenue its home, the organization took the initiative to seek for a new home that will provide a centralized location for the growing business community. After a thorough search of properties, and locations, the Executive Committee motioned to place an offer for the 5702 McPherson Suite 8 A&B properties. Such offer got accepted after several rounds of negotiations, and on August 1st, 2022 the Chamber made this building officially its home. To wrap up 45 years of memories and important milestones for the economic development of the area, an auction was hosted as a farewell to the building that witnessed historical events. Such auction was an invitation for members and non-members alike to partake on a one-of-a-kind event and have the opportunity to bid on their favorite memorabilia, local art, Cola Blanca collectors' items, photos, and archives. The fundraiser collected over \$4,000 dollars in revenues from items that were auction off at this event.



Thank You!

