



JUST ASKING

BY MARY KLEST

What role does the Barrington Area Chamber of Commerce play in supporting the vitality of our business community?

I asked Brad Stetson, chief executive of Barrington Bank & Trust and 2009 chairman of the Chamber.

Business climates change and so does the board at the Chamber of Commerce.

Brad Stetson is beginning his term as chairman looking for answers from questions such as: What can we do collectively to improve our business environment? What are the needs of our business community? How can the Chamber help?

Stetson thinks open dialogue between village governments, business owners, residents, and Chamber members can create a powerful synergy for improving the business community and our communities as a whole. "We're facing some challenging issues. We need to air out what problems exist so we can move forward," Stetson said.

As CEO of Barrington Bank, he's comfortable wearing multiple hats, including shoveling snow when necessary. He has experience building a business that serves the area — his company constructed two buildings in downtown Barrington. Call his office and the receptionist does not ask who is calling and why. You are immediately connected to him. About the Chamber, Stetson said, "If you're frustrated, keep coming back. Tell me what you need. I'm ready, willing, and able to help if it contributes to a viable business community." He does not

PHOTO: MARY KLEST



BRAD STETSON, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF BARRINGTON BANK & TRUST AND 2009 CHAIRMAN OF THE CHAMBER

have a lot of admiration for people who drop a concern and never follow up.

The Chamber has offered networking sessions, educational seminars, promotion opportunities, and a knowledge base on work force, economic, legal, and leadership issues. The Chamber has worked to support the Barrington Area Council of Government, looking to facilitate planning, development, and growth.

The Chamber's Government Affairs Council advocates for business concerns on the local, state, and national levels. A few years ago they segmented their networking sessions to include young professionals interested in living and working in the Barrington area. They now embrace telecommuters and home-based businesses. The Chamber also publishes an annual business directory and community profile filled with information.

Board members at the Chamber are volunteers. They exist with a small staff and no legal authority to create the change some are seeking. Diplomacy skills are required.

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Strategic thinking helps, too. The Chamber represents multiple points of view from an area that includes eight villages and six townships in four counties. The interests, infrastructures, and zoning are unique to each.

Complicated as that is, Stetson is determined to find answers. "We need to work harder to find out the needs of our business community. People here want to support local business," he said. "With the resources available we will attempt to reach out to everybody we possibly can, whether it's a one person home-based business or larger commercial enterprises." His open dialogue initiative may create more understanding of what businesses need before they open or close their doors. "A business friendly community serves us all," Stetson said.