

Presidents Report September 2020

Thursday 17 September 2020

The Greater Southern Gold Coast Chamber of Commerce. Inc. AGM
Currumbin RSL

Hilary Jacobs – President

Greater Southern Gold Coast Chamber of Commerce

It's now 4 years since our merger in 2016. As the President of the Greater Southern Gold Coast Chamber of Commerce it's great to be able to report that your chamber is growing stronger year on year.

****This time** last year we had reached 89 financial members and had around \$46,000 in funds. We've grown our membership by another 19% to 106 and our asset base is now sitting at around \$55,000. Our Treasurer John Forrester will have more details on our financial status in his report.

During the last 12 months we have increased the number of Gold Members to a total of 15, we have eight Silver members, and nine bronze members. We now have 67 general members and four lifetime members. Sadly during the COVID crisis we saw the closure of The Sun Community Newspaper who had been our media partners for some years. Without the support of all of our members and the volunteering of our committee and executive the GSGC Chamber wouldn't exist. So thank you to everyone here for your ongoing and continuing support.

****At our last** AGM the executive was confirmed as our two Vice Presidents being Jo-Ann Smith and Chris Ward, Secretary Mike Remmer, John Forrester was appointed as Treasurer and I was returned at President again. The Executive has been ably supported for the last twelve months by our management board members; Joan Farmer, Josh Martin, Michael Kelly and John Mitchell. During the year Ian Grace resigned from our board and the casual vacancy resulting was filled by Anne Stovin. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the executive and management board for their support and efforts during the past 12 months. I'd like to say a special thanks to Ian Grace for his extensive work on the management board over many years. Thanks to everyone.

**** Since this** meeting last year we have held four events, with COVID 19 impacting our ability to hold face to face meetings from March onwards. None of us could have imagined that 2020* would have been such an unusual year!

Following our AGM in September our event was our October "After dark" at the Vikings SLSC. It was great to see so many of you there.

****In November** we welcomed the Gold Coast Airport team to talk about the plans for the airport over breakfast at the Coolangatta Surf Club, which as you can all imagine are not quite the same today as they were that day, when we welcomed close to 100 members and guests to share the event.

**** In December** we had an End of Year Drinks at the Kirra Beach Hotel. We had a great night, with over 50 guests. We had a great raffle and a nice relaxed evening was had by all.

****Our first** event for 2020 and as it turned out our last event for 2020 was held in February again at Coolangatta Surf Club. Our guest speaker was John Witheriff from Goldline to talk everything Light Rail. Again close to 100 guests enjoyed a very enlightening morning.

The GSGC Chamber of Commerce is consulted by many committees and groups. As President I attend meetings with many of these groups. The Chamber is recognised as the voice of business for our area from the Tallebudgera Creek to the NSW Border. In the south of our catchment I have represented the Chamber on the Southern Gateway Advisory Committee and the Coolangatta and Kirra Core Business Centre Master Plan group. This time last year we still faced the Sandtunes event coming to the Gold Coast. As many of you will recall we were instrumental in the event moving to Carrara Stadium, the event was subsequently cancelled all together due to low booking number, among other things. Sandtunes was not the right event in the right location for the Southern Gold Coast.

The Chamber is included in the Light Rail Business Advisory Group which again has not been meeting in person due to Covid 19 since March but had had a number of Zoom meetings!

My last face to face event pre-Covid was as speaker at the PBC Alliance breakfast in March, where I spoke about the Chamber movement and it's value to the business community. That day was close to the last normal day.... Which brings us neatly to the COVID 19 response.

We can't pass today without mentioning the impact COVID 19 has had on the Chamber movement and more importantly, you the businesses that we represent, not just here, but across the whole of Australia, indeed the world. The first impact was the lockdown restrictions which came into play in Mid-March. This impacted many businesses livelihood, very quickly. We responded by being the first Gold Coast Chamber to introduce a 6 month free extension of membership for all of our members. At a time when money was tight, access to advocacy was more important than ever before in our 15 year history.

**** The next** impact was no more face to face meetings as mentioned before. The GSGC combated this by introducing online content including weekly newsletters, with details of support available via programmes like JobKeeper, payroll tax refunds, and State innovation grants. We also ran a series of online interviews via YouTube of the key players and members of the Chamber to highlight how they were approaching COVID 19. Thanks go to Zac Revere for his very professional approach to these short enlightening conversations.

**** In our** region we have faced more barriers to trade than many others due to the Border closure first announced in late March and subsequently changed on too many occasions to recall, on top of all of the restrictions imposed by the various stages of lockdown. The GSGC Chamber took up the cause and highlighted the impact of the border restrictions early on and despite many setbacks we have continued to voice the concerns of the small businesses about the damage being done both to trade and the border community. As a result myself and the board have given many interviews on TV and Radio including The ABC radio AM program and Win TV, having done 2 pieces on Paul Murray Live on SKY TV as well. The changing issues are an ongoing debate around the depth and necessity of the closure in contrast with the balance of economic damage to the state, especially in the tourism sector. We have also voiced concerns about the level of support being offered to small business, especially in the form of grants etc. The GSGC has worked very closely with CCIQ which is the QLD peak Chamber of Commerce, which we are affiliated to, on this and many other policy issues. The CCIQ have been holding Zoom meetings weekly for the Chambers to develop and lobby the State government for adequate and in depth support due to the pandemic.

Our efforts remain focused on Covid 19, and it's impacts on small business whilst at the same time we are now pivoting to ensuring that we deliver a set of principles which we will be seeking to be adopted by all parties vying for our attention at the forthcoming October State election. The platform for this is Small Business is a BIG Deal.



**** During COVID** 19 our Facebook page has become a potent tool to ensure our messaging has been delivered to the wider public. We have posted frequently to ensure that the balanced response to COVID 19 is pressed for. As a result our followers have doubled since last year to over 550 now. The page is used to promote the Chamber, our activities and to keep the local businesses informed of events and activities in the area. Our online YouTube interviews with Zac Revere were promoted via the FB page as well.

The Chamber had a great relationship with the Sun Community Newspaper and the Bulletin. In June the Sun was slated for closure. This was a loss to the community, felt more acutely by those who don't take a daily newspaper and with less digital connectivity.

Another notable change has been the Gold Coast City Council's decision to close down the various events alliances. This impacted Connecting Southern Gold Coast, which closed from 30 June. This was a group we worked closely with since it's inception around 7 years ago. It remains to be seen if the new Major Events group will have as much relevance to our community as Connecting Southern GC did. We take this opportunity to say thank you to Josh Martin the last CEO of Connecting, and his team for their sterling work in this space. We note that the small business support activity undertaken by Connecting has not been replaced and will this be on our agenda for the foreseeable future as a result of this change.

The chamber is active in many other concerns around the area. One longstanding arrangement is the support of PBC School, for Australian Business week. Again last December we sponsored this event by providing medallions for every student who took part in a week-long virtual business environment to learn about how business works. The Chamber also assisted in locating business mentors for the event. We look forward to considering working with PBC again this year.

In summary we have continued to grow and build our relevance to you, our business community. Our membership, and financial security continued to improve, despite Covid 19. We can now do more for our members and our dedicated management board are planning to take us even further in the coming year.

In closing I'd like to thank our past and future board members for their continuing endeavours and commitment to what is a very voluntary role.

**** I'll now** pass you to our current treasurer, John Forrester – John