

The First 100 Years

Wharton Chamber of Commerce

est. 1919



Wharton Journal  Spectator

The First 100 Years



WHARTON
Chamber of Commerce



Ron Sanders

Executive Director 2007-Present

The War to End All Wars was fought and won. Prohibition began with the 18th amendment. A flu pandemic continued to sweep the world, even inspiring a Horton Foote film.

The year was 1919. Who would have imagined all that transpired between then and now?

The businessman of 1919 in Wharton, Texas, must have known one thing: the future will either hit you between the eyes, or you can build a road to meet it with purpose.

That's what happened. The Wharton Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture was born.

For one century, our chamber has served as the front door to Wharton. Through rapid change, our Chamber has continued to be the go-to place to help businesses do business and to help travelers find a destination for their dollars.

Today, our chamber is strong because of the enduring support of our members, friends and partners. You have chosen Chamber board members and officers who understood through the

years the mission and stewardship that is required.

The next 100 years will offer a full load of more change and opportunity. Yes, growth is coming our way. The risk of flooding will be reduced in time. Our public schools will be refreshed with a long-overdue investment in infrastructure. We will continue to take full advantage of having a regional junior college among us. Transportation will be enhanced. New generations of men and women will continue to grow in leadership roles and bless us with their enthusiasm and new perspectives and ideas.

In year 100, I assure you that we continue to keep our eyes on the road to meet the future with purpose. Thank you.



Billie Jones

Executive Director 1984 - 2005

The Lone Ranger of comic books, radio and television, did all his good works alone. Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Wharton Chamber of Commerce tells the opposite story. It is hundreds, yes thousands of volunteers working together to reach goals. Chamber volunteers have been the think tank of the community. Look around as we celebrate 100 years. Every good thing has some spark of this amazing organization. Whether ideas, money or workers, volunteers have made this a great place we call home. Let's celebrate and plan for the next 100 years.

The First 100 Years - Wharton Chamber of Commerce

Editor and Publisher

Bill Wallace

Advertising and Design

Jessica Hartman

Managing Editor

Albert Villegas

Staff Writer

Dacey Schauer

Contributing Writers

Pat Blair, Sylvia Carrizales

115 W. Burluson St.
Wharton, TX 77488
979-532-8840
www.journal-spectator.com

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Copies of this section will be available throughout the year while supplies last at the Wharton Journal-Spectator and Wharton Chamber of Commerce.



The Wharton County Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture

Community leaders of every background have put their best-informed ideas and skills to work to meet challenges and to capitalize on opportunities, as evidenced by Wharton Chamber of Commerce's 100-year history of business leadership.

In this section you will find the history of the Wharton Chamber of Commerce. Broken down by decades, we will take you through the documented triumphs of this organization within the first 100 years.



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1919-1923

Special to the Journal-Spectator

The Wharton Spectator
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FRIDAY, MARCH 21, 1919.

HUNTSVILLE BUSINESS LEAGUE REORGANIZED.

Huntsville, Tex., March 17.—Business men of Huntsville have reorganized the Young Men's Business League. The reorganization was effected so as to resume the work that had been carried on in former years but was interrupted by war work.

A full-time secretary is employed and downtown offices, which are used as the clearing house for all civic and public affairs are to be maintained.

The league has adopted a definite policy for the development of Huntsville and Walker County and the work of putting this program into effect has been started.

With the reconstruction period here, old Wharton must be awakened from its lethargy, get to work along with other towns of its size in the state, and develop its resources to the limit.

There is no finer county on earth than our own and no finer people—no more capable citizenship—all we need is co-operation and push, with an organization whose business it is to give Wharton county publicity, to push enterprises worthy of consideration, to encourage new business, we can flourish. We have a fine opportunity right now to go forward with a power which has never been ours before.

The county's war record is second to none. We never slacked where the country's welfare was at stake. Let's not slack now that the welfare of our homes, children and our community is at stake. Here's for a greater, a bigger and a more wide awake Wharton County.

When in 1919 Huntsville, Texas, established a Young Men's Business League, opened downtown offices, and hired a full-time secretary, Whartonians took notice. An editorial in the March 21, 1919, issue of The Wharton Spectator urged: "With the reconstruction period here, old Wharton must be awakened from its lethargy, get to work along

with other towns of its size in the state, and develop its resources to the limit. There is no finer county on earth than our own and no finer people — no more capable citizenship — all we need is cooperation and push, with an organization whose business it is to give Wharton County publicity, to push enterprises worthy of consideration, to encourage new business. We can flourish. We have a fine opportunity right now to go forward with a power which has never been ours before."

In 1919 Wharton merchants organized the Retail Merchants Association of Wharton, predecessor to Wharton Chamber of Commerce.

In 1923 the Retail Merchants Association of Wharton elected Officers and Directors: J. C. Locke, President and Ben Peine, Secretary; and Directors J. L. Soutes, H. G. Forgason, F. I. Moore, W. A. Moers, P. H. Metzger, and Joe Prasifka. A total of twenty-five charter members joined forces under the direction of the state RMA.

Around the same time, Wharton Business Men's Club had organized and become active in the community. It announced it would rent the City Park from the Women's Club for five years. The site was advertised as an auto tourist campground, following three hundred dollars' worth of improvements: running

water, sanitary toilets for both sexes, and electricity in a nice shelter for bad weather. Signs were erected on incoming roads to welcome tourists to Wharton.

In July 1923, the Business Men's Association announced that the auto tourist camp was the best advertisement the city had ever financed. With 3 to 12 cars present on any given night and some people having driven thirty or more miles just to stay there for the night, it was felt that this venture was a success. This success prompted the Wharton Business Men's Association to approach County Commissioners about turning their attention to the condition of roads leading into the City. Wanting to build on its success, the group then decided to try to boost the town's and individual business' images by traveling through parts of Wharton, Colorado, Fort Bend, and Matagorda Counties in a two-day planned caravan of sixteen cars, decked out with colorful banners and, at each stop, distributing flyers and business cards for merchants and others. This too was deemed a worthwhile venture.

In December 1923 the District Manager of Southwestern Bell Telephone, guest speaker at the Wharton Business Men's Association meeting, with the largest attendance to date, addressed complaints over poor telephone service in Wharton and promised to do the best he could to remedy the problems people had experienced, and a representative of the Santa Fe Railroad asked Whartonians to participate in a Trades Day to help promote their Cow, Sow, and Hen Train, which was to make 106 stops between Sealy and Louisiana in early January 1924.

In 1929 the Wharton Chamber sponsored a county fair, secured a creamery, helped to foster agricultural endeavors, initiated good roads projects, and sponsored the construction of an airfield at Pierce.

THE WHARTON SPECTATOR
WHARTON, TEXAS, FRIDAY, JUNE 1, 1929
WHARTON COUNTY SWEEP BY FLOOD

THE WHARTON SPECTATOR

WHARTON, TEXAS, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1923

ON MADE FOR WATER RIGHT
The State Board Monday

BUSINESS MEN'S MEETING MONDAY
Largest Attendance in History of Organization Present—Trades Day Planned

COV. SOW AND HEN TRAIN ON SANTA FE
Here, January 9th—Merchants to Have Trades Day—Everybody Come

ALVIN PUBLISHER IN SENATE RACE
Advocate Aid in Draining of Gulf

NEW SENATOR DOES NOT FORGET SON
Takes Oath on Same Day the Latter Celebrates 19th Birthday

THE METHODIST CHURCH
Services 11 a. m. and 7:15 p. m. Sunday School 9:45 a. m. We are preparing for a gift Christmas tree for Sunday week, December 16th. Every member and friend of our Sunday school is invited to bring something for the tree that day, either a present or cash. All will then go to the Methodist church for Orphans at 7:00. Let us make up a nice box and help Santa Claus visit the little boys and girls who do not have any papa and mama.

LET US FORGET
There is but a short time in which to have those portraits made for Christmas.

THE HAMILTONS
Photographic Art.

Raymond Armstrong spent last week end here from Colorado.

Green Davidson came in the early part of this week from Dallas, where he makes his headquarters, and will spend the time until after the holidays with his parents, Dr. and Mrs. G. L. Davidson.

Read The Spectator—It has the news while it is newsy.

City of Wharton TEXAS

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1930s - 1940s

Special to the Journal-Spectator

In January 1930 approximately sixty men attended the "chamber of commerce" meeting, one of the largest meetings of its kind, where President R. F. Howard thanked Secretary Manager H. C. Copenhaver for his capable direction in getting Wharton businesses organized throughout the area.

During World War II, Wharton Chamber of Commerce's Military Affairs Committee studied the possibility of a recreational center for soldiers coming to Wharton. By 1942 nearly every local merchant had sworn to devote fifteen minutes per day exclusively to the sale of war bonds and war savings stamps during the month of July – as well as pledging to enroll all employees and themselves in the Treasury Department's 10% payroll allotment plans.

In May 1943 the Chamber of Commerce sponsored, in collaboration with Gulf Health Department and Texas A&M Extension Service, a rat eradication program in El Campo and Wharton. Due to heavy infestations and an increase in typhoid fever, every business, home, and farm in the county received the poison Red Squirrel. Four years later, the Chamber and downtown merchants reported that their efforts had reduced the threat of typhus – not one case in four years.

To assist with the war effort, Chamber businesses placed bottles in downtown stores, advertising that every nickel dropped in them would purchase a pack of cigarettes for our boys in service overseas.

In August 1943 the Chamber leased land in a corner of the municipal airport for a temporary cotton-picker camp for East Wharton County. Signs were placed to direct pickers to the campsite, where water and toilet facilities were set up through cooperation with the City.

In November B. D. King received \$10 for his slogan idea for the city of Wharton: "The City of Friendliness and Hospitality."

In June 1946 the Wharton Chamber of Commerce welcomed forty new members, among them: Joe Frazar of Frozen Supply Company, John Frazier of the Manhattan Café, Joe Richards of Sunshine Cleaners, Bill Jones, new Plymouth-DeSoto dealer, and Dr. J. C. Willis, new veterinarian.

In October 1946 the Chamber purchased a P-51 airplane and donated it to Wharton County Junior College for instructional and educational purposes. Originally priced at \$125,000 the Chamber was able to purchase the plane for \$100, plus delivery fee, from the U. S. air base at Hobbs, New Mexico.

December 1946 saw the chartering of a Wharton Junior Chamber of Commerce (Jaycees) chapter. This was the first time Wharton had had a Jaycee club. It met on the first and third Thursday nights each month.

In February 1947 the Chamber created a display in their building featuring products made in and around

Wharton. The purpose was to encourage local people to "buy home-town" products. On display were dresses, blouses, cakes, mops and brooms, and more.

By March 1947 the Wharton Jaycees had completed their project to beautify the City Park adjacent to the swimming pool. Fourteen live oak and thirty-four palm trees were planted.

In April 1947 the U. S. Chamber of Commerce celebrated Chamber Week. The Wharton Journal recorded Wharton Chamber of Commerce's history as follows:

"In 1908 a number of Wharton businessmen organized to foster trade and industry for the town. Later it was reorganized as Wharton Goodfellows. Members of this group still active are B. C. Roberts, Sr., J. O. Graham, and F. I. Moore. In 1921 another reorganization took place and called themselves Wharton Businessmen's Association. In 1925 the name was changed to Wharton Chamber of Commerce."

The Chamber's \$7,000 budget for 1948 called for contacting the Texas Highway Department to request improvements to FM 102 and making the road from Whar-

ton to West Columbia a state highway. The Chamber also formally endorsed the Tideland Bill.

In its May 21, 1948, edition, the Wharton Spectator announced it would build a migratory workers center and labor camp headquarters on a two-acre tract located on the banks of the Colorado River, about four blocks from the Colorado River Bridge. The building was to be V-shaped, with sleeping stalls on the longer arms and bathing and toilet areas at the apex. The cost would be \$2,000. That autumn the Chamber sold pecans and offered a mailing service to assist customers with Christmas deliveries.

In April 1949 new "Welcome to Wharton" signs appeared on U. S. Highway 59 just outside the city limits. At the an-

nual Chamber banquet, awards were given to the Cotton Farmer Contest winners: 1st place: A. J. Kallas, Egypt, who got 1-1/2 bales per acre on a 35-acre plot and received a new dress suit; 2nd place: Leo Allenson, Danevang, who won boots; and 3rd place: Henry Stolle, Wharton, who won a new Stetson hat.

WHARTON, TEXAS FRIDAY, JANUARY 31, 1947

Dignitaries At Wharton C. of C. Meeting



Wilson Honored At Annual Wharton

A group of 180 men attended the annual Wharton Chamber of Commerce Monday night of this year. A fine turkey dinner high praise given to the progress and growth of the Chamber for many whose earnest efforts the progress and growth are exemplified in life membership card appreciation of his presentation was made Frank S. Haines. Present R. D. Wright with a certificate of for the work he has for the time he has served the organization.

The meeting was a sumptuous meal had and eaten President a brief resume of the Chamber of Commerce and past year. He gave ci

Principal figures at the Wharton Chamber of Commerce annual banquet held Monday night: reading left to right: front row, Jay L. Cannon of the Houston Chamber of Commerce; Hubert M. Harrison, general manager of the East Texas Chamber of Commerce; L. W. Atkinson, president of the Wharton Chamber of Commerce; H. E. Wil-

son, who was presented with a gold life membership card for outstanding service to the community and the Chamber of Commerce. Back row: R. D. Wright, immediate past president, G. L. Childress, general manager of the Houston Packing Company and vice-president of the Houston Fat Stock Show. —Cut Courtesy Houston Chronicle.

Chamber Commerce Secretary Reports

By Virginia Serrel
Thursday, November 11, is the next holiday scheduled for the City of Wharton, according to the list of holidays adopted by the membership of the Chamber of Commerce.

On this day all stores will be closed.

At 4:00 p. m. a military parade will be staged with all the uniformed organizations of the city, along with 400 soldiers from Camp Hulen, Wharton Prison Camp, American Legion and Texas State Guard. A representative from the Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts, Red Cross, as well as the Camp Hulen Band and the Wharton High School Band. A group of planes from the local CAP squadron will fly in formation over the town during the parade.

Immediately after the parade a band concert will be held on the court house square by the Camp Hulen Band under the direction of Sgt. Sam Johnston. This band has previously given concerts in Wharton and they are well known as professional musicians from all parts of the United States. Following the concert will be addresses given by Col. C. C. Ingram, representing the American Legion, on "The Significance of Armistice Day," and Capt. Wm. A. Sammons on the aspects of National Defense Guard week as proclaimed by the President.

At 8:00 o'clock all visiting soldiers and members of the Texas State Guard will participate in a feed given at the Community Center, followed by a dance for members of the band and armed forces. Don't fail to see the 473rd Bn., with 99 half-tracks or more, along with the other motorized equipment that will be in the parade. And remember, the time is 4:00 p. m.

At the directors' meeting held Tuesday night of this week, the new slogan for the Chamber of Commerce and the city in general was adopted: "The City of Friendliness and Hospitality." How do you like it? Mr. B. D. King submitted the above slogan and received the \$10.00 prize.

The next membership meeting will be held on December 7th, at which time a film entitled "The Making of a Bomber" will be shown. I am sure that many of you will be interested in seeing this picture, since you all had a part in the buying of "The Spirit of Wharton" bomber which will soon come off the assembly line.

The aviation committee of the Chamber of Commerce will be in charge of the program which will be based primarily on the future of aviation in post-war planning.

Mrs. L. E. Outler had as her guests Sunday for the day Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Sanders, Jr. and children, of Houston. Mrs. J. A. Sanders, Sr., accompanied them to Wharton and remained for a longer visit with her sister.

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1950s - 1960s

Special to the Journal-Spectator

In the winter of 1950 Black businessmen organized a Progressive Business Men's Club in Wharton. Professor Monroe Lawson, Hungerford, was elected President; Rudolph Braxton, Kendleton, Vice President; Lawrence Balfour, Secretary; Walter Hegmon, Treasurer; Pierce Boone, Business Manager; H. N. White, Parliamentarian; Professor V. Steptoe, Sergeant-at-Arms. The club met on the second and fourth Mondays at Pierce Boone Funeral Home. The fourteen charter members generated a list of goals to strive toward.

The Chamber of Commerce's Agriculture Committee's ambitious schedule of projects for 1950 included:

1. sponsor 4 beef calf shows,
2. a 7-step cotton farmer contest,
3. annual District Dairy Day,
4. Latin-American Labor Camp,
5. Black Farmers of America Livestock & Poultry Show,
6. NFA & 4H Club Pig Show,
7. Youth Rodeo,

C. of C. To Stage Round-up Of New Members Monday

Plans are completed for an intensive five day drive for new members and greater support of the Chamber of Commerce with a goal of 350 members and an additional \$2,500 in funds, according to G. P. Shryer, chairman of the Membership Committee, and as such "crew boss" for the week-long roundup.

Oren Frazier, Assistant Manager of the Walker-Hell Motor Company, will lead a group of seven crew hands and has adopted the moniker of "Steer Riders" for his workers. Howard Rainwater, Manager of Duke & Ayers, will boss a group of six workers who will take the field, as the "Bronc Busters." These two crews comprising a working force of fifteen men will hit the trail Monday rustling up Mavericks to turn into the herd.

The mark of a member of the trail herd in the Roundup will be a bright white lapel button which will be pinned on each member and each new member of the Chamber during Roundup week. The large plastic buttons of white with red lettering will easily identify workers, members and new members. They will be worn all week long by everybody in the Chamber.

Shryer said that the Chamber now has more than 170 members and "there are at least 175 more business firms and individuals who should belong; and the Chamber extends an invitation to everyone to get into this trail herd and to work for Wharton."

The breakfast held Friday morning, July 30, at the Community Center for the Herd Riders group received a lot of impetus and encouragement from their "Crew Boss", Pat Shryer, and the men were given outlines of the five day campaign. So look out, if you aren't a member of the Chamber of Commerce those men are going to rope you in!



—Photo By Hamilton
Mayor Jesse R. Martin signs the proclamation for Wharton Chamber of Commerce Week. Howard Rainwater and President Pat Shryer look on as the Mayor signs the document.

8. El Campo Poultry Show,
9. Wharton County Fair
10. 4-H and FFA hybrid corn projects.

The agenda also included: (1) taking a city census, (2) recommending that City Council annex the Ahldag Addition into city limits and the area west of the railroad, (3) a Spring Clean-Up Week, (4) help with the federal Census, and (5) help placing numbers on all houses within the city limits to facilitate home mail delivery. The Chamber collaborated with the Negro American Legion Post to provide and attach house numbers to all houses located in the Washington Addition. More than five hundred homes were visited to ensure efficient mail delivery for those residents.

In the spring of 1951 the Chamber launched a program to beautify the City of Wharton. Five hundred Redbud and seven hundred Mimosa trees were given to residents, plus other shrubs and bulbs.

In the spring of 1952, the City of Wharton and Chamber of Commerce worked with Texas Wildlife Association and Texas Health Department to again control typhus fever. Ten percent DDT was dusted in all possible rat-infested areas, along with Warfarin bait.

In March 1953 the Chamber announced

merchant business hours for 1953. All stores would open at 8:00 a.m. and close at 6:00 p.m., with Saturday hours of 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Christmas week hours were 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. through Christmas Eve. New City maps came out in September, showing the newest subdivisions.

In 1954 the Chamber advertised that Wharton County was listed fifth in wealth in the state. In August of that year Buckshot Lane replaced Bob Bateman as Chamber of Commerce Executive Director. It was felt Lane would bring a number of fresh and original ideas.

Negro Legion And Chamber Commerce Number 300 Houses



Wm. A. Cline, Chairman of the Civic Committee of the Wharton Chamber of Commerce, W. E. Brady, president, and Ruben Kimble, representative of the American Legion Negro Post of Wharton, are shown affixing a number to one of the 300 houses in Washington Addition that received street addresses Sunday, September 24th.

According to Mr. Cline all the approximate 500 houses across the tracks in the Washington Addition have now been numbered; and since those two sections were the ones holding up the city mail delivery it is hoped that the delivery of mail may soon be a reality.

Mr. Cline, Mr. Brady and Mrs. Virginia Sorrel met with the colored representatives Sunday morning at the S. P. Depot and the group worked all day numbering the houses. The colored representatives of the Legion were Wesley Aubrey, John Marks, Otis Johnson and Ruben Kimble.



—Photo By Russell Rowe
Dairy Day officials are pictured at the Wharton County Fair Grounds during the greatest Dairy Day in the history of the county.

Left to right: M. G. Curlee, General Committee; Lawrence Brown, Dinner Committee; J. E. McSweeney, Cattle Committee; Larry L. Burleson, County Agricultural Agent; Joe H. Hall, General Committee; S. E. Stallone, Speaker of the day and General Manager of South Texas Milk Producers' Association; Mrs. Katharine Larrieu, Secretary-Manager, Wharton Chamber of Commerce; Sam E. von Rosenberg, Field Representative, American Dairy Association and one of the Judges of Cattle; R. E. Burleson, State Dairy Specialist, Texas A. & M. College and one of the judges of cattle; George R. E. Hungerford, exhibiting his Grand Champion Bull. Not present in the picture is Jimmy Damon, local Manager of Phoenix Milk Company and General Chairman of Dairy Day Program.



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THE GROUND BREAKING CEREMONY—For the new Shearith Israel Synagogue Sunday, January 15th, was simple but impressive. President of the Congregation Mervin Franklin used the 'gold' shovel to turn the first earth for the beautiful new building. In the picture left to right front row (kneeling) are Dave Krumholtz and Jake Kasman of Bay City, Aaron H. Sharman, Mervin Franklin, Dr. Henry Halz and David D. Cozier. Standing in the same order Isaac Neuman of Bay City, Julius Gensberg, Arthur I. Holland, Rabbi Israel Rosenberg, Maynard Smith, Milton Sinderbrand, Sam Bishkin and Bob Meisel of El Campo, Mrs. Paul Wadler, Abe Bishkin of El Campo, Morris Zeidman, M. N. Bernstein, and Alex Harrison, in the background at the extreme left is Irving Rothenberg. PHOTO by Hamilton

Ground Broken For New Synagogue

On Sunday, January 15th, the Jewry of Wharton, Bay City, El Campo and surrounding towns opened a new chapter in the history of Shearith Israel Congregation. With an impressive groundbreaking ceremony, they officially started the building of their new synagogue on Kait Moon Lake Road in Wharton. Mr. Maynard Smith acting as master of ceremonies introduced Rabbi Israel Rosenberg who read a solemn prayer appropriate for that moment. The president of the congregation, Mr. Mervin Franklin, symbolized the commencing act by turning three shovelfuls of earth with a golden shovel specially prepared for that occasion. With the song and the taking of pictures, the groundbreaking ceremony came to a close, but the good spirit went on through the supper and installation of officers which followed.

The installation took place in the Community Hall which was decorated in a most festive manner. With much wit, humor, and talent, the master of ceremonies guided the evening's program which began with Rabbi Rosenberg's invocation and blessing, after which a barbecue supper was served to the delight of all present. Mr. David Cozier, a past president, in a short and effective address proceeded with installing the new officers and members of the board. These are: Mervin Franklin of Wharton, president; Isaac Neuman, Bay City, vice-president; Bob Meisel, Wharton, secretary; Arthur I. Holland, Wharton, treasurer; Sam Bishkin, Bay City, secretary; Bob Meisel, Wharton, secretary; and Jake Kasman, Bay City, secretary.

Special to the Journal-Spectator

As the Wharton Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture celebrates 100 years, former executive director Billie Jones marvels at how the history began and the organization continues to thrive in its active role in the town.

"Woodrow Wilson was president and troops had come home from World War I in 1917 and 1918," Jones said. "Then in 1919, a group of men decided that they were going to organize a Chamber of Commerce. And here we are a hundred years later because of those guys."

Jones, who first came to Wharton as the wife of a Methodist minister, Wayne Jones, and later returned to serve as the Chamber's executive director from 1984 to 2006, said she enjoys watching projects get completed, working with people and just getting things done.

"I told them at the Chamber, when I first went there, I said: 'I'm going to be here as long as it's fun,'" Jones said. "And it was. I didn't have a year that I couldn't say, 'This was a fun year.' And again, it was because of all of the presidents and the volunteers."

During Jones' tenure at the Chamber, new business, including major companies like Nan Ya Plastics, drove the local economy, tourism grew, a Boys and Girls Club was founded and the town's historic courthouse was revamped. Of course, challenges existed which the Chamber tackled and included a lagging economic times, a lack of medical services after the merging of two major hospitals and an overall demographics change that transformed the city's neighborhoods and business community.

Another former Chamber president (1999-2000) and a Wharton native, Jeffrey Blair, 73, grew up here and

spent his career as a banker from 1976 to 2015. Blair noted the town's once-thriving Jewish population when he was growing up in Wharton and how a generation later, it dramatically dwindled.

"When I grew up, most of the businesses in this town were sole proprietorships," Blair said. "They were owned by families." These businesses included furniture, hardware and dry goods stores. The business owners were made up of a largely Jewish segment of the population. "A lot of the merchants in Wharton were Jewish," Blair said. "As a result of that, Wharton had a synagogue."

The synagogue, which no longer exists, drew Jewish faithful not just in Wharton but from about a 50-mile radius who came for services. Wharton also has a Jewish cemetery, Blair said. However, the next generation of these families did not come back home but moved on to other cities, leaving the family businesses in jeopardy.

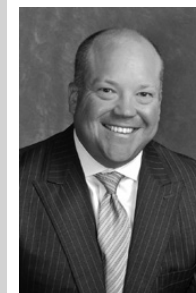
"They chose other careers and they just stayed more in metropolitan areas," Blair said. "So, one by one, those businesses didn't have any succession. They just gradually either went out of business or sold and that's pretty indicative of a lot of small towns in South Texas."

Blair noted that those "kids" who didn't return home would have been his age and older.

Jones also remembers the loss of the Wharton Jewish community.

"When I left here as a minister's wife (in 1977), the businesses and the whole square downtown were all Jewish businesses," Jones said. "They were the strength of the business community here for a number of years."

Edward Jones
MAKING SENSE OF INVESTING



Chad Faucett
Financial Advisor

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100 Years**

Wharton Journal  Spectator

T.M. Neal Home, 225 N. Richmond Road



The Chamber of Commerce's office moved several times over the years. During World War II, it was relocated from the municipal building downtown to space upstairs over Wharton Hardware Company on the east side of the Square. In December 1946 Wharton City Council gave permission for the Chamber to move into the mayor's office, as it was little used and those having business with the Chamber would be able to reach it more easily. In January of 1969, Mrs. Mae Vineyard Neal deeded her property at 225 North Richmond Road to Wharton Industrial Foundation, and that became – and remains - the Wharton Chamber of Commerce's home. Mrs. Neal was the wife of Dr. Thurman McCloud (T.M.) Neal, a local physician in private practice in Wharton. The home was built in 1912 by Dr. T.M. Neal as a



Dr. T.M. Neal



Mae Vineyard Neal

tribute to Mae. Now, the building stands as the center of Wharton Chamber Business and is easily located by visitors that want to begin their journey through Wharton.



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The Visitors & Newcomers Guide (2009-2019)



Photos from top left are of variety of Guides from years 2009 to 2019, the Morris Carriage House, Tee Pee Motel, Dan Rather Home and the Wharton County Historical Museum.



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1970s



Special to the Journal-Spectator

Throughout the last century, as people and places have come and gone, demographics, industries and economics developed and diversified, the Wharton Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture has remained a constant in its role at the center of the town's activity and progress.

"The Chamber has always been the backbone of virtually any community and especially small communities," said James "Doc" Blakely, PhD, the Chamber's president in 1975. "And I think we have one of the best ones in the United States and especially in Texas. We've kept up-to-date, we have good leadership and we have good volunteers. We have very progressive ideas, sound members to serve on the board and sound leaders to take on the chairs of the various committees, and of course, the president."

Blakely, who originally came to Wharton more than 40 years ago to teach agriculture and run a soil-testing lab, is now a much sought-after professional speaker whose humor cannot help but come through when you speak with him. Blakely said, mostly joking, that he became president in 1975 because he thought he would avoid the 1976 Chamber presidency and the monumental tasks related to the bicentennial celebration. But all did not work out as he planned.

"I remember it so vividly because '76 was a big time for the bicentennial," Blakely said. "I took the '75 presidency and they said, 'All you have to do is raise the funds for next year.' What a job that turned out to be."

Blakely recalls the strong local support and how there was no shortage of sponsors who stepped up for the celebration festivities.

"In '76, they had lots of parades and celebrations," Blakely said. "One of the things I remember was they painted all the fire plugs (the



predecessor to the fire hydrant).” Blakely said that back then, fire plugs were adopted by local businesses, individuals and organizations, such as the Rotary Club.

Blakely said there was not much direction given but just “to do something patriotic.”

So throughout Wharton, fire plugs featured stars and stripes and the faces of famous presidents like George Washington and Abraham Lincoln in a fashion that Blakely described as “the wildest imagination that turned out to be really great.”

“For many years afterward, they left those fire plugs just like they were,” Blakely said. “It gave us a chance to look back and remember '76, which was a very special year in our country.”

One of the projects that involved the “Wharton Navy” occurred Oct. 25, 1975.

To Chamber officials' surprise, the United States Navy sent to Wharton an officer to “commission” 82 local people as Admirals in the Wharton Navy, who had donated to the Chamber's project to raise money for the upcoming Sesquicentennial celebration.

The goal was \$25,000 and they raised more than \$20,000 from contributors who each donated \$100.

An idea was conceived to protect the waters of the Colorado River from invasion by foreign vessels from outside the county, to commission 76 men and women who had the three outstanding characteristics of courage, honor and valor, as Admirals.

Around 100 personalized letters were sent out, anticipating perhaps a 3-5 percent return

on the first round of letters. Instead the chamber received an 82 percent return on the very first try.

As Blakely remembers even further back when he arrived in Wharton in the early 1960s, he said the idea that Wharton was on the brink of a population boom was always a common notion.

“We moved here in 1964 and the population was a little over 9,000 and everybody was telling me, ‘Get ready, Wharton is on the cusp of a great expansion. We are just going to grow and bust the seams out because we're close to Houston.’”

The expected explosion has yet to happen. Blakely points out that the population is about



CHAMBER OF COMMERCE BOARD OF DIRECTORS for 1974 are shown above, left to right, front row: Robert Vineyard, Ed, Larry Wadler, Al Siba, Mrs. W. A. Harrison and Mrs. Lee Le-

man, back row: Charles Sansing, Hal Means, J. B. Chamberlain, Dr. James Blakely, and John Billings. Not shown are R. L. Carter and Ron Peel.

the same as when he first moved to Wharton. The 2010 Census puts the population of Wharton at about 8,830.

“Every year, they say that and what do you suppose the population is today?” Blakely asks. “It's just a little over 9,000. And I don't say that as a criticism, I say that is part of the charm of Wharton.”



The Chamber through the years



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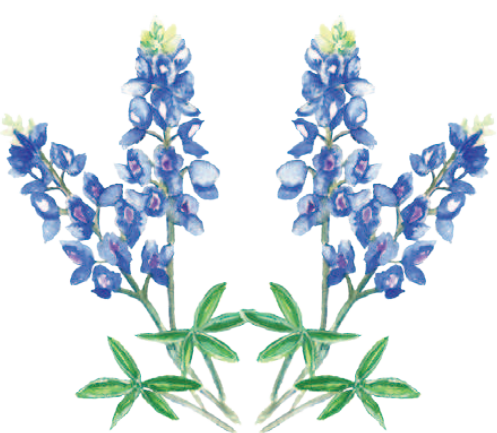


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1980s

Special to the Journal-Spectator

Those associated with the Wharton Chamber of Commerce, say at the beginning of the 1980s, Wharton experienced prosperous times.

Faye Evans served as chamber executive secretary from 1979 to 1984, with retired Colonel I. J. Irvin, Jr., as executive director. During Faye's time the Chamber produced a new booklet entitled Southwest Magazine, with Wharton and East Bernard editions, and added a new lighted sign to their property on Richmond Road.

New people were constantly coming to town, and the Chamber always stocked pamphlets on area schools and churches. Linda McCown (who worked for Magcobar Drilling Fluids, now Lambert) later remembered Evans' help when she needed to move and thanked her for it.

During Evans' time with the Chamber, the construction of a toxic dump site in Boling was stopped. A big row ensued, but ultimately the issue was settled in favor of community health. The railroad and US 59 loop were also frequent topics, a brand-new hospital was constructed after she left, and Nan Ya Plastics joined our community.

Evans said the Chamber started the now-annual Chamber Banquet and Christmas parade, plus political speakers, Wharton County Youth Fair (one time the Shriners were invited, and they came with their scooters), and a monthly luncheon for board members. She has happy memories of her time as Chamber Secretary and feels much good was accomplished.

Both Executive Director Billie Jones, who started her tenure as executive director in 1984, and Michael Wootton, president in 1980, remember this decade fondly.

"We had a lot of small businesses and I think there were probably more small businesses than in Wharton than there are now just because of the way economics have developed over the years," Wootton said. "But it was an active time. It was a pretty prosperous time, the early 1980s were."

Wootton, a local banker, moved to Wharton in 1975 after working for a couple of years for the Department of Agriculture, dealing primarily in rural development and agricultural loans. He then worked for a local bank, Security Bank and Trust, and community involvement came naturally, he said.



Poster winners named

Displaying their entries are the proud winners in the Wharton flag contest sponsored by the Wharton Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture's public relations committee. The winners are (from left) 13-year-old David Buck of Wharton, first place; 8-year-old Chanel Bryant

of Hungerford, second place; and 9-year-old Robert Nash of Wharton, third place; along with PR committee member Don Elliott. The winners were awarded \$100, \$75 and \$50 savings bonds, respectively, for their efforts. There were approximately 150 entries.

"I served on the Chamber and had an opportunity to be a board member," Wootton said. "That led into the opportunity to serve as president, which I was glad to do. We were involved with the community and worked with the local businesses to keep the community active and involved."

Both Wootton and Jones also remember the economic downturn toward the latter part of the 1980s.

"Now, we did have some economic problems in the late 80s but the early 80s were pretty prosperous times," Wootton said. "Wharton was showing some growth and there was housing going on and people were active in our community."

Jones said thanks to the plastics industry, Wharton survived the tough economic times of the mid to late 1980s. When she started her time as executive director of the Chamber in 1984, a company called Nan Ya Plastics, a division of Formosa Plastics, was just settling into town. Shortly after, another company who would become a major employer, JM Manufacturing, arrived.

"They came in at a great time," Jones said. "The economy being flat is not a good time and yet it was a good time because those companies came in and strengthened our tax base."

Nan Ya, a Taiwan-based company, gave Jones the opportunity to travel to East Asia and she found that she had a knack for dealing with businesses, and especially enjoyed dealing with international ones.

"During my tenure, it was great to see the growth of that company," Jones said. "We were privileged to travel to Taiwan several times to get to know that family and to be a part of the growth of that company."

"I really enjoyed that and still have a great relationship with the company (Nan Ya)," Jones said. "I'm out there pretty often. Our relationships with industries are so important and that's one of the things I enjoy."

However, Jones said that in addition to the plastics manufacturing industry, Wharton does not forget its agricultural roots. Several past presidents mentioned the success of companies including

J.D. Hudgins, known worldwide for breeding American Brahman cattle. Many ranches and farms produce corn, grain sorghum, and cotton. The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in Wharton County, in a 2017 report, identify cotton, grain Sorghum, soybean, corn and rice production as "a major economic force in Wharton County." The USDA reported 232,913 acres planted in 2017 for these five major crops in Wharton County, according to the report.

"This is great agricultural land along the Colorado River," Blair, 1999-2000 Chamber president, said.

Gramm praises Wharton plastics facility in tour

U.S. Sen. Phil Gramm visited Wharton on Sunday to thank J-M Manufacturing Co. Inc. for its long-term economic investment in Wharton.

"J-M Manufacturing is a prime example of a company that produces quality products sold throughout America at competitive prices," the senator said. "Because they make a marketable product, J-M and Wharton have experienced job growth and opportunity," Gramm said. "They are an engine in Texas' economic recovery."

J-M is the only manufacturer in the U.S. that makes 20 inch and 24 inch plastic pipe. A new 50,000 square foot facility located next to the present site, designed to increase output, is scheduled to open May 1, Gramm's office said in a press release.

Gramm was greeted at his tour of J-M and sister plant Nan Ya Plastics Corp. USA by a host of government, chamber of commerce, and local economic development officials. He met with James Silvers, manager of projects at J-M, and officials including Wharton Mayor Garland S. Novossad, Wharton Chamber of Commerce President Elbert C. Hutchins, City Manager C.G. Machin, Chamber Manager Billie Jones and city councilmen Leroy Barnes and Dr. Dennis Voulgaris.

Gramm's visit was on the eve of two days of high-level meetings in Washington with plastics company and economic development leaders from Calhoun County, competing for a proposed big plant by parent company Formosa Plastics Group.

Karen Silver, during Sunday's tour, gave Gramm a breakdown of Nan Ya and J-M's production and employment figures for Wharton.

The payroll at the Wharton Nan Ya plant was \$3.1 million last year and will be \$4.5 million this year. The plant has the potential for an eventual \$7.2 million payroll.

J-M payroll was \$1.2 million in 1987, will be \$1.75 million this year, and eventually it could climb to \$2.7 million.

J-M sales from the Wharton plant were \$33 million last year and will be \$44 million this year.

Nan Ya's sales were \$66 million last year and will be \$99 million this year.

Nan Ya manufactures ridged plastic film mainly used for product packaging. J-M makes PVC pipe.

Raw materials for the Wharton plastic plants are made in Point Comfort by Formosa Plastics.

Both Gramm and U.S. Rep. Mac Sweeney are involved in recruiting a new Formosa plant to Texas. One location competing for the plant is Point Comfort in Calhoun County.

The new plant holds the promise of 1,000 to 2,000 additional jobs.

Both Gramm and Sweeney believe that Wharton would benefit economically from the proposed facility.

Calhoun County economic development officials, plus Formosa Plant Manager Jack Wu and a Formosa liaison from corporate headquarters in Taiwan, were scheduled to meet Monday in Washington with Gramm and Sen. Lloyd Bentsen. Sweeney was to meet with the group yesterday.

Gramm said in an interview that "2,000 jobs will do a miracle for any community in Texas."

Sweeney, in a press conference Monday night after a fund raiser here (see story), said that the benefits of the new plant "can't be confined to one county."

Sweeney sees benefits for Wharton, Matagorda and Victoria counties as well.

He said he is working on issues that may affect siting the plant in Point Comfort. The issues center on immigrating 200 Taiwanese families to Texas, dredging operations to handle the added ship traffic, and environmental aspects of the proposed facility.



Staff photo by Susan K. Pearson

U.S. SEN. PHIL GRAMM tours Nan Ya Plastics Corp. U.S.A. in Wharton. Gramm is looking here at more than four Nan Ya production lines making ridged PVC film. Sunday's tour was followed by a visit to sister plant, J-M Manufacturing, next door, followed by speeches and refreshments. Gramm is flanked here (from left) by Jack Wu, Texas head of parent company Formosa Plastics; and Larry Lin, Nan Ya plant manager. See additional pictures, Page A2.

"There's a lot of people involved in agriculture and it drives a lot of business."

Jones echoed this sentiment about the importance of agriculture in Wharton and how the Chamber continues to support agriculture business needs.

"We also are agriculture so while we were doing the different kinds of industries, we did not want to forget our agriculture," Jones said. "Anytime there had been issues or problems with agriculture, the Chamber has been right in there as a positive force."

The success of new businesses like Nan Ya Plastics helped drive Wharton's economy into the 1990s, another decade that brought growth and challenges yet was led by Chamber leadership and efforts.

When Jones began her tenure in 1984, she didn't know that it would be position she would hold until 2004. Her husband, the Rev. Dr. A. Wayne Jones, had died in March 1984, and Billie had planned to remain in Nacogdoches where her mother lived and where she had established connections with Stephen F. Austin University, her church, and many friends. Wharton Chamber's Selection Committee approached her about coming to Wharton to succeed Colonel Irvin, who had resigned to run for county judge. She had no intention of leaving her mother but on the spur of the moment decided the position appealed to her, made the move, and never looked back.

She eventually made her first trip to Taiwan as a result of Nan Ya Plastics' plans to move to Wharton.

The issues that had been so troublesome at the time resolved themselves with the help of a TxDOT road access, U. S. Post Office mail delivery, and a better selection of vegetables at H-E-B. Wharton Industrial Foundation funded the first trip, and soon Nan Ya Plastics was in business in Wharton, joined later by JM Plastics, maker of PVC pipe, next door.

New Sonic promises 20 jobs, says release

Twenty full-time and part-time employees will be sought in the Wharton area to man the new Sonic Drive In restaurant to be open in about 60 days at 120 W. Boling Highway.

A press release issued Wednesday from developer Quintana Enterprises, Inc. said, "Sonic has had its eye on Wharton for several years and only within the last 12 months has a combination of available land and market conditions made the project possible."

The Sonic Drive In will be renewing acquaintance with a familiar name that sports a new look, says the release.

The franchisee and operator will be K&S Restaurant of Huntsville. K&S is owned by Ken Waitford and Stan LaChance whose combined experience with Sonic Industries is 25 years. They own and operate sites in Brazoria, Clute, Freeport, Santa Fe, Friendswood, Kinross and Galveston.

The new facility is being built by John King Construction of Houston and should be completed by April 10.



Staff photo by Susan K. Pearson

Ground breaking

BREAKING THE GROUND for the new Sonic Restaurant on the Boling Highway, members of the Chamber of Commerce and city government join in the festivities. Pictured are: (left to right) on shovel are Quinton Anderson and Nina Baker; first row, Billie Jones, Walt Cowart, Debbie Korenek, Harry Beck, Marjorie Yland, Larry Walker, Paul LaChance, Stan LaChance, Bly Nankervis, Tom Miller, Ken Waitford and Elbert Hutchins.

1990s

Special to the Journal-Spectator

As the first few years of the 1990s began, the Wharton Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture was beginning in its seventh decade of operation. The country had its first major armed conflict through Operation Desert Shield in the Middle East, and a Democrat took office for the first time in more than a decade.

According to the U.S. census, Wharton had a population of 9,011 residents.

One of the chamber presidents in the 90s was Mickey Reynolds, who started in 1994.

He said his slogan was "Bridging the Gaps," in reference to working in tandem with the City of Wharton, Wharton County and neighboring cities and chambers of commerce. Reynolds said working closely with businesses like Nan Ya and Formosa Plastics proved effective, too.

"Bridging the gaps led to working closer with other entities and I see those bridges still being successful," Reynolds said. "Challenges were pretty typical of chamber business. El Campo and Wharton worked together in spite of being very competitive cities and chambers."

The creation of Wharton's Economic Development Corporation in the early 1990s brought a focus on not just recruitment but maintaining and expanding business and industry in the town. This did not come without some growing pains.

"The Chamber had to regroup when the City of Wharton created its Economic Development Corporation," Reynolds said. "We had been the main force in development for the city. We had to learn to let the corporation do its job while working with it."

The Chamber took on a stronger role in the area of tourism, which Reynolds said was a positive development. Jones particularly enjoyed the increased focus on tourism and seeing tour buses come in to Wharton. Chamber Executive Director Billie Jones



Horton Foote, left, Lloyd Shoppa and Leon Locke honored during Tuesday banquet. Staff photo by Tai Houston

said the visitors get to tour the sites of Wharton, including the charming downtown Monterey Square restaurants, antique and gift shops and the renovated historic Wharton County Courthouse.

"Houston has a great senior program," Jones said. "Each precinct has buses so I enjoy getting to know the commissioners in the Houston area. They all have buses and bring a lot of senior groups out."

As Reynolds looks back on his leadership tenure at the Chamber, he mentions Jones as at the "top of the list" as someone who fueled his team to achieve success.

"We became great friends, traveled together and worked really hard to be ambassadors for our city and county," Reynolds said.

His Chamber experience led Reynolds to run for Wharton County Commissioner Precinct One, a spot he held for 12 years while continuing to serve in an advisory position with the Chamber.

In the late 1990s, around 1998, Wharton met the needs of its younger demographic with the opening of the Boys and Girls Club of Wharton, led by Jones and a Chamber team, along with funding and support from the Mary Louis Dobson Foundation.

"(Dobson) wanted to do something for the kids," Jones said. "So because of her graciousness and all of her funding, we are able to have two wonderful buildings here now - one for the Boys & Girls and then the other for the teens."

The turn of the century was in sight along with more accomplishments and progress for Wharton, including the restoration of the Wharton County Courthouse and changes for the medical care services available for Wharton residents.

As the 1990s concluded, the last awards luncheon in 1999, saw a



New restaurant draws a crowd. Anissa Mirvaz, manager of the new Los Cucos Restaurant in Wharton, cuts the ribbon to celebrate the opening of the chain's new Wharton location. Helping to hold the ribbon are her assistant, Amber Campos, and Los Cucos owner Manuel Cabera. Mayor Joel Williams and WEDCO executive Bill Knesek, at left, joined other city and chamber of commerce officials to welcome Los Cucos to town. Staff Photo by Larry Jackson

changing of the guard.

Five outgoing directors were honored, including Ren Burgert, Jim Cockrell, Kent Hill, Russell Machann, and J.W. Kuykendall. Incoming directors who were to serve three-year terms were Tim Barker, Randy Chumchal, Mike Hinze, Gaylen Segrest and Larry Jackson.



Former Mayor Garland Novosad, seated on the stage as decorations are being set up for a wedding reception in the main ballroom, says the relationships built are the ones most important to him. Staff Photo by Ronald K. Sanders



Familiar retailer at new store. Manager Earl Jones clips the ribbon as the grand opening of the new Dollar General Store is celebrated Wednesday. Joining in the event were store employees and members of the Wharton Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture. The discount merchandise store is now open on Milam Street in what formerly was a legal aid law office. Staff Photo by Larry Jackson

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2000s

Special to the Journal-Spectator

Arriving in Wharton in 1991 as editor of the Wharton Journal-Spectator where he would work until 2007, Larry Jackson served a two-year term as the Wharton Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture president in 2001 and 2002.

This came during a tumultuous time in America's history after the Sept. 11, 2001 terror attacks. Changes came with our federal government and homeland security, and then eventually led to millions of Americans being affected, including Wharton.



Nevertheless, Jackson, said housing and healthcare led among his list of priorities for the city as chamber president.

"We were really looking at increased housing opportunities," Jackson said. "Unfortunately, we did not accomplish as many of these as we would have liked to have. Of course, healthcare was a major



concern. We had at that time a really terrific hospital system. Things would change in later years."

He was referring to Gulf Coast Medical Center, which years later would become OakBend Medical Center in 2018.

Jackson said Wharton, at the time, had two thriving hospitals with their own clinics who competed vigorously to provide the most modern equipment and best doctors and specialists.

"By having these two competing hospitals, it was like the best of capitalism," Jackson said. "We just had wonderful healthcare in Wharton and so Wharton was really well known as a major medical center for that whole area."

Jackson said the robust hospital systems, along with the flourishing plastics industry, led by Nan Ya Plastics, provided a boost to the local economy.

"We had some really strong private sector employers and the Chamber worked very closely with all of them," Jackson said.

He also credits Chamber Executive Director Billie Jones as pivotal to the ongoing projects at the time and cites the cooperation and contribution of the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) for providing funding for civic projects.

As the healthcare climate evolved, Wharton's two hospital systems merged with the clinics becoming South Texas Medical Clinics and the hospital became Gulf Coast Medical Center, owned by Hospital Corporation of America. As a for-profit hospital, Gulf Coast became a major taxpayer while the former non-profit hospital's assets were sold and the South Texas Medical Foundation was formed. This foundation, Jackson said, provided local grants and supported Wharton projects. One of the former hospital facilities became the city's Civic Center with the adjoining medical clinic becoming the Wharton Independent School District Administration Building.

"We were able to repurpose that group of hospitals and offices into some civic facilities," Jackson said. "The other hospital on Richmond Road became a (behavioral healthcare) clinic."

Midway through the decade at the end of December 2004, housing was still an issue in Wharton following a major flood. The last Chamber luncheon of the year had a Fort Bend County developer speak locals about it. Chamber Executive Director Abby Schubach said the luncheon had to be moved from

the Wharton Civic Center to the First United Methodist Church. Dawson Elementary School students and teachers held classes at the civic center following

Colorado River flooding.

Jackson recalls that another focus of the Chamber was the inclusion of members of the city and county leadership including Wharton County Junior College, City of Wharton and Wharton County representatives on the Chamber board. This ensured better communication among the area leaders and remains a hallmark of how the Chamber operates.

"I would just emphasize what a wonderful role that the Chamber of Commerce played in Wharton," Jackson said. "It helped to coordinate projects and bring together people and finances to be able to achieve some tremendous things for the community, whether in youth, recreation, education..."

"We really worked hard to provide business opportunities so that tax-paying businesses came in to our community and provided good jobs. I just think the Chamber played a terrific role in pulling all of that together."

Jackson, who now lives in La Grange and serves as an executive officer in the Rotary District of Central Texas, said he regrets he cannot attend the 100th banquet March 2, but will always have fond memories of his time with the Chamber.

As the decade ended, the Chamber had plans to hold its third annual Christmas Open House, an event that is still going on today.

Ron Sanders was the Chamber's executive director at the time.



2010s

Special to the Journal-Spectator

As 2019 began, things were building up for the 100th year of the Wharton County Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture's existence, but so too was the annual banquet, which has been held for just as many years in Wharton.

The historic event will be held at the Wharton Civic Center, Saturday, March 2.

Two weeks before the banquet, a committee meeting in the chamber office consisted of staff members and Executive Director Ronald K. Sanders. The meeting included first-year Board President Michael Limas and others from the community.

There wasn't a detail left off the list of topics among the seven people who were present, including Laura Reyna, Victoria Heffner, Kim Pikert, Lacy Border and Kaytee Cenko.

Planning a banquet is nothing new to Sanders as he was working on his ninth in the 2010s. He has served the community since 2007.

But for Limas, whose terms began in October 2018, this is new to him.

The banquet, and where the Chamber is now and moving forward is something Limas takes very seriously.

"It's an honor and to be celebrating the 100th anniversary, it means there were great men and woman ahead of me, so now we have to make the turn moving forward, and there are big things in front of us," said Limas, who mentioned major building renovations as a priority.

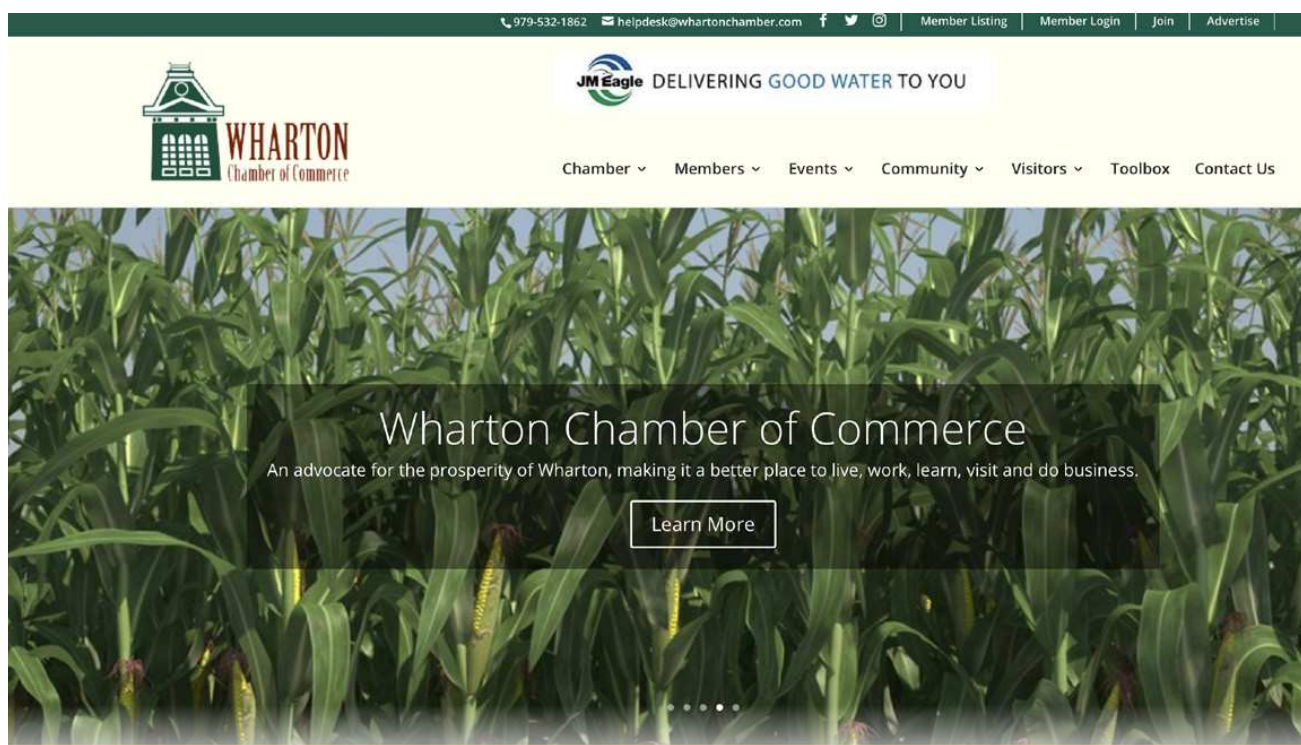
He would like to be part of Chamber project(s) that will give those in the year 2119 something to work with, but it will be a "tough" road ahead.

One reason is mother nature.

Wharton is no stranger to repeated flooding and Hurricane Harvey in 2017 cemented that claim. Landon McClain was board president then and challenges arose to help victims. In 2016, Wharton had another flood. The board president then was Abby King.

Limas said he has spoken to both in some capacity while their roles as presidents came and went. He said every board president will be presented challenges of some kind. He compared it to a sailboat operating through the wind and the importance of having a tack to change course and direction.

He commended Sanders for piloting him and



other board presidents through rough waters.

Sanders is proud of the way the Chamber office has become more self-sufficient and promotes Wharton with an impressive internet and social media presence. These are tools that have come into play, especially this decade.

"I think one of the most lasting accomplishments is that we have modernized the office," Sanders said. "We're able to produce marketing materials in house. We have a very strong website that's interactive."

When he arrived, the Chamber's equipment was aged, including generations-old computers.

"We have a modern office," Sanders said. "I think that's one of the things I feel most proud about."

Technology advancements have helped the Chamber, too, and Sanders cites the Chamber's e-mail blasts and social media, which includes Facebook, Twitter and Instagram sites, as among new ways to reach members.

"We're very proud of our aggressive and I hope, smart, use of technology to reach our members," Sanders said. "We are the front door of Wharton and we have been the front door of Wharton for 100 years. We are the go-to place and we continue to grow as the go-to place for information about business and doing business in Wharton."

Other accomplishments include the Chamber's digital marquee in front of the building along Richmond Road.

Among the presidents who Sanders worked for this decade before Limas were McClain,

King, Justin Coldeway, Charla Kulcak, John Perches, Chris Cerny, Arthur E. Schulze, and Larry Jackson.

Looking ahead to the 2020s, Sanders spoke Limas' sentiments regarding the challenge of improvements to the Chamber building's interior.

"I like to look at it as an opportunity," Sanders said, of the physical repairs that are needed inside the edifice.

Leadership and effort are key. A glance at Wharton Chamber's online calendar provides insight into the range of projects it undertakes nowadays to achieve its goals.

As the decade nears an end, among the major events the Chamber sponsors presently are as follows:

- Inaugural Texas Salsa Showdown
- Inaugural Annual Pick & Flip
- Second Snow on the Square
- Second Party Under the Bridge
- 10th Annual Wharton City-Wide Garage Sale
- 39th Annual Chamber Christmas Holiday Parade
- 2th Annual Wharton Chamber Christmas Open House

Of course, there will be ribbon-cuttings, business breakfasts, fund-raisers, and special events. Strong Chamber leadership ensures success and productivity for all Wharton businesses for many years to come.



**LOOKING
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TO 100 MORE!**



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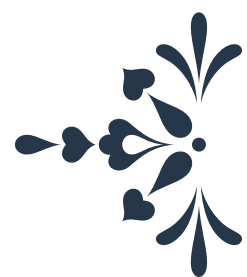


Chad Odom
Executive Director


1944 North Fulton St.
Wharton Texas 77488

Office: 979.532.0999
Toll Free: 866.532.0999
Fax: 979.532.5257

Email: chad@whartonedc.com
www.whartonedc.com



Wharton Chamber of Commerce
Board Presidents



2018-2020 Michael Limas

2016-2018 Landon McClain

2014-2016 Abby King

2013-2014 Justin Coldeway

2011-2012 Charla Kulcak

2008-2009 John Perches

2008 Cheryl Roach

2005-2006 Chris Cerny

2003-2004 Arthur E. Schulze

2001-2002 Larry Jackson

1999-2000 Jeffrey Blair

1997-1998 Randy Michael

1996 Mary Sheek

1995 Ray Linseisen

1994 Mickey Reynolds

1993 Craig Watson

1992 Gary Grogan

1991 Joe Svrcek

1990 Bill Ansley

1989 Deborah Korenek

1988 Dr. Elbert C. Hutchins

1987 Janie S. Noble

1986 Gene Matthews

1984 Gana Hill

1983 Don Middlebrook

1981-1982 Don Elliott

1980 Michael Wootten

1979 Tom Carlson

1978 Lucy M. LaDieu

1976 Robert M. Taylor

1975 Dr. James "Doc" Blakely

1974 Larry E. Wadler

1973 John Billings

1972 Make Sheffield

1971 W.I. "Roy" Whitsett

1970 Robert Skinner

1969 B.R. Kincer

1968 William A. Cline, Jr.

1966 Dee Russell McElroy

1963-1965 Robert S. Judson

1962 Gordon Koonce

1961 Robert C. VonDerAu

1959-1960 R.B. Hand

1958 J.B. Chamberlain

1957 Don Brown

1956 A.H. Chambers

1955 Louie Worthing, Jr.

1954 G.P. "Pat" Shryer

1952 Lloyd G. Rust, Jr.

1950-1951 W.E. Brady

1948 Charles Ingram, Jr.

1947 L.W. Atkinson

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