

Chamber & Economic Development of the Rutland Region

2019-2020 Annual Report

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To Our Members and Friends

We are pleased to present the 2019-2020 Annual Report for Rutland Region Chamber of Commerce and Rutland Economic Development Corporation. As you read this report, you'll see there's a lot worth celebrating. In its pages, you will find stories that highlight our signature events, committee updates, and information about our recent decision to merge the two organizations.

It has been a year of change not only in our region, but across the country, with the COVID-19 pandemic impacting nearly every business sector and changing not only the way we do business, but how we live. There are countless reasons why we are proud to call the Rutland Region our home, but especially for the way we come together as a community and support one another when transitions and challenges arise. We are confident that together, we can prepare for whatever the future has in store.

As we reflect on the past year, we are incredibly thankful to our generous sponsors for providing much-needed support for the many events and initiatives of our organizations to bolster economic activity and support the efforts of the Chamber.



John Casella II
President



Laurie Mecier-Brochu
Immediate Past-President

FY 2019-2020 was a year of great accomplishment for both Rutland Region Chamber of Commerce and Rutland Economic Development Corporation, but we know the best is yet to come as we embark on our first year under the Chamber & Economic Development of the Rutland Region banner. The future is bright for our new organization. We look forward to continuing to use collaboration, creativity, and ingenuity to create a regional economic climate conducive to business growth while creating a bridge to our community and cultural organizations to promote healthy and vibrant neighborhoods and enhance the quality of life in Rutland County.

We would be remiss if we didn't thank Mary Cohen, who served as Executive Director of Rutland Region Chamber of Commerce for the past four years, for being an ardent champion of our two organizations and for her unwavering commitment to making Rutland County a great place to work, live, play, and learn. Mary transitioned into the role of Executive Director of Housing Trust of Rutland County in September, and we are grateful to have her serve on our Board of Directors.

To all our members, community partners, board members past and present, and friends, thank you again for your support and inspiration.

John Casella II, President
Laurie Mecier-Brochu, Immediate Past-President

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Chamber, REDC Merge to Improve Community Development, Services



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The boards of Rutland Economic Development Corporation and Rutland Region Chamber of Commerce voted unanimously on July 30 to create a merged, streamlined organization to better serve their members and the greater Rutland Region. The organizations began operating under the name Chamber & Economic Development of the Rutland Region after the merger was finalized on September 1.

The merger was the result of four months of conversation about how the nonprofits could strengthen and expand services to better meet the needs of region's businesses and residents.

Lyle Jepson, who served as Rutland Economic Development Corporation's executive director from 2016 to 2018, returned as executive director when the merger was completed in September. Mary Cohen, who served as executive director of the Rutland Region Chamber of Commerce since 2016, was recently named executive director of the Housing Trust of Rutland County. The organization's other staff members, who have modified and exciting new roles, are working out of the former Rutland Region Chamber of Commerce office located at 50 Merchants Row in Downtown Rutland.

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Chamber Annual Meeting Celebrates Our Community





Rutland Region Chamber of Commerce's 2019 annual meeting was held on October 24 at The Paramount Theatre in Downtown Rutland. The meeting featured keynote speaker Stefanie Schaffer, who addressed the theme of "strength and resilience" to a room filled with legislators, business owners, and community leaders. Schaffer's life changed forever when the tour boat she was on exploded while on vacation in the Bahamas in 2018 with her family and friends. She suffered a spinal cord injury, brain injuries, and had to have both legs amputated. At the meeting, Schaffer described the obstacles she has overcome and the strength and resilience she found along the way.

Donald Billings, owner of Roots the Restaurant and The Bakery in Downtown Rutland and CRU and Mountain Merchant in Killington, was named Business Leader of the Year. Terry "Jaye" Jarrosak, operations manager at Catamount Radio, was named the inaugural recipient of the Chamber's Community Leader of the Year award. Thank you to Cape Air, Heritage Family Credit Union, and Alderman's Automotive Group for sponsoring the 2019 Chamber annual meeting.

Chamber Responds to COVID-19 Crisis

Since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, Rutland Region Chamber of Commerce has focused on helping member businesses and our local communities deal with the challenges created by COVID-19.

The Chamber launched several initiatives including a business resource page and business and restaurant updates with relevant links, resources, and restart information for members, business leaders and community members. The organization also worked to keep businesses connected with their customers by curating positive messages of hope and resilience from local businesses and sharing them on social media.

Despite having to cancel many of their annual events, the Chamber was able to host several virtual mixers and professional development events, including a meeting with the Rutland County legislative delegation, Creating Calm in Chaos with Pyramid Holistic Wellness Center, and How Personality Styles Impact Relationships with Dale Carnegie.

The Chamber also assisted businesses with navigating PPP and EIDL recovery programs, hosting several meetings with the Vermont Small Business Development Center.





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Chamber Mixers

Rutland Region Chamber of Commerce was able to hold eight monthly mixers prior to the start of the Coronavirus pandemic. These monthly mixers help facilitate connections between members. Thank you to the following businesses that hosted these networking events during the 2019-2020 fiscal year: Community Health; The Bank of Bennington; Allen Pools & Spas; The Franklin Conference Center; Heritage Family Credit Union; Countryman's Pleasure; Downtown Gentleman's Salon; and Comcast's Xfinity Store.

Chamber Indoor Golf Tournament

For the second year, Rutland Region Chamber of Commerce hosted an indoor golf tournament fundraiser. The Indoor Golf Tournament was sponsored by Heritage Family Credit Union and offered 14 teams an opportunity to play a professional course on Stonehedge Indoor Golf's simulators when the weather outside keeps them off the golf course. Players also had the opportunity to win cash and prizes, including a chance at $10,000 for a designated hole in one.



Keeping Our Community Safe

To help businesses enforce Vermont's mask mandate, Chamber & Economic Development of the Rutland Region distributed a free box of 50 masks to customer-facing businesses across Rutland County.

The initiative was made possible by generous donations from Rutland Regional Medical Center (RRMC), Casella Waste Systems, and Heritage Family Credit Union, with support from Foley Distributing and Green Mountain Power. RRMC President and CEO Claudio Fort, Casella Waste Systems Director of Community Engagement Jeff Weld, Heritage Family Credit Union's Senior Vice President of Marketing and Business Development Carrie Allen and President/CEO Matt Levandowski, Green Mountain Power Vice President of Customer Care and Ambassador to Rutland Steve Costello, and Mark Foley Jr. and Mark Foley Sr. of Foley Distributing were all present to help unload the truck carrying 50,000 masks. The masks were delivered to Rutland County businesses by Chamber & Economic Development of the Rutland Region staff members.



Connecting Students with Rutland County's Business Community

Castleton University and Chamber & Economic Development of the Rutland Region are proud to announce a new partnership with an eye toward enhancing internship and career opportunities and an increased focus on community engagement.

Kimberley Rupe, business development and community engagement manager of Chamber & Economic Development of the Rutland Region, will work alongside Castleton's Pathway to Graduation team to engage Castleton students in a diverse range of opportunities, including job experiences, internships, and workplace readiness skill programming. Rupe will also be tasked with providing support in developing and delivering community engagement activities that enhance the economic and social interactions between Castleton and its surrounding communities.

Kelley Beckwith, Director of Student Success at Castleton, said working with Chamber & Economic Development of the Rutland Region and Rupe to further engage students in the region's business community is a triple win for students, the university, and local organizations.

"Castleton is delighted to partner with Chamber & Economic Development of the Rutland Region. Strengthening experiential learning and workplace readiness is a main objective of Castleton's newly-launched Pathway to Graduation initiative," Beckwith said. "The timing of this collaboration complements Castleton's goal to include a significant workplace learning component in at least 80 percent of majors. As a result of this partnership, Castleton students will gain invaluable, career-enhancing exposure and Rutland area employers will benefit from the skills, creativity, and energy that students bring."

Rupe, who served as assistant director at Rutland Economic Development Corporation (REDC) for nearly two years, transitioned into the new role following the organization's recent merger with Rutland Region Chamber of Commerce. She previously worked as director of community engagement & alumni relations at College of St. Joseph, where she helped connect students with volunteer opportunities at businesses and organizations across Rutland County.

Chamber & VDTM Work Together on Stay to Stay Program

Rutland Region Chamber of Commerce and the Vermont Department of Tourism continued to partner together for the Stay to Stay Program, which is intended to attract prospective residents to Rutland County and let them explore how they can make this their home. Interested individuals and families stay at one of our many lodging partners for the weekend, and the Chamber hosts a welcome reception attended by participants, community members, and local business leaders. Throughout the weekend, participants are encouraged to explore the region. Participants can also meet with a local employer, go on a community tour with a realtor, or visit The MINT – Rutland's Makerspace. Stay to Stay weekends were postponed beginning in March due to COVID-19, but potential participants are being engaged through virtual channels, including the Stay to Stay video series and more.

Xfinity Wins Real Rutland Feud



Congratulations to the Xfinity team who took home top honors at the Real Rutland Feud on February 22 at The Paramount Theatre. Now in its third year, this "fun"raiser benefits the Regional Marketing Initiative. This event would not have been possible without the support of our 10 participating teams: Rutland City Rotary; Rutland South Rotary; GE-Aviation; Ellison Surface Technologies; Omya, Inc.; Rutland Young Professionals; Rutland Radiologists; Vermont Orthopaedic Clinic; F.W. Webb; and Xfinity.

Thank you to Eric Mallette for hosting the event, Mike Coppinger of MCSounds, Atomic Pro Audio, The Vermont Veterans Home for sponsoring "Minute to Win It," and everyone who purchased tickets and packed the Paramount. We also owe a special thank you to our board of directors and volunteers who helped plan the event and who, along with The Paramount Theatre's staff and volunteers, kept the show moving. We can't forget the great businesses that provided support and services to make this event successful, including Awesome Graphics; Green Mountain Marketing & Advertising; Lyz Tomsuden; Vibe Portrait Art; Green Screen Graphics; and Springfield Printing.

We're proud to say we raised $10,000 to support the Regional Marketing Initiative!



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The Life You Were Meant For



We are excited to report that year four of the Regional Marketing Initiative is under way, and we have been working with the Saratoga-based marketing firm LIFT to continue developing creative content targeting those who might be longing for a different lifestyle with the tagline "The Life You Were Meant For." The print and digital content also highlights Vermont's affordable living, career opportunities, supportive community, and the abundance of outdoor recreation available in the Rutland Region.

In the past year, the firm developed an exclusive curated guide for those thinking of moving to Rutland County that was downloaded 2,000 times. The group held a holiday contest that gave away a gift basket of Vermont products from Baird Farm in Chittenden, as well as a contest encouraging could-be Vermonters to "Experience Life Outside." More than 2,200 entered the drawing, which awarded a visit to Rutland County. To date, more than 25 families, representing more than 55 residents, have moved to Rutland County who have identified the Regional Marketing Initiative in some way as part of the reason they now call the Rutland Region home.

Thank you to all the individuals, businesses, and municipalities that have supported the Regional Marketing Initiative.

REDC Recognizes National Manufacturing Day

Rutland Economic Development Corporation engaged with local students, their families, and community members throughout October 2019 in celebration of National Manufacturing Day. Rutland County manufacturers opened their doors for visitors to highlight their innovative technology, career pathways, and employee benefits. While 2019 marked the first year that REDC recognized National Manufacturing Day, the event has been recognized nationwide since 2012 to address the shortage of workers manufacturing and to call attention to the exciting careers available within the field.

REDC's month-long celebration kicked off at The MINT – Rutland's Makerspace and included open houses at Ellison Surface Technologies, First Light Technologies, General Electric, and Hubbardton Forge. To round out the month, REDC partnered with Community College of Vermont to facilitate conversations with students and area employers, discuss education opportunities at CCV, Stafford Technical Center, and Vermont Technical College, as well as determine eligibility of financial assistance programs for continued education from Vermont Student Assistance Center (VSAC) and the Strengthening Working Families Initiative.

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REDC Annual Meeting Celebrates Businesses, Community





Each year we are blown away by the effort of our community partners in making the Rutland Region the most collaborative, innovative, and friendly place in Vermont to live, work play, and grow a business. The 2019 Rutland Economic Development Corporation annual meeting was held November 6 at The MINT – Rutland's Makerspace, and celebrated the extraordinary and supportive partners working tirelessly for our region. REDC was proud to present the Business Member of the Year award to Enman Kesslering Consulting Engineers and Heritage Family Credit Union for their efforts in growing our region through leadership, innovation, and collaboration. REDC named Karen McCalla Innovator of the Year for volunteering countless hours as The MINT's enthusiastic executive director.

Thank you to our annual meeting sponsors: GE-Aviation; Green Mountain Power; VELCO; NBT Bank; Heritage Family Credit Union; Omya; People's United Bank; Carris Reels; and Foley Services.









Rutland Economic Development Committee Updates

Policy Committee

Through a joint committee with Rutland Region Chamber of Commerce, REDC monitors and weighs in on legislation that could impact our business community. Our committee reconvened upon the onset of COVID-19 with more members and a reinvigorated look at the committee's role in determining Rutland County – and Vermont's – economic future. The committee diligently monitored the unique state budgeting process this year, as well as COVID relief programs for local businesses. We welcomed Drew Smith, business leader at GE Aviation, as our new committee chair in August.

This past year we saw the continuation of the Legislative Breakfast Series (until COVID-19), a series of forums that are intended to be informative and timely regarding current and future legislative activity. We are grateful for the continuous support of our dedicated regional delegation.

Building upon our prior years' work, the Policy Committee continued to monitor the Act 250 process, and this committee has continued to be engaged in this process. We have also monitored the 3-acre stormwater rule, working to make sure our area businesses and commercial property owners are aware of this issue while continuing to advocate for sensible, cost-effective solutions.

We have been working closely with Downs Rachlin Martin, who contract through the statewide Regional Development Corporations to provide lobbying services, to help us monitor legislation that is important and impactful to the business community. We also welcomed the team from the Vermont Chamber of Commerce to present their legislative priorities.

Finance Committee

As we end the fiscal year 2020, REDC continues to operate in a position of financial strength and security. Revenue generated this year (as reported in our most recent financial report of August month-end) was $462,277, with a profit/loss of $44,978. Revenue is diversified and is generated from membership dues, rental income from 112 Quality Lane, grants from the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, loan fees, and interest from banks. This year, the Finance Committee reviewed several loan applications for the Revolving Loan Fund, but no new loans were made. The Revolving Loan Fund has $700,000 to lend as of October 2020. Two loans were paid off this fiscal year. The Finance Committee was instrumental in the development of the Emergency COVID-19 fund to assist businesses impacted by COVID-19. The committee also oversaw the financial aspects of the REDC/Chamber merger, including analysis of current financials and projections/budgets going forward. REDC is audited annually by an outside accounting firm. These audits continue to be "clean" audits citing no issues of materiality and no issues regarding internal controls.

Real Estate Committee

This fiscal year, REDC's Real Estate Committee continued its oversight of the 112 Quality Lane building. Ellison Surface Technologies is in the final year of a five-year lease for 82 percent occupancy of the building. The group has investigated removing an underground oil tank and conducting a phase II environmental study upon acquisition of Ellison by Bodycote.

In 2016, the committee approved the donation of 8,000 square feet of the remaining space at 112 Quality Lane to The Mint – Rutland's Makerspace, through 2019. In 2020, the MINT and REDC entered into a low-rent lease.

This group continues to monitor what businesses will be needing in regard to commercial space in the wake of COVID-19, as well as legislation surrounding Act 250 and the 3-acre stormwater rule.

Entrepreneurship Committee

The Entrepreneurship Committee continued to support the work of our regional and statewide partners, focusing on building resources and networks for entrepreneurs in Rutland County. The committee also focused on how to best adapt businesses in the wake of COVID-19. This included support for the flow of information, programming, and resource allocation, monitoring trends and needs, and supporting member outreach assessments.

The committee continued mentor support for Center for Women & Enterprises' 10-week free business planning course, as well as support for The MINT-Rutland's Makerspace. This included support for the OnRamp program, the search for staff and staffing position development, and facilitating donations for The MINT and its programming and initiatives.



REDC Hosts Workforce Development Summit

Over 70 area employers, educators, and workforce development providers gathered at Castleton University in November for the region's Workforce Development Summit in partnership with Vermont's Regional Development Corporations and the Vermont Department of Labor.

This event, which was one of 12 summits held throughout the state, was designed to bring regional workforce systems into better alignment, provide actionable solutions for employers, and increase awareness and partnerships among the regional and statewide service providers. The output from this event will be used in the region to make our own systems stronger and by the State Workforce Development Board as it prepares future Workforce Strategies. Thank you to everyone who participated in this important work.

Thank You to Our Collaborative Partners



Economic development is truly a collaborative effort. Expanding and creating partnerships and strategic alliances to provide technical assistance for starting and growing small businesses is a core function of Rutland Economic Development Corporation. Our work would not be possible without the support of our regional and statewide partners, including: Vermont Procurement Technical Assistance Center (VT PTAC); Vermont Small Business Development Center (VTSBDC); Center for Women & Enterprise (CWE); Women Business Owners Network (WBON); Rutland Young Professionals; Downtown Rutland Partnership; Rutland Redevelopment Authority; Rutland Regional Planning Commission; Rutland Region Workforce Investment Board; Vermont Department of Economic Development; Vermont Department of Labor; Vermont Manufacturing Extension Center; USDA Rural Development; U.S. Small Business Administration – Vermont; and countless others.

REDC Connects Businesses with Resources During COVID-19

Since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, Rutland Economic Development Corporation has been committed to providing accurate, timely information to business leaders. REDC developed a COVID-19 resource page detailing Vermont's economic restart, recovery, and relief initiatives following Governor Phil Scott's Stay Home, Stay Safe executive order in March. Other resource categories included developing news for business owners, resources for municipalities and employees, healthcare updates, and manufacturing support for Rutland County. REDC also worked to connect regional businesses with U.S. Small Business Administration resources, including disaster relief funding through the CARES Act such as the Paycheck Protection Program and Economic Injury Disaster Loans/Advance.

Rutland Economic Development Corporation also received authorization to offer an Emergency Loan Program through its Revolving Loan Fund to assist businesses that are impacted by COVID-19. USDA Rural Development authorized REDC to use $150,000 from its Revolving Loan Fund for the COVID-19 Emergency Loan Program. Highlights of the Emergency Loan Program include a 4.25 percent fixed interest rate for a maximum of five years with deferred payments for the first three months, the expedited delivery of funds, and no penalties for pre-payment for businesses looking to use this funding source as gap financing or until other funds are available. The minimum lending limit is $5,000 and the maximum lending limit is $50,000. Applications can be found online at rutlandeconomy.com/covid19.

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The MINT Celebrates Three Years



The MINT – Rutland's Makerspace celebrated three years of operations in August and continued to experience growing membership and increased classes and workshops. The MINT closed for a brief period due to the Coronavirus pandemic, but a small group of volunteers quickly began to ponder how they could put their skills and resources to work to benefit our community. Working with staff from Rutland Regional Medical Center, a team of volunteers from The MINT developed a face shield that was laser cut from a single piece of 0.020 PET plastic in less than one minute, shipped flat, and folded to use. The original goal was to produce 10,000 face shields for local healthcare providers; However, due to Vermont's early COVID-19 response, only 3,500 face shields were necessary.

The Coronavirus pandemic also impacted The MINT's entrepreneurial development program, known as OnRamp, which welcomed its first six early-stage entrepreneurs in August 2019. In-person meeting has been halted, but after some adjustments to deliver the program virtually, the six entrepreneurs are finishing the program, with several of them pivoting their original business concepts to adapt to COVID-19. Members of the OnRamp program have access to business experts in our community, complete an entrepreneurship curriculum from CoStarters, and go from idea to a complete business in one year. The program also includes one year of MINT membership, co-working space from Green Mountain Power in the Energy Innovation Center, access to OnRamp mentors, and one-on-one support.

The MINT's Executive Director Karen McCalla was named Innovator of the Year at the 2019 Rutland Economic Development Corporation annual meeting.

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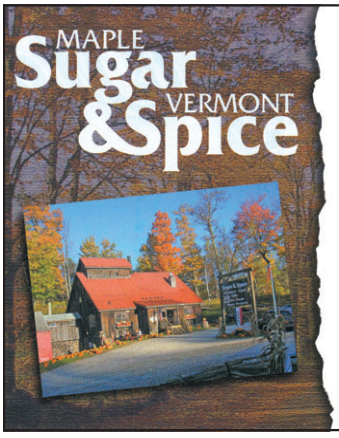

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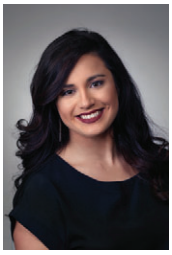

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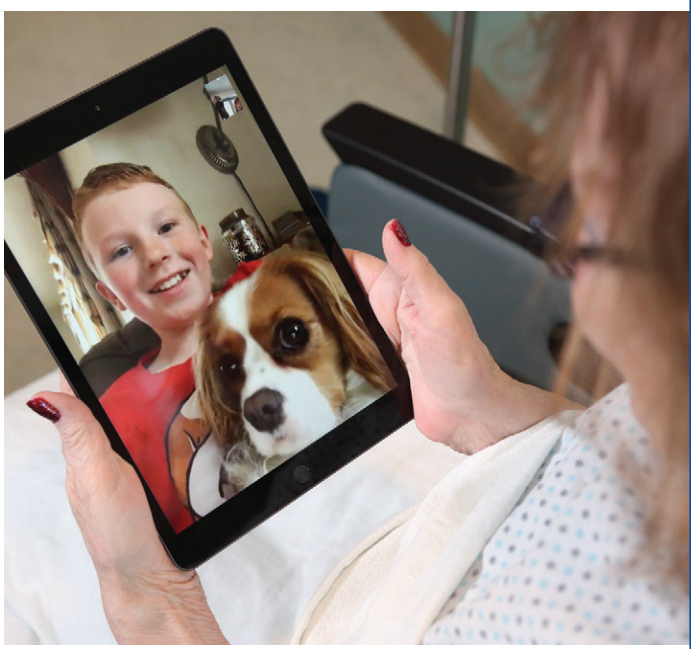

Rutland Regional Medical Center

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Healthy You. Healthy Together.