

Chamber Executive of the Year Submission

Jodi Winkler

Executive Director, Carman & Community Chamber of Commerce

Executive Summary

For the past eight years, I have had the privilege of serving as Executive Director of the Carman & Community Chamber of Commerce. During this time, I have focused on transforming our rural Chamber into a highly visible, engaged organization that plays a significant role in both the economic and social life of our community.

Under my leadership, Chamber membership has grown from **127 members to 217 members**, almost doubling in size. Our programming has expanded significantly, partnerships with municipal governments and regional organizations have strengthened, and the Chamber has become a key driver of community engagement and economic activity.

My leadership approach centers on connection—bringing together businesses, community organizations, and local government to collaborate in ways that strengthen our region. Through innovative programming, strategic partnerships, and strong member engagement, the Chamber has become a trusted advocate and connector for businesses across our area.

I strongly believe Chambers of Commerce play a vital role in supporting small businesses, advocating for safe and vibrant communities, and creating opportunities that allow local economies to thrive.

Chamber Management & Operations

The Carman & Community Chamber of Commerce represents approximately **210 businesses and organizations** across the Town of Carman and surrounding communities including the RM of Dufferin, Roland, Elm Creek, Sperling, Homewood, and Roseisle.

As a rural Chamber serving a broad geographic region, we play an important role in connecting businesses, supporting economic development, and strengthening the vitality of our community.

The Chamber operates with a **lean structure consisting of one ¾-time Executive Director supported by a volunteer Board of Directors** made up of local business leaders. Despite limited staffing resources, we deliver a wide range of programs and services, including:

- Business networking events such as luncheons, coffee chats, and mixers
- Business promotion through social media, newsletters, and marketing initiatives
- Community events designed to drive traffic to local businesses
- Professional development workshops and training opportunities
- Advocacy on behalf of the local business community

A key strength of our Chamber is the **strong partnerships we have built with organizations such as Community Futures Heartland, the Town of Carman, the RM of Dufferin, local schools, and community groups**. These partnerships allow us to deliver impactful initiatives while maximizing limited resources.

Operating a rural Chamber presents challenges, but through collaboration, strong volunteer leadership, and creative programming, our organization has continued to grow and remain highly active within our region.

Leadership, Governance & Volunteer Development

With limited staffing resources, strong collaboration between staff and volunteer leadership is essential.

I work closely with our Board of Directors to ensure the Chamber remains focused, transparent, and aligned with its mission of supporting local businesses and strengthening our economy. I prioritize clear communication through structured agendas, detailed reports, and background materials that allow board members to make informed decisions.

A key strength I bring to the role is a strong level of organization and structure. I have implemented clear communication systems and processes that ensure our members and board receive relevant, high-quality information in a timely manner without overwhelming them. Maintaining the right balance between keeping members informed and respecting the demands on their time is something I take seriously, and this structured approach has helped strengthen member engagement and trust in the Chamber.

Creating a positive and collaborative volunteer culture is also important. I work to ensure board members feel informed, valued, and confident in their governance role. By supporting open discussion and encouraging active participation, I help foster an environment where volunteers feel motivated to contribute their time and expertise.

Through this approach, our volunteer board remains highly engaged and plays an active role in guiding the Chamber's direction and initiatives.

Financial Sustainability

Ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of the Chamber has been a key focus of my leadership.

The Chamber generates revenue through **membership dues, sponsorships, events, partnerships, and grant-funded initiatives**. I have worked to strengthen relationships with sponsors and community partners to expand programming while maintaining financial stability.

Events and sponsorship opportunities are carefully structured to provide value to businesses while supporting the Chamber's operations. This approach has resulted in increased participation and stronger financial support from local partners.

Working with our Board, we have also reviewed our membership structure and implemented modest membership fee adjustments to ensure the Chamber can continue delivering valuable programming, advocacy, and business services while remaining financially sustainable.

Membership Retention, Engagement & Growth

During my time as Executive Director, membership in the Carman & Community Chamber of Commerce has grown from **127 to 217 members**.

This growth reflects a strong focus on relationship-building, community engagement, and ensuring that businesses see clear value in Chamber membership.

In recent years, membership numbers have stabilized as we have successfully engaged most businesses within our immediate community. Our focus has now expanded toward **recruiting regional businesses that serve our community**, strengthening connections across our local economy.

Member engagement is supported through consistent communication and promotion opportunities. Initiatives such as our weekly **“Did You Know Friday”** email, active social media platforms, networking events, and community campaigns provide members with valuable visibility and opportunities to connect with customers.

Personal outreach also plays a key role in retention. I prioritize building relationships with members to ensure they feel supported and understand the value of their Chamber membership.

Innovative Programs & Services

Innovation has been central to the Chamber’s growth and impact.

Over the past several years, we have developed a number of signature initiatives that drive economic activity while strengthening community engagement.

Chamber Golf Tournament

One of our largest networking events, welcoming over 140 golfers and 20–30 sponsors annually.

Burger Week & Poutine Week

Week-long promotions encouraging residents and visitors to support local restaurants, typically involving 8–10 participating establishments.

World River Day

A community celebration of the Boyne River held in partnership with the Boyne River Keepers, featuring a pirate-themed kayak poker derby and drawing visitors into the downtown business district.

Holiday Hoopla & “Keep the Cheer Here”

A major holiday shopping initiative that has grown significantly and is now widely considered one of the busiest retail days of the year for many local businesses.

Surviving February Small Business Challenge

A creative program designed to support retailers during the slow winter months. The initiative generates over \$5,000 in gift card purchases annually, providing direct support to local storefront businesses.

Business Awards Celebration

An annual event recognizing outstanding businesses and community leaders.

Chamber Bucks Program

A popular local gift certificate program that circulates approximately \$40,000 annually back into Chamber member businesses, encouraging residents and organizations to keep spending within the community.

Emerging Initiatives

Chamber Business Incubator Project

The Chamber is currently leading the development of a Business Incubator Project, designed to support start-up and early-stage businesses by providing access to affordable office space and business support. This initiative is being developed in collaboration with the Town of Carman and the RM of Dufferin, and represents an innovative approach to supporting entrepreneurship and economic growth in our region.

Economic Development Walking Tour

In partnership with Community Futures Heartland, the Town of Carman, and the RM of Dufferin, the Chamber is launching an Economic Development Walking Tour. This initiative will engage directly with businesses and gather feedback to develop a community-wide SWOT analysis of our local business environment.

Local Economic Development Tour

Inspired by the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce model, this tour will provide members with the opportunity to visit local businesses and gain a deeper understanding of the industries operating within our region.

Community Leadership

Community involvement is an important part of my role as Executive Director.

I have been actively involved in the **Clearwater Memorial Playground Project**, a community-led initiative to build an inclusive memorial playground in Carman.

I also volunteer with the **Carman & District Christmas Cheer Board**, which provides holiday hampers to families in need. Whenever possible, we source items locally to support both families and local retailers.

Additional community involvement includes:

- Carman Minor Hockey volunteer support
- Organizing the **Carman Fair Parade** through the Dufferin Agricultural Society
- Partnering with the **Boyne River Keepers** to organize World River Day
- Collaborating with **Carman Collegiate and Carman Wellness Connections** to organize the Carman Collegiate Career Fair
- Serving on the **Carman Elementary School Parent Advisory Council**
- Acting as the **Community Leader for the Missoula Children's Theatre program**

These initiatives help strengthen connections between businesses, families, and community organizations.

Policy & Advocacy

Advocating for the needs of local businesses is a core responsibility of the Chamber.

I work closely with the **Town of Carman and the RM of Dufferin** to ensure the perspectives of local businesses are represented in municipal discussions and economic development initiatives.

In response to rising concerns about crime affecting local businesses, I helped establish a **Community Business Safety Committee** in collaboration with the Town, the RM, and the RCMP. This committee provides a forum for businesses, municipal leaders, and law enforcement to work together to address safety concerns and improve communication.

I have also advocated for **increased RCMP presence in the region** to help address property crime and support the safety of our business community.

Engagement within the Chamber Network

I remain actively engaged within the broader Chamber network.

I currently serve as a **Board Member of the Chamber of Commerce Executives of Manitoba (CCEM)** and participate on the **CCEM Conference Planning Committee**, helping organize professional development opportunities for Chamber leaders across the province.

I also regularly attend **Manitoba Chambers of Commerce events and meetings**, allowing me to bring new ideas and best practices back to our Chamber.

Awards & Recognition

In **2021**, I was honoured to receive the **Community Builder Award** from the Carman & Community Chamber of Commerce. This recognition came through a nomination from a Chamber member and acknowledged my efforts to support local businesses, strengthen partnerships, and contribute to initiatives that improve our community.

At its core, the work of a Chamber of Commerce is about people—supporting entrepreneurs, building relationships, and creating opportunities that strengthen our communities.

It has been an honour to serve the Carman & Community Chamber of Commerce. I remain deeply committed to supporting our business community and continuing to build partnerships that help our region grow and thrive.