

CCEM Executive of the Year 2026 Submission

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Portage la Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce

Chamber Management & Operations

The Portage la Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce represents a diverse and engaged membership of 207 active businesses and plays a key role in supporting regional economic growth. Our Chamber operates with myself as the sole staff, supported by a dedicated Board of 8–12 volunteer directors, requiring a strategic and collaborative approach to governance and operations.

Core programs and services include networking opportunities (luncheons, Business After Hours events, and election candidate forums), weekly newsletter featuring member spotlights, community events, and resources/training opportunities for businesses. These initiatives ensure consistent engagement and visibility for members.

We undertake strategic planning every three years, with Board members actively engaged through committee structures aligned with each pillar of the organization’s mandate (Events, Advocacy and Membership). Delegated responsibilities with direction from the ED ensure accountability, support governance best practices, and enable focused progress on strategic priorities.

Operational improvements have been a key focus during my time. Over the past two years, more than 30 inactive or non-paying members were removed, and outstanding dues from accounts delinquent for over three years were successfully collected. This work has strengthened the integrity and sustainability of our membership base.

Financial performance has significantly improved, closing our most recent fiscal year at three times the profit of previous years- profit driven by strategic event growth, strengthened sponsorships, and disciplined financial management. I have also been able to offer free programming for our members – including a holiday Women in Business mixer, Coffee with Candidates event, and Breakfast with the MP, to continue to bring value and exclusivity to our membership.

Our Chamber is also an active and instrumental partner in local economic development through leadership in the Business Walks program, an initiative focused on business retention and expansion, entering its third year this fall. This annual engagement with local businesses gathers feedback, which is then compiled into a comprehensive report identifying strengths, weaknesses,

opportunities, and threats, directly informing advocacy, programming, and economic development strategies.

One of my biggest goals when I assumed this role nearly three years ago was to firmly cement the Chamber as the 'go-to' for all things business. I wanted to reposition ourselves as the ultimate Portage Champion, doing everything I could do ensure our region remains the best place to work, live and play. I can confidently say the number of new partnerships we have forged, higher attendance, increased sponsorship dollars and membership retention reflects how far we have come in a matter of years.

Membership Retention, Engagement & Growth

Over the past two years, we have strengthened both membership engagement and accountability, maintaining a base of 207 active and fully paid members.

Retention efforts have focused on consistent communication, relationship-building, and demonstrating value through high-quality programming and advocacy. Members are regularly engaged through events, direct outreach, and enhanced communications, ensuring they remain connected and informed.

As part of a targeted retention strategy, our Advocacy Committee routinely invites small groups of 5–8 members to participate in roundtable discussions focused specifically on advocacy priorities. These sessions provide valuable insight into the challenges and opportunities facing local businesses, while reinforcing our role as a responsive and member-driven organization. Feedback from these discussions has directly informed advocacy priorities and programming decisions.

We experienced a small dip in renewals last winter, when the threat of tariffs and increased economic turmoil threatened our country. Many of our sole proprietor businesses expressed concern over fiscal commitments, and we were able to work with some of them on a month to month membership plan to ease their concerns.

We increased our dues by 5% in 2024, which had not been done for over 5 years before my tenure. I have since implemented a fee increase structure which will increase membership dues 2% every other year, and we are now working to offer monthly plans with automatic payment processing.

Digital engagement has increased significantly, with social media reach growing from fewer than 100 views per post to an average of 5,000 views per post, greatly expanding our ability to promote members, events, and initiatives.

Recruitment efforts have focused on showcasing the Chamber as an essential partner in business success. By highlighting member achievements, offering meaningful networking opportunities, and maintaining a strong community presence, we continue to attract new members while strengthening retention. I also worked with our local radio and online news outlet to manufacture a membership incentive, offering a significant advertising credit to all new Chamber members.

Delivering Innovative Programs and Services

Innovation has been a key driver in enhancing our Chamber's impact and relevance within the business community.

Signature events such as our Annual Golf Tournament and Best Business Awards have experienced substantial growth, with both attendance and fundraising revenue doubling under my leadership. The Best Business Awards program was further enhanced through the introduction of new award categories and an online nomination system, improving accessibility and ensuring broader representation across all sectors of the business community. I introduced the People's Choice Award, which was determined by online vote from the public. This was developed in response to feedback from our members.

In 2024 I introduced the Chamber Subscription Box, an annual event which centered around a basket of Chamber Member exclusive offerings, services and products. Businesses could apply to be featured in the box, with items ranging from locally produced saskatoon syrup, to vitamin D – each box complete with an exclusive 'Crescent Lake Sunset' candle. This program had a waitlist of businesses wanting to be featured, and we sold out 100 boxes in a matter of days, with a fundraising profit of just over six thousand dollars.

In 2025 I collaborated with the local school division to host our first ever Career Fair. With major employers in town opening new locations (McDonald's), others with plans for expansion, we are consistently hearing a need for youth employment. This was a wildly successful endeavour, selling out 30 booths, with each business in attendance seeing over a thousand students during the day. This event opened to the public as well in the evening, giving job seekers face time with employers.

A major addition to programming is the State of the Province Luncheon, developed in partnership with the Province of Manitoba. This event features the Premier delivering the State of the Province address, followed by a member-driven Q&A session. Participation from Cabinet Ministers, MLAs, and the business community has been strong, with attendance doubling from its inaugural year.

Additional programming developed through strategic partnerships under my leadership include:

- Ag Appreciation Night & Awards
- International Women's Day Luncheon
- Annual Santa Parade of Lights
- Pink Friday
- Entrepreneur Challenge (youth)

These initiatives have expanded the Chamber's reach, strengthened partnerships, and created new opportunities for engagement and economic development.

Current Event Overview:

- Best Business Awards
 - 8 sponsors
 - 208 attendees
 - 2 partners
- Santa Parade of Lights
 - 1 sponsor
 - 87 floats entered
 - 2 partners
- State of the Province luncheon
 - 3 sponsors
 - 196 attendees
- Agriculture Appreciation Night
 - 4 sponsors
 - 130 attendees
 - 1 partner
- International Women's Day
 - 5 sponsors
 - 250 attendees
 - 3 partners
- Annual Chamber Golf Tournament
 - 20 sponsors
 - 80 attendees
- State of the District Luncheon
 - 1 sponsor
 - 90 attendees
- Pink Friday
 - 25 businesses involved
- Entrepreneur Challenge
 - 1 sponsor

- 100 attendees
- 7 partners
- Career Fair
 - 1 partner
 - 30 sponsors
 - 1500 attendees

Community Leadership

Community leadership is demonstrated through active advocacy, collaboration, and participation in initiatives that support long-term economic and social development. Members of the Advocacy Committee and I meet monthly with our City Council & Administration, and quarterly with the RM of Portage la Prairie Reeve & Administration, MLA Jeff Bereza and MP Branden Leslie.

At the national level, advocacy efforts have included contributing to policy discussions on renewable aviation fuel and bail reform, ensuring local business perspectives are represented in broader conversations.

At the municipal level, we successfully advocated for increased transparency in the use of accommodation tax revenues, supporting efforts to allocate funds toward tourism and economic development initiatives. During the massive undertaking of the Saskatchewan Avenue resurfacing project, which forced many businesses to constantly shut down due to no water, have their storefronts inaccessible, lose parking, and close off streets and intersections – we pushed for intentional and clear communication, facilitating weekly updates from the contractor to our Chamber members.

Ongoing advocacy work includes:

- Collaborating with the Province to improve infrastructure near the new hospital, including roadway enhancements and active transportation considerations for the Tupper Street overpass
- Advocating for enhancements and new pathways for active transportation – particularly pushing for a pedestrian/cyclist crossing along the railine
- Supporting improvements to Highway 1A west service roads in commercial areas
- Working with the RM to develop a business storefront improvement grant and enhanced security initiatives
- Advocating for strong vehicle for hire bylaws – wherein both safety and availability directly affect workforce

- Writing letters of support for the RM's Oakville development project
- Sitting on a provincial MDC Working Group to ensure existing infrastructure and land at the former Manitoba Developmental Centre is utilized in a functional and meaningful manner
- Working with local RCMP to advocate for depot renovations, which contribute to recruitment efforts

In addition to advocacy work, I have demonstrated leadership through direct community involvement. I previously served as Chair of the Public Art Committee, where I led the development of the largest public art installation in the region. This project was managed from initial concept through to completion, including budget development, planning, site selection, and public presentation. The initiative has contributed to community identity, placemaking, and reconciliation with regional Indigenous partners.

I also actively contribute to several community initiatives, including:

- Community Well-Being and Safety Steering Committee
- Portage Economic Response Team
- Childcare Working Group
- Chair, Local Immigration Partnership Committee
- Portage Tourism Committee

These roles reflect a strong commitment to collaboration, economic development, and community well-being.

Weblinks:

https://www.thegraphicleader.com/news/local-news/chamber-says-rural-focus-crucial-for-manitoba-budget-success/article_b828cb1a-e2f8-4662-b622-be39b07d7922.html

https://www.thegraphicleader.com/news/local-news/portage-chamber-discusses-priorities-amid-manitoba-budget/article_2a1a5aba-fe3b-469f-b37a-d0140b27eb2e.html

https://www.thegraphicleader.com/sports/local-sports/portage-la-prairie-farmers-learn-about-bio-genetics/article_6c5a7ce6-3b16-42fa-a4a2-e18aeb5d713a.html

https://www.thegraphicleader.com/news/local-news/portage-chamber-concerned-about-city-budget-tax-hike/article_89deeea8-f365-400f-ade2-1cc62d33f7c9.html

<https://portageonline.com/articles/community-event-encourages-women-to-lead-connect-and-recharge>

<https://portageonline.com/articles/portage-women-reflect-on-leadership-for-international-womens-day>

<https://portageonline.com/articles/portages-restaurant-scene-growing-despite-national-challenges>

<https://portageonline.com/articles/portage-chamber-plans-growth-recognition-and-new-events-for-2026>

<https://portageonline.com/articles/portage-la-prairie-chamber-manitoba-trade-office-a-welcome-move-for-local-industry>

<https://portageonline.com/articles/chamber-of-commerce-hosts-mp-branden-leslie-for-breakfast-meeting>

<https://portageonline.com/articles/portage-offers-15k-for-business-storefront-improvements>

Network Engagement

I am actively engaged in the broader Chamber network, contributing to collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and the advancement of Chambers across Manitoba.

This includes participation with the Chamber Executives of Manitoba (CEM) and ongoing engagement with peers across the province. Through these connections, I contribute to strengthening the effectiveness and impact of the Chamber network while continuously learning and applying best practices within my own organization. I consistently contribute to network calls and webinars, assisted in planning this year's CEM conference, and attend in person workshops where permitted. As a founding member of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, I attend the annual conference, participate in the Pan-Canadian Forum and actively contribute on behalf of my region.

I am currently enrolled in the ACE program for April 1 cohort. In late 2025, I also reached out to connect with a volunteer-led Chamber, in MacGregor, to share resources, offer supports and partnership on all our events to ease the burden and lack of capacity for their leadership and members.