

BUSINESS JOURNAL

COVER STORY



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Mission 1,000: The ambitious goal of the new chairman of the Laredo Chamber of Commerce

By Jorge A. Vela
LAREDO MORNING TIMES

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce has a new chairman of its Board of Directors, and as he started his new tenure on Tuesday night, he made it sure to have a very ambitious goal of growing the 700 membership organization to 1,000 or more.

IBC Bank's Senior Vice President of Marketing Gabriel Castillo officially was handed the gavel to become the new chairman of the board for the Laredo Chamber of Commerce this week. He states that he is very prepared for his one year tenure and for his ambitious goal thanks to the previous two chairmen Mike Marasco and Cliffe Killam, serving as mentors and preparing him for his turn.

"Fortunately, I have been on both sides," Castillo said. "I used to have my own business, and then at some point I worked for other businesses, worked for a nonprofit and worked for a for-profit, so I think my experience helps and guides me to see what is best for our community and how we can help do more for everyone."

"The little guy needs our help just as much as the big guy, and quite frankly the big guy can always help out the little guy. The idea is to create a united front so that we can do more for our city, and we should take the honor of business and think of the city as a whole, think of the economy as a whole and do what we can."

In 2022, the Laredo Chamber of Commerce reported a historic milestone as they reported 700 members in their organization. However, for the incoming chairperson, 700 might be good, but he is looking forward to add at least 300 more.

"That is my goal. I am not sure

if it will happen, but it is my goal," Castillo said. "We should always have goals about moving ahead, to do our best and to reach high goals, and it takes a group effort. I am not going to do it by myself, as we need a whole team, but we have a good team of people who are very hardworking on the board and also very hardworking at the Chamber."

Castillo is a native Laredoan who considers to have seen "the good, bad and ugly" of Laredo. He states that businesses and nonprofits like the Laredo Chamber of Commerce must be in constant contact with the local government such as City Council in efforts to forge solutions for the issues that matter.

During his tenure, Castillo will try to see what he can do to revive the downtown area and help the area's councilmember, as he states that the business life there is doing poorly due to the economic effects of the pandemic, inflation and other economic problems.

Castillo states that he comes in a time of challenge and he understands how all of these factors affect businesses of all sizes. The main threats he sees is continued high inflation, high interest rates and other global issues impacting local economies.

"One thing that we do is that we try to be positive and be solution makers — not just point fingers but look for perfection in everything and make things better," Castillo said. "Go from good to great, and I am hoping that it is what happens with the Chamber as I move forward and try to do my best to lead it in a new path."

Gabriela Morales, president and CEO of the Laredo Chamber of Commerce, spoke about Castillo's involvement and hard work with Laredo community.

"I know that he is very in-

involved with the community, and I know that he has also done wonderful things not only for IBC but also Laredo Center for the Arts and other nonprofit organizations around the city," she said. "He has also been part of our executive committee for many years, so I have seen hands-on his involvement and his love for the Laredo community. I am looking forward to working very closely together with him."

According to Morales, even prior to him taking the gavel as official chairman, she and Castillo had already been strategizing various business ideas that they believe the local business industry would be "very interested about." She also firmly believes that with his leadership the organization will be able to reach their 1,000- member goal.

"It will be achieved, because we know that the call of action to improve our city is out there and the business community knows

Chairman continues on B3



Gabriel Castillo received the gavel from the former chairman of Board of Directors, Mike Marasco.



Courtesy photo/Laredo Chamber of Commerce

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