My how time flies in our world here at the Chamber! We’ve just gotten through all of the holidays at the end of last year, welcomed a New Year, and now we are starting at the busiest time of the year for the Shippensburg Area Chamber of Commerce. The staff at the Chamber have a love/hate relationship with this time of the year. While we love the hustle and bustle of it all because things are happening, time is limited and it seems we are always running up against the clock! Yikes!!!

Three to four of the Chamber’s major events happen within the first quarter of the year and it is always our goal to make them the best events they can be!

Thank you to all of our members whether you are brand new to the Chamber or if you are a longstanding member. We don’t want to ever assume your commitment but we are grateful to anyone who commits to this organization with their membership. I know for some of you, it’s a sacrifice to continue to pay your dues and to keep your business involved with the Chamber. I promise you we work hard on a daily basis to make sure that you, as a member, get the best return on your investment.

One of the events that I want to really encourage you to participate in is the Chamber’s Annual Awards Banquet. This event is designed to recognize businesses and business people in our community. It’s a great opportunity for you to get together and connect with fellow business friends from the region and possibly meet someone new. It is always an enjoyable time and very gratifying to share in the recognition of others’ accomplishments and influence in our community. If you are able, we encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity and be a part of the event. You won’t want to miss it! There is still time to get a seat so contact the Chamber office for reservations.

Let’s keep making Shippensburg a great place to Live, Work, Worship, Play, Invest, and Enjoy.

Sincerely,
Scott Brown
President
Shippensburg Area Chamber of Commerce
Cumberland Valley
Business Journal Column
Jan. 20, 2017

Goals for a New Legislative Session

The New Year ushered in a new legislative session, which kicked off on Jan. 3 with the swearing-in of the 201st General Assembly.

It’s sure to be an interesting two years, with a Democratic governor, a historically strong Republican majority and a host of fiscal issues to overcome. Our organization stands ready to work with elected officials on both sides of the aisle on efforts to ensure responsible state spending; reduce tax burdens and excessive regulation; bring equality to the Commonwealth’s legal system; and achieve other goals defined in our 2017 legislative agenda, which is available on our website at www.pachamber.org.

A focus in the early weeks of session will be Gov. Tom Wolf’s administration’s spending plan for the 2017-18 fiscal year. This year’s budget negotiations will be met with the challenge of closing a nearly $2 billion funding gap that is the result of lower than expected revenue returns and rising fiscal obligations.

Last month, administration officials said they intend to look to government efficiencies and spending cuts to help balance the budget. This decision comes with a different kind of cost: the governor has also announced his plans to shutter two state prisons and two mental health institutions, which will lead to job loss. The decision has understandably sparked backlash and will undoubtedly be analyzed in the months to come.

Tied to the budget is the Pennsylvania Chamber’s No. 1 priority — getting a comprehensive public pension reform bill to Wolf’s desk. This is critical given that the more than $60 billion public pension deficit remains the state’s largest cost-driver and is the underlying reason behind continued tax hikes.

Coupled with that, the PA Chamber also continues our push to bring Pennsylvania’s outdated and costly prevailing wage structure in line with today’s economic demands, since the law (which hasn’t been updated since 1961) requires inflated wage rates that drive up costs well beyond what local governments and school districts can afford and often forces them to delay or shelve projects entirely.

At the same time, we’re also speaking out against some lawmakers’ efforts to eliminate school property taxes by significantly increasing and expanding sales and personal income taxes. This tax-shifting measure, while well-intentioned, would end up hurting many businesses, and would generate even higher costs for goods and services.

The fact is, older and retired Pennsylvanians would generally benefit the most from this measure, as many would experience some property tax relief while enjoying the benefits of the state’s tax-free social security and retirement income. Meanwhile, younger generations of taxpayers — many of whom are young working families with children to care for — would be forced to pick up the tab, paying higher income taxes, sales taxes and new taxes on many essential day-to-day items (things like diapers and children’s Tylenol).

Our organization continues to promote public pension reform as the only true way for the Commonwealth to begin to reduce tax burdens.
Rural, Risks and Revenue: Entrepreneurial Development for Rural Communities

With the industrial revolution, then the technological revolution, rural communities found themselves slowly losing residents and businesses to major metropolitan regions. While a few communities saw a dramatic economic decline, a number remained in a pattern of slow economic growth that sustained vital businesses and residents, but hindered anything else. Although it is nice to reminisce about times gone by, global and industrial changes have forced communities to assess their growth in hopes to avoid major economic downturn.

Solutions come in all shapes, sizes and theories. They can come from consultants and spirited community leaders. Whatever solution, it is best to be critical of it and its long-term implications. All economic development strategies or plans for growth need to consider long-range sustainability. Single solutions may be a temporary fix and lead to a more dismal outcome in the long run.

For rural communities, one of the most well-tested and praised economic development strategies has been the push for entrepreneurial development. Rural communities have an opportunity to cultivate entrepreneurs and create a strong localized economy that is reminiscent of yesteryears, but capable of handling modern economic turns. In their report, Developing Entrepreneurial Economies in Rural Regions: Lessons from Kentucky and Appalachia, The Aspen Institute examined the success of “entrepreneurial economies” in rural communities.

Unlike the idea of the single high tech entrepreneur or encouraging everyone to start a business, the entrepreneurial economy is about cultivating entrepreneurial spirit and support. Rural communities are naturally inclined to creating strong relationships, neighborly support and localized spending. Building upon these existing characteristics, rural communities can develop an entrepreneurial economy through welcoming creativity and risk-takers.

The common misunderstandings about entrepreneurship that often push communities away from developing their own entrepreneurial economies are three fold.

The first is the misconception that entrepreneurial means high-tech. With heavy emphasis from the media, the term entrepreneurship has found itself synonymous with the start-up tech businesses. This is a complete fallacy minimizing the broad array of entrepreneurs and their experiences. Rural communities are capable of developing entrepreneurial economies based on their specific needs and culture.

The second misconception is that all entrepreneurs must have rapidly growing businesses and be innovative. While innovative ideas are delightful, encouraging individuals to bring their services and skills to market does not require innovation, but rather support and acceptance. Rapid growth is not a sure sign of success and can be quite problematic. For the entrepreneurial economy, there is no push or demands on the entrepreneur, just support, ideas and collaboration.

The third misconception is that only cities are for entrepreneurship and it fails in rural communities. The truth is entrepreneurs succeed and fail in both environments. The small town coffee shop and hair salon are examples of entrepreneurship. They have their clientele and continue to operate without the need to relocate to the center of a major city. The only affect location may present to the entrepreneur is the type of product or service sold. If you were a lobster fisherman, you would probably start your business in Maine and not relocate to the center of a major city.

In the end, rural communities can build themselves into entrepreneurial economies. Providing resources to capital, expertise and support is critical. The Shippensburg Area is a community that has a number of these pieces already in place with the presence of an entrepreneurial university, the Small Business Development Center, a strong library, an active Chamber of Commerce and a various public financing options. Beginning to embrace the entrepreneurial culture is often the most challenging aspect of creating the entrepreneurial economy, but supporting a neighbor is what strong communities do naturally. Rural economies have all the pieces to change the direction of their future; it is just a matter of fitting them together.