

## Elevate, Connect, Thrive: Annual Conference Promises Unforgettable Experience



Patrick Ellis, ACE

As anticipation builds for the upcoming Western Association of Chamber Executives (W.A.C.E.) Annual Conference, chamber professionals from across the United States and Canada are gearing up for an event that promises to be nothing short of extraordinary.

With an illustrious history dating back to 1924, W.A.C.E. has been a guiding force for chamber executives, and this year's conference, marking the association's centennial celebration, is set to be a milestone event.

### Keynote Speakers

The conference lineup boasts an impressive array of keynote speakers, each bringing unique perspectives and invaluable insights to the stage.

• **Former Montana Governor Marc Racicot:** Renowned for his commitment to bipartisanship, integrity and ethical leadership. Governor Racicot, along with historian **Marc Johnson** of the Mansfield Center, will share a conversation that transcends political divides. Their wealth of experience promises to inspire chamber executives to foster collaboration and lead with unwavering principles.

• **Dr. Frank Luntz, American political consultant:** As we navigate a dynamic election cycle in American politics, Dr. Luntz will take center stage to provide unparalleled insights into political commentary and polling. Dr. Luntz has a keen understanding of the political landscape, and his address will equip attendees with the knowledge they need to navigate the ever-evolving political terrain.

• **Crystal Allen Dallas, Excel Business Concept:** Sponsored by the U.S. Chamber, Crystal Allen Dallas, former vice president of membership development for the Greater Shreveport Chamber of Commerce, has a wealth of experience in chamber leadership. Her session promises practical strategies for membership develop-

ment and valuable insights into building thriving chamber communities.

### Centennial Celebration *Centennial Celebration: Building the Future of Chamber Leadership*

This year's conference marks the centennial celebration of W.A.C.E., a significant milestone in the association's rich history. With a focus on developing the next generation of chamber leadership, the conference will celebrate the accomplishments of the past while laying the groundwork for a vibrant and innovative future.

The heart of the conference lies in its 30 breakout sessions, each meticulously curated to address key areas crucial for chamber success. Attendees can choose from sessions covering Economic Development, Workforce Development, Advocacy, Membership Revenue, Non-Dues Revenue, Chamber Structure, and Community Challenges.

These sessions, led by industry experts, will provide actionable strategies and tangible takeaways to address the diverse challenges faced by chamber professionals.

### Why Attend?

The W.A.C.E. Annual Conference isn't just an event; it's an opportunity to elevate your skills, connect with industry leaders, and thrive in an ever-changing landscape.

Whether you're a seasoned chamber executive or a rising star in the industry, the conference offers a unique chance to connect with like-minded professionals, gain insights from keynote speakers, and delve into breakout sessions that cater to your specific needs.

As we celebrate W.A.C.E.'s 100-year journey, we invite you to be a part of this momentous occasion. Join us for an unforgettable experience that promises to shape the future of chamber leadership, foster collaboration, and empower you to lead with integrity, innovation, and resilience.

Elevate your expectations, connect with the best in the industry, and thrive in the vibrant community of chamber professionals at the W.A.C.E. Annual Conference. See you there!

*Patrick Ellis, ACE, is president/CEO of the Murrieta/Wildomar (CA) Chamber and chair of the W.A.C.E. 2024 Conference Committee.*

# #1

**VOLUME 55**  
**JANUARY**  
**2024**

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### SNAPSHOT

### Importance vs. Performance of Chamber Being a Catalyst for Business Growth

IMPORTANCE	PERFORMANCE	DON'T KNOW
89%	57%	20%

Source: Industry averages from cumulative results of W.A.C.E. chamber performance surveys of 27,028 members of local chambers.

## COMMENTARY

# New Year, New Direction for Association



Lorraine Clarno, ACE

It has been a true honor and privilege to serve as the chair of the board. We all knew that 2023 would be different for W.A.C.E. with Dave Kilby's retirement after 30-plus years of steady and strong leadership.

Today, we find ourselves in an unfamiliar but extremely exciting and pioneering time for our organization. We are financially strong, our membership is thriving, and we are soon to be an independent professional development organization for the first time in our 100-year history.

## Transition Ahead

After careful research and due diligence, your board and transition team decided to move from a management association structure and take our future into our own hands.

As you read this, the team should be in the final stages of finding our first CEO. As word of the new direction spread, we were overwhelmed with the expressed interest in the position from many experienced and qualified W.A.C.E. members and chamber professionals.

It was imperative to the board to ensure transparency and remove all potential conflicts of interest and personal relationships in the process; therefore, we engaged a third-

party professional recruiting firm to get us through the vetting process and to identify the final candidates.

The CEO interview panel will consist of current board members, past chairs of the board, and members at large. We will announce our new leadership in February if all goes as planned.

## Strategic Plan

With your trust and support as our foundation, we are preparing to embark on another year of change, evolution, and improvement.

The incoming board, with your help and input at the conference and through additional communications, will work with the new CEO to develop and execute a three-year strategic plan to take W.A.C.E. and its professional development and support of chamber of commerce professionals to new heights.

Huge thanks to my fellow board members who have navigated the past 12 months with steadfast commitment and provided their passion, expertise and direction. And a final heartfelt thank you to Jennifer Johnson for getting us to the finish line and the CalChamber for their years of support and partnership.

As many of us have heard

for years — "Eat change for breakfast" (Kilbyism). It's time to grab that extra-big cereal bowl and fill it with our favorite Lucky Charms!

I wish you all a very Happy New Year and a wildly successful 2024.

*Lorraine Clarno, ACE, is president/CEO of the Discover Kalispell (MT) Chamber and 2023–2024 W.A.C.E. Board chair.*

## 2023 - 2024 W.A.C.E. OFFICERS

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## CHAIRMAN'S CIRCLE

Gold Members

**CalChamber** **Citslinc** **Indus Travels** **Personify**  
**International, Inc.**

The Chairman's Circle is a special group of members that have committed to support W.A.C.E. through sponsorships. If your business would like to become a member of the Chairman's Circle, please contact W.A.C.E. staff at (916) 442-2223 or email [wace@calchamber.com](mailto:wace@calchamber.com).

## LEADER TO LEADER

# 2023 Successes: Programs to Nurture Talent, Celebrate Victories, Fight Retail Crime

*Looking back on 2023, what was your chamber's biggest success/accomplishment?*



**Jim Johnson, CCE, IOM  
President/CEO  
Pearland (TX) Chamber**

Our biggest accomplishment was being recognized by the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (ACCE) as Chamber of the Year!

Chambers too often don't do a good job of telling our story. The application process and the interview allowed our entire team to reflect on our programs, successes and messaging. This internal review translated directly externally in our communications. We are now encouraged to tell the community our wins and tie it back to our mission and purpose. This is reflected in new member growth and increased sponsorships throughout the year.

We also really dug into workforce issues and launched WorkinPearland.com. This comprehensive job board and employer resource center has posted more than 600 jobs, engaged 65-plus businesses, and interacted with 2,500 unique residents. This is all done via a 24/7 virtual meta-verse environment that allows for unique interactions.

Our goal is to decrease

the number of residents who commute daily while showcasing careers within our own community, and we are seeing residents get hired with local companies! The branding is now carrying over to all our workforce initiatives, including training and revamped in-person job fairs.



**Krystal Crockett, IOM  
President/CEO  
Bixby Metro (OK) Chamber**

The Bixby Metro Chamber's biggest accomplishment in 2023 was recognizing the rapid changes in our community and moving toward them rather than sticking to what "we've always done."

While this may not seem like a huge accomplishment for a chamber, our industry often fights the same battles repeatedly — the sacred cows, the loud voices that want us to do what serves them rather than our membership overall, and the dread of changing a "successful" program to meet the needs of business with the risk of monetary loss.

We set up and began executing a strategic plan that offers bold support for spreading the good news of our community to drown out the social media naysayers, began work on a comprehensive economic development plan that sup-

ports business and not just the most recent developer, and are being louder in our support of our public schools in a way that is not catering to the desires of our elected officials.

We continue to offer support to our businesses and we love to have a good amount of fun. However, if the chamber doesn't recognize the outside risks to our members and step in front of them before they do damage — who will?



**Rana Ghadban  
CEO  
Roseville Area (CA) Chamber**

In the remarkable culmination of 2023, the Roseville Area Chamber of Commerce celebrated the successful launch of the U.S. Chamber's Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) Initiative within the health care sector in the Greater Sacramento Region.

By convening industry leaders from Kaiser Permanente, Sutter Health, UC Davis, Dignity Health, and Raley's, our chamber demonstrated an unwavering commitment to bridging the talent gap within our region.

Leveraging the TPM framework, we were able to identify critical jobs, conduct job demand projections, and engage in the implementation of solutions with our local talent

providers. This strategic alliance led by our chamber not only addresses critical workforce needs, but also exemplifies the power of collaboration in fostering sustainable solutions for the region's economic vitality.



**Bridget Dixon, IOM  
President/CEO  
Santa Fe (NM) Chamber**

In 2023, the standout achievement of the Santa Fe Chamber of Commerce was the creation of the New Mexico Organized Retail Crime Association (NMORCA). This collaboration with retail members and law enforcement proved pivotal in combating organized retail crime (ORC).

NMORCA's digital platform facilitates real-time information exchange, enhancing efforts to prevent and prosecute ORC in New Mexico. Addressing the dual threats of financial and physical harm posed by ORC, NMORCA not only safeguards businesses but also the broader community.

The economic ramifications, including threats to competitiveness and job opportunities, highlight the urgency of joining NMORCA — a free, straightforward process that allows individuals and businesses to actively contribute to a safer New Mexico.



## Survey Says

# BUSINESS ISSUES & ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

### Top 3 business concerns in your community

1. Housing Affordability (64%)
2. Workforce Shortage (50%)
3. Homelessness (32%)



**56%**

Said their state is going in the wrong direction



**59%**

Said the country is going in the wrong direction

**54%**

Labeled their community as a friendly environment for business

Do you think your state is going in the right or wrong direction?

	CA	Other States
Right	15%	33%
Wrong	64%	48%
No Opinion	21%	19%

Data was collected in December 2023 with participation from 165 chamber executives.

# Foundation Announces Recipients of 2024 Conference Scholarships

The W.A.C.E. Foundation Board is pleased to announce that the following 20 chamber chief executive and staff professional members will receive scholarships in the amount of \$500 each to assist with their registration for the 2024 W.A.C.E. Conference in Orange County, CA on February 7–9.

This year's scholarship recipients are:

- **Marcella Avilez**, Greater Irvine (CA) Chamber;
- **Cherilyn Bairos**, Oakdale (CA) Chamber;
- **Josie De Vera**, Chino Valley (CA) Chamber;
- **Lisa Farquharson**, The Dalles Area (OR) Chamber;
- **Anne Glasscock**, Kaufman (TX) Chamber;
- **Andrea Helart**, Lake Havasu Area (AZ) Chamber;
- **Damon Hunneman**, Murrieta/Wildomar (CA) Chamber;
- **Vanessa Lee**, Oceanside (CA) Chamber;
- **Natalie Leighton**, Long Beach Area (CA) Chamber;
- **Jose Guadarrama**, Atascadero (CA) Chamber;
- **Renay Mehta**, Chino Valley (CA) Chamber;
- **Courtney Nakagawa**, Greater Irvine (CA) Chamber;

- **Elizabeth Prentiss**, Palisade (CO) Chamber;
- **Michael Ritter**, Fruita Area (CO) Chamber;
- **Rachel Sparks**, Calaveras (CA) Chamber;
- **Briana Swan**, Oakdale (CA) Chamber;
- **Sara Teel**, Glenwood Springs (CO) Chamber Resort Association;
- **Loretta Thomas**, Greater Grays Harbor (WA), Inc.;

- **Sue Turner**, Castle Rock (CO) Chamber;
- **Randy Young**, Benicia (CA) Chamber.

In addition to providing the above scholarships, the Foundation is also a platinum sponsor of the annual conference, helping underwrite the costs associated with keynote speakers. We encourage you to support the Foundation at the upcoming conference by par-

ticipating in the raffle and live auction so that the Foundation can continue to support the development of chamber of commerce professionals.



## Preparing For Your Planning Session or Board Retreat?

Check out the updated Board Retreat Facilitator List in the resource library at [www.waceonline.com](http://www.waceonline.com).





## W.A.C.E. 100 YEARS

2024 W.A.C.E. CONFERENCE  
Hyatt Regency Orange County  
February 7 - February 9

WEDNESDAY,  
FEBRUARY 7

Registration  
Keynote Speakers  
Marc Johnson and  
Marc Racicot



Breakouts

Connections  
Luncheon & Awards  
Presentation

Breakouts

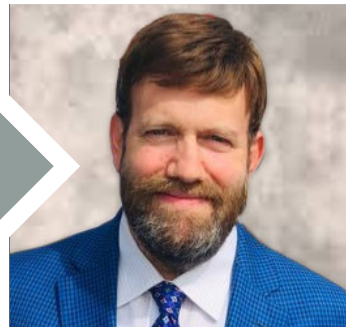


Emerging Leaders  
New Member &  
First Time Attendee  
Reception

Welcome Reception  
& Trade Show

THURSDAY,  
FEBRUARY 8

Keynote Speaker  
Dr. Frank Luntz



Breakouts



100 Year Celebration  
Dinner

Breakouts

Lunch & Awards

FRIDAY,  
FEBRUARY 9

Keynote Speaker  
Crystal Allen  
Dallas



W.A.C.E.  
Game Show

Conference  
Adjourns



## Chamber Executives in the News

The Greater Bakersfield (CA) Chamber has hired **Janelle Capra** as their next president/CEO. Capra previously led the Alzheimer's Disease Association of Kern County.

**Sherri Souza** is the new president/CEO of the Livermore Valley (CA) Chamber. Souza

has been serving as interim CEO for the last 10 months after the departure of **Dawn Argula** due to a medical leave of absence. Before stepping into the interim position, Souza served as the chamber's director of operations.

After three-and-a-half

years, **Lynnette Buffington** has announced her resignation from the Greater Grays Harbor (WA), Inc. to become the chief of staff for the Seattle Metro (WA) Chamber. **Jon Martin** will serve as the interim CEO while a search for a successor is underway.

**Jake Mangas** has announced his departure from the Redding (CA) Chamber. Mangas led the chamber for eight years. He resigned to accept the position of president and chief philanthropy officer of Mercy Foundation North.

After 22 years of service to the chamber industry, **Kathy McCorry** has announced her retirement. McCorry is currently the CEO of the South County (CA) Chambers. She will be succeeded by former Board Chair **Jeff Chambers**, who will serve as the interim CEO while a search for a permanent executive is conducted.

# Are You Utilizing the Ad Wizard?



## The Chamber is community.

Whether in times of prosperity or times of crisis, we are with you on the front lines, leading the way and making sure our community emerges stronger than ever.

We are all in this together at [www.chamberwebsite.com](http://www.chamberwebsite.com)

**YOUR CHAMBER LOGO**  
Catalyst. Convener. Champion.

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Western Association of Chamber Executives

The W.A.C.E. Ad Wizard allows you to easily create a custom 3C "The Chamber Is..." advertising campaign for your chamber.

## MEETING DATES

W.A.C.E. Events  
(916) 442-2223  
[www.waceonline.com](http://www.waceonline.com)

### 2024 Annual Conference

February 7-9, 2024  
Hyatt Regency Orange County  
Garden Grove, CA

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**Sponsorship**

**Opportunities**

### Academy 2024

August 4-7, 2024  
Hyatt Regency Sacramento  
Sacramento, CA

Access the Ad Wizard at [wizard.waceonline.com](http://wizard.waceonline.com)