



Chamber of Commerce  
LA CROSSE AREA

# CONNECTION

AUGUST 2016



## Sisters in Trade: Developing Businesses and Relationships with Sister Cities

CHAMBER REPRESENTATIVES  
FROM LA CROSSE TRAVEL TO  
EUROPE TO EXPLORE THE  
DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES  
BETWEEN CHAMBERS HOME  
AND ABROAD.





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# Executive Director's Message:

## *Our Sister City's Chambers*

I found myself in the homeland during this Sister Cities trip to Epinal, France and Friedberg, Germany. Chambers of Commerce began in France in the 1500s and made their way to the England and the United States as well as other countries. The U.S., however, adopted the Laissez Faire model – i.e. “let us do what we want to do.”

In France and German, a portion of the taxes paid by businesses funds the Chamber of Commerce. As a result, the Chamber functions as a middle organization between government and business. They hold seats on key department committees in government and in the case of Epinal's region, they run the airport. It is a 110-person chamber. Because everyone pays, the budget for the region is \$8 million. Compare that to our \$500,000. They run training programs to match workforce with business needs. The Chamber has a person dedicated to growing international exports. Two great examples are the Chamber paying for 50 web designers to be educated for free on an 8-month track to get them launched out into local businesses. Another Chamber runs an award-winning dual training in which students work three weeks a month and go to school for another week, learning and working at the same time. To advance in the company, they repeat the cycle for the next level. Their Chamber purchased wish-list items desired by small businesses and then charged a per-use fee –



for example, a photo cube to take pictures of products that could then be used on websites to sell the item.

Because it's what we can't have, both Chambers were fascinated with each other's models.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not proposing we create a new tax. I thoroughly believe in being accountable to our members. But in the Chamber world, many of our members define value on transactions. What did we directly do for you. Did our actions directly result in you growing? The less-tangible things we do such as being the voice for business in countless meetings so you don't have to and ensuring a bill is less impactful on your business are hard to quantify as a return-on- your investment.

The European Chambers showed what could be done if our organization didn't have to dedicate nearly a full position to selling and reselling memberships was liberating. The availability to create exactly what the businesses say they need was inspiring.

Those Chambers also taught me a lesson – businesses need to drive initiatives. Often I've seen us waiting for government to fix a problem, then be displeased with what the solution. Often we wait a long time for something that never happens. The Chambers in Europe see the programs needed, they create solutions and government operates knowing business is self-addressing its needs.

The La Crosse Area Chamber is holding a few listening sessions for members to provide feedback on what we're working on and what we should be working on. We look forward to engaging you in the conversation.

*Vicki Markussen*

Vicki Markussen,  
Executive Director  
La Crosse Area  
Chamber of Commerce



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# Recent Events



## OT! OH MY!

Preparing for the new overtime requirements

June 28, 2016 - The Lunda Center

A group of more than 150 managers and business owners joined the Chamber at the Lunda Center where a panel of experts discussed the impact of the new overtime rules and regulations that go into effect in December of 2016. If you were unable to attend this event, the packet of information shared is available for purchase (\$5) on [lacrossechamber.com](http://lacrossechamber.com)



## YP COMMUNITY 2 CONNECT JULY 21, 2016

### LA CROSSE QUEEN

The hottest day of the year and severe thunderstorms didn't stop 40 members of YPCR from having a great connection event aboard the La Crosse Queen.



## THE FORUM

The July Forum featured a Protective Services Panel that included: Chief Gregg Cleveland - La Crosse Fire Department, Captain Troy Nedegaard - La Crosse Police Department, La Crosse County Sheriff Steve Helegson and Town of Campbell Fire Chief Nate Melby. Also included were legislative updates from Representatives Jill Billings, Lee Nerison, and Steve Doyle.



## BUSINESS AFTER HOURS

July 14, 2016

Attendees enjoyed a night of music from Coulee Region Steel Band, a Valley View Mall goodie bag, delicious food from the different mall dining outlets and fantastic door prizes.

Business After Hours is a monthly reception held on the second Thursday of the month at varying member locations.



## YP EDUCATIONAL LUNCHEON

July 13, 2016

More than 50 YPCR members met on Wednesday, July 13 for a luncheon to learn about a variety of ways you can get involved with local meaningful organizations and make a difference in your community.

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# Upcoming Events

## THE FORUM

AUGUST 8, 2016

7:00 AM - 8:15 AM



Anderson Training Room -  
La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce

*"State of Higher Education in  
Western Wisconsin."*

Presenters will be Lee Rasch (President  
of Western Technical College) and  
Joe Gow (Chancellor of University of  
Wisconsin-La Crosse).



## BUSINESS AFTER HOURS AT MARKET & JOHNSON

AUGUST 11, 2016

5:15 PM - 6:30 PM

Join us for August Business After Hours  
at Market & Johnson. This month's event  
will take place in their expanded office  
on French Island. Premier Catering will  
provide food and drinks will be provided.  
Learn more about Market & Johnson's  
20 year presence in the La Crosse  
community.



## 2016 GOLF OUTING

AUGUST 29, 2016

LA CROSSE COUNTRY CLUB

The Chamber's Golf Outing is a best-  
ball, 18-hole tournament with shotgun  
starts for two flights -

7:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.

The afternoon flight is full, but limited  
spots remain for the AM flight. Don't  
miss this opportunity to enjoy a day on  
the course while networking with key  
decision makers in the community.

Thursday, October 27, 2016  
La Crosse Center

# Business Expo



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local business  
success stories

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companies doing  
business in our area

Reconnect with  
businesses you  
know



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**YP COCKTAILS 2 CONNECT**  
**AUGUST 18, 2016**  
**5:00 PM - 7:00 PM**  
**THE LOUNGE @ THE CHARMONT HOTEL**

Join the Young Professionals of the Coulee Region, along with  
Robin Moses, Executive Director, Downtown Mainstreet. Robin  
will share details on what is happening in historic downtown  
La Crosse!



# Sisters in Trade: Developing Businesses and Relationships with Sister Cities

By Vicki Markussen,

## THE PEOPLE SIDE

The guidelines on French and German culture didn't say anything about red pom poms. They included how to greet each other with "bonjour" or "bonsoir" and how to cheek kiss. Hence, I didn't think anything of touching the red pom pom when asked. It became the epitome of being an American deep in foreign country on a trade-mission representing La Crosse in our Sister Cities of Epinal, France and Friedberg, Germany.

It was the rainy evening before Bastille Day. We had just celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Epinal-La Crosse Sister Cities -- twinning as they call it. Our bellies were full with the usual four-course meal including champagne and wine. We, with Epinal Mayor Michel Hienrich led the people through the street of Epinal behind a band playing New Orleans style-jazz songs, and the fireworks had extinguished. Mayor Heinrich invited us to have a drink at a nearby bar.

During the day and into the following day a crew of submarine officers were with us because Epinal sponsors their submarine. Hence,

they were at the bar with us and had ordered a round of drinks. Thinking it was a shame to have such dedicated officers buying their own beer, I had Arnaud, with the City of Epinal communicate that I would buy the round of beers. Well, Arnaud did do so, but when he spoke to me in English, he said he made the purchase conditional on me being able to touch the pom pom on the top of the officer's hat. Okay. No big deal. I gave it a light-hearted pat. Little did I know, there is a French tradition. When you touch the red fuzzy ball you must kiss the officer. Oh my! So I began wondering what type of kiss this was, lip peck or cheek kiss, and quickly uttered, "Do I have to give him a French kiss?!" Uh oh. That's not the wording for the cheek kiss. Ah, the laughter!

And so it was that we would tip-toe, stomp and smile our way through Germany and France. The experience in Friedberg was so different from Epinal that it was like being on two different trips re-wearing the same clothes. Each location was indicative of their cultures. German families hosted us and were so gracious and warm. Within an hour of meeting someone you felt like old friend.

Dr. Hannes and Dr. Margot Proeller, a pharmacist and dentist, respectively, were the perfect hosts for Lisa Herr (7 Rivers Alliance) and myself, providing great insight as to what it's like to own businesses in

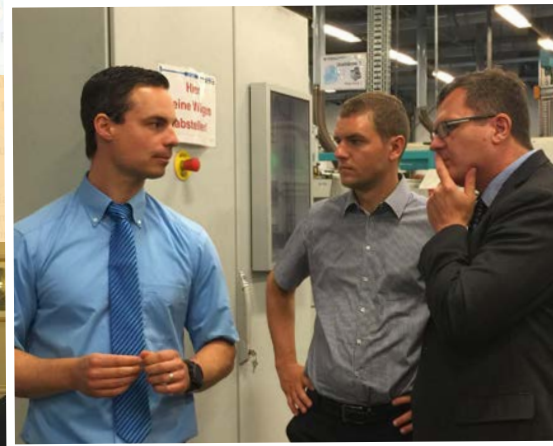
Friedberg proper and for Hannes to be innovative and find markets in Germany. Read my column about the comparison of Chamber in Europe and the U.S.

The Europeans are so proud of their heritage. We saw farms older than our country. I ate a pretzel as large as my head and drank refreshing beer from steins that if finished, would put me under the table. I saw eight people simultaneously training for the Olympics not behind boats but one right after the other on a pulley system strung all across the lake -- something we HAVE to get going here in the U.S. as another great water activity. I learned stories of people who have successful careers that took them all over the world or who but who live on Friedberg because of its quality of life. We ate -- oh did we eat -- hearty meals that I said no human could possibly finish. It was the precursor to Epinal where the two-hour lunch and four-hour dinner is an art including how it is arranged on your plate

In France, my love for World War II came alive and was a culmination to what would occur tragically on Bastille Day -- the equivalent of the July 4. It began with a 94-year old French Freedom Fighter telling us about how when German came they still had equipment from World War I. His mother told him the American came



La Crosse Chamber Executive Director Vicki Markussen joined La Crosse Mayor Tim Kabat and 7 Rivers Alliance's Lisa Herr to visit with business organizations in the Sister City of Friedberg, Germany in July.





in WWI and saved France. She told him to wait. American would come again. Fernand Nedelc was one of 38 rebels who lived in the forest, killing more than 500 Germans in a three-month window. It took five years of the Epinal area of France being annexed to Germany before we did. To much fanfare, we brought out technology and reclaimed their land for them. No longer would they be forced to speak German and be recruited into the German Army to fight against their fellow French. The veterans and volunteers at the display had tears in their eyes that Americans had come to see their display and swore of the eternal friendship between France and America.

From there we moved to the American Cemetery in Epinal where we saw the 5,200 graves of American soldiers killed – paying respect to the soldier Robert Skaar who has ties to La Crosse, and jointly sponsoring the grave of a soldier from Washington D.C. Interestingly, it was on land donated by the French, paid for and maintained by the U.S. It is one of many for the World Wars.

We celebrated our 30 th Anniversary, patted a few pom poms, and attended a parade in which the military in France were on full display. I will admit that a public gathering like that with so many dignitaries made me a bit nervous for an attack. Then tragedy struck that evening 540 miles away (about an eight-hour drive) in Nice, France. While we were far from danger, our hearts felt for the people of France, having gained a deeper understanding of the significance of the national holiday for their country.

#### THE BUSINESS SIDE

We were treading new ground during what has historically been a relationship building Sister City trips. Our goal was to make the connections to take the

conversation further. We were thankful that one conversation often led to others as organizations learned how we could connect. A city economic development specialist connected us with a technology company that was struggling to launch in the U.S. It may be that the company grows in La Crosse simply because we went to Friedberg.

We met with a business incubator to learn how they grow businesses, a regional group that is trying to pair higher education innovation and research with businesses, and a regional group in which our workforce development struggles are similar to those in Friedberg. They took tremendous interest in our Young Professionals work. In Epinal, we put La Crosse on the map with an international specialist with the regional Chamber. Their heavy automotive exports focus has them focused on Detroit, but through our new investment opportunities, we may have opportunities to talk about other connections.

For me the greatest learning happened in learning how their Chambers operate. Interestingly, their level of programs and services are higher than we have in our Chamber because of the resources they have. Read my Executive Director column for more on that.

I write this as La Crosse Mayor Tim Kabat is just returning from the trip. What comes next will be discussed with the Mayor and 7 Rivers Alliance next week. We know we want to bring some companies here to connect with our businesses. We'll keep you posted. 🌐

The Epinal Sister Cities group lowered the flag at the Epinal American Cemetery in France. There are more than 5,500 Americans from World War I and World War II buried in our Sister City.



#### A FAMILIAR SITE IN EPINAL

After 10 days of being abroad, Chamber Executive Director Vicki Markussen's heart soared at seeing familiar sight so deep in Europe. This replica of the La Crosse Players statue showcases the bond developed over 30 years with the City of Epinal and even the friendship developed between countries during World War I and World War II.







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# Connecting Me to Members

**GLOBE UNIVERSITY'S** Massage Therapy Program will be featuring 'Massage 101' on Tuesday, August 2 at 6:00 p.m. The educational session will include information regarding the program and a professional massage therapy technique tutorial. For more information, contact [jknapp@globeuniversity.edu](mailto:jknapp@globeuniversity.edu) or 608-779-2644.

**NATURALLY UNBRIDLED WELLNESS, LLC** welcomes Selena Miller to their staff. Selena has over 20 years in the holistic therapies field. Selena will measure the energy flow through the acupuncture meridians of the body (blunt probe, no needles). Contact 608-799- 8326 or visit [www.naturallyunbridled.com](http://www.naturallyunbridled.com).

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The **WESTERN TECHNICAL COLLEGE** Supervisory Management program is designed for individuals who want to acquire and improve managerial, supervisory, and leadership skills. Classes offered in La Crosse, Mauston, Tomah, Black River Falls, Independence, Viroqua, and online. Contact [supervisorymgt@westernnc.edu](mailto:supervisorymgt@westernnc.edu) or visit [www.westernnc.edu/superman](http://www.westernnc.edu/superman).

Dan Rickert, Director of Solution Sales – **EO JOHNSON BUSINESS TECHNOLOGIES**, has been named a Young Influencer of 2016 by The Cannata Report, an industry authority on office products and workflow solutions.

**GUIDELINES FOR THE "CONNECTING MEMBERS TO MEMBERS" SECTION OF THE NEWSLETTER.** Share your business developments with your fellow Chamber members. Submit items before the 10th of the month, no more than 40 words in length and limited to personnel news or changes, new ownership, merger or acquisitions, awards, change of location, expansions, remodeling, or sponsorship of community events. The Chamber reserves the right to edit items over 40 words in length. Submit your information to Dawn Honken at [dawn.honken@lacrossechamber.com](mailto:dawn.honken@lacrossechamber.com).



## REMIS POWER SYSTEMS

Remis Power Systems completed an over 3000 square foot new office building and re-grand opening. With three locations in Wisconsin, Remis Power Systems is a supplier of batteries and chargers to a wide range of industrial clients. Offering free fleet inspections, their consultants will help streamline battery and charger fleet to maximize production and increase efficiency.



## BURGER FUSION

Burger Fusion Company opened their second location in downtown La Crosse at the Holiday Inn. Offering diners hand crafted burgers, specialty mac & cheese dishes, ten beers on tap, a full bar and ample parking! Congratulations on your second location in the La Crosse Area.



## ASSOCIATED BANK 4TH STREET

Associated Bank celebrated their new modern branch at 4th & State, part of the Belle Square complex. It is a full service facility, including personal banking, drive thru, ATM, business banking, mortgages, and investment / insurance services.



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## GOLF OUTING SILENT AUCTION

Donations – If you are interested in donating to our silent auction for the 2016 Golf Outing, please contact Dawn at 608-784- 4880 by August 15 th .

The auction is another way the Chamber raises funds for education at an affordable cost to our members.

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