History was made on October 17 when the Greater Westerly-Pawcatuck Area Chamber of Commerce (GWPACC) announced it has changed its name to the Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce (OCCC) and changed its logo. The surprise name change took place in conjunction with The Chamber’s 90th anniversary, and was announced during the celebration event attended by over 250. Cheers and applause roared through the tent as a show of support from the regional businesses in attendance. Angela Thoman, President of the Board of Directors said, “This new name more accurately reflects the geography of our membership and our two-state regional business advocacy efforts. The Chamber Board felt it was important to include the word “community” in our name, as this particular organization is dedicated to fostering a robust business environment but equally community-focused in spirit and action. We are The Chamber that puts “Community” first, and now it shows in our name” added Thoman. There are approximately 3,000 chambers of commerce in the United States. OCCC becomes the 23rd chamber with the word “community” in its name, and the only chamber of Commerce in CT, RI or MA that has “community” in its name. The name change and new logo development follow extensive planning and discussion that culminated at the annual Board of Directors Retreat in February. The process included focus group discussions about our mission and strategic vision, and a community survey which clearly showed the old name was too cumbersome. A group meeting of Past Presidents of The Chamber also took place as part of the process. Feedback solicited helped select a name that would best describe the next century of activity for the 90 year-old organization. The process culminated with a historic and unanimous vote of the Board of Directors on September 24th. The phrase “Ocean Community” was originally used locally when the Westerly-Pawcatuck YMCA changed its name to the Ocean Community YMCA on November 2, 2005. The service area of The OCCC closely mirrors that of the Ocean Community YMCA with members in Westerly, Richmond, Hopkinton, Charlestown and Stonington. The Ocean Community YMCA gave their enthusiastic endorsement of our new name. Additionally, the 501c3 charitable arm of The Chamber has been changed from The Greater Westerly Chamber Foundation to Ocean Community Foundation. “It’s actually going to help brand the area having an additional high-profile organization operating in the region and using the same term,” said Chamber Executive Lisa Konicki. The trend to be more encompassing with a consistent regional name is growing in the Westerly community. The Ocean Community Christian Church at 120 Main Street in Westerly, registered their name on December 17, 2009 and The United Theatre, located in downtown also registered with the RI Secretary of State as “The Ocean Community United Theatre” on May 2, 2013. OCCC will continue to execute programming that is responsive to the needs of small businesses, while producing large scale community events and spearheading tourism marketing initiatives. The name change and new logo underscores, above all, our intent to remain steadfastly committed to the community while keenly focused on advancing business interests. The new logo design was created to be more contemporary and easier to read, while still conveying an oceanic theme. The anchor has long been recognized as a symbol of hope and steadfastness. It represents The Chamber’s intent to keep itself grounded in the community, with steadfast focus on its mission. “Like an anchor, our chamber has been solid, sure and stable during challenging economic times and rough waters resulting from acts of nature. “said Angela Thoman of Paddy’s Beach Club, one of 29 businesses seriously damaged by Superstorm Sandy in 2012. The new website address is oceanchamber.org.
NEW MEMBERS

Anderson Energy Solutions, LLC
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860-514-8610
Contact: Robert Anderson

Anderson Energy Solutions, LLC is an energy broker serving commercial and non-profit clients in Connecticut and Rhode Island. We provide our customers with fixed rate natural gas and electricity contracts that allow them to better manage their costs going forward. Our pricing is superior, and our customer service is unparalleled. We also offer block and index products to those customers who wish to take advantage of market fluctuations while protecting themselves during periods of predicted pricing increases. We love to serve non-profits because every dollar we save them goes back to accomplishing their mission. Having strong non-profits in our community allows all our residents to reach their full potential.

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Guidici Financial Group, LLC.
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Contact: Tom Guidici

Tom has over 12 years of working with clients in the financial and insurance industry. Tom believes that honesty, integrity and the truth are more important than anything. Tom is proud to be an approved Member of the National Ethics Association. The NEA is an organization of financial professionals who have successfully passed a comprehensive series of background checks and have agreed to maintain NEA membership standards. When Tom established Guidici Financial Group, he set out with an objective to help clients eliminate as much confusion as possible in planning for their financial future. Tom is very diligent in helping his customers achieve their long term financial objective by taking a “Safety First” approach. Tom believes everyone should have someone with honesty, integrity and a commitment to help make things simpler and less complicated. Tom leads a very active lifestyle. When not at work, you can find him enjoying the great outdoors, coaching youth soccer, and spending time with his wife and three children.

CHAMBER NEWS

RI Welcome Center Update

The RI Welcome Center moved one giant step forward. The Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce (OCCC) received communication from Lydia Teixeira at Hi-Tech Profiles in Hopkinton who confirmed that they had a productive meeting with the State and "believe it will all work out." Her comments were welcome news given previous concerns that the welcome center could impede their company plans to expand its world class manufacturing business, creating more high-paying jobs. OCCC stands firmly behind Hi-Tech Profiles and puts job creation at the forefront of any discussions. Given that their issues have been resolved, the next hurdle is for the state to satisfy the many concerns of the Town of Hopkinton whom, surprisingly, had also not been consulted during the process to develop these plans. While The Chamber has long supported the idea to establish a welcome center at exit 1, prior to the point at which cars pass the Westerly exit, we believe it is critical that plans proceed if, and only if, the Hopkinton Town leaders are engaged and supportive of the process. We will keep you updated as this project moves forward.

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90th Anniversary Continued...

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5 incredible ladies were recognized for excelling in their professions and making incredible contributions to the community. Each gives generously of their time to improve the quality of life in our community. Each has also made it a priority to help other women achieve leadership roles. We thank Geraldine Cunningham Associates Financial Advisors for their continued generous support of this event. Without Gerry’s leadership and commitment to women in leadership, it would not be possible to continue this wonderful program.
$150,000 Grant Application Submitted

Westerly Regional Real Jobs Partnership - It was nail biter, but we made it with 2 minutes to spare. On October 23rd, representatives of the WRRIP worked frantically in the final hours to complete the laborious grant application of the Department of Labor & Training. After nearly 6 hours of copying, collating, and packaging 8 copies of the 162 page grant application, the team found themselves racing to Warwick to meet the deadline. With just two minutes to spare, we made the deadline and submitted our grant. We were #28 of the 29 grant applications submitted but we feel confident we will be ranked number #1 in the eyes of those judging this competitive program. This is a highly competitive process and one of the reasons we worked right up until the last second was that we continued to recruit new business partners to support our initiative and strengthen our application, right up until the morning the application as due. Our goal was to have the highest number of employer partners of any community that applied, and we achieved that goal. A cross section of industries including banking, manufacturing, hospitality, service and others have committed to work with us. Area employers and reps of the Westerly Regional Real Jobs Partnership worked for months to prepare the components of this first-ever regional workforce development grant for our community. The two- part application outlines a training program that will address soft skills and digital literacy over a 6 week period for two classes of 30 adults. Additionally, the application includes a hard core, soft skills Biz Camp that will be offered to 40 high school students during February and April vacation. Local employers have agreed to partner as panelists, instructors, give guidance on resume development and also mock interviews. Together, we are committed to developing a better workforce and helping the businesses in our community fill vital job openings with qualified, skilled employees. On November 16, the DLT will announce the winners of the grants and until then, we wait with great anticipation.

The Chamber would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all of the businesses who participated in the survey (138), the over 225 students who also participated, and most of all, the employer partners who participated in focus group discussions and served on the team to develop the curriculum. The process has been an example of collaboration at its finest, and we are truly grateful to have strengthened relationships with all involved.

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Surveillance Cameras for Downtown Westerly

In September, the Ocean Community Chamber Foundation put forth a challenge to the community – donate funds to help Westerly Police place video cameras in downtown and we will match your donation, dollar-for-dollar up to $3,000. This goal was set with the deadline of October 31. We are delighted to report that the goal was met and we have received pledges with a combined total of $3,000 from the following:

- 84 Tavern on Canal, Downtown Business Association
- Andrea Resort
- Studio 4 Yoga
- Perks & Corks
- Malted Barley
- Zoe & Co.
- And a few others who don’t wish to be identified.

As a result of their combined generosity, the Ocean Community Chamber Foundation will issue a check for $6,000 total to the Westerly Police once all funds have been received from the parties above. This is yet another example of a wonderful private/public partnership that yields great results for our community.

BUY A SUBARU AND THE CHAMBER FOUNDATION BENEFITS!


Subaru will donate $250 for every Subaru vehicle sold or leased from Subaru during this time period. Valenti Subaru of Westerly selected The Greater Westerly Chamber Foundation as their local charity that stands to benefit from some of these funds. Subaru will make the donation to the GWCF in a lump sum payment by March 1, 2016. The Greater Westerly Chamber Foundation is the charitable, 501c3 arm of the Chamber of Commerce. The GWCF has recently made donations to the summer concert series in Donahue Park, video cameras for the Stonington Police (we are currently working on the same campaign for the Westerly Police) and a donation to the Future Business Leaders of America. If you are considering a new car purchase please consider the Subaru line of vehicles offered by Valenti Subaru of Westerly. Your purchase could make a big difference in supporting community projects. Thank you!
Chamber Defends the Free Enterprise System

Recently, there was an attempt to sway the town council to reject a zoning change application that would allow a national chain store to be developed near the 78/1 intersection. This commercial corridor is ideally suited for development, though it does have some very significant challenges in regards to the proximity to the airport. The Chamber advocates for SMALL business and promotes the unique characteristics of our town. We do not want to become Warwick or Groton.

With that in mind you may wonder “why did the Chamber speak in favor of this zone change?”

1. It downgraded the intensity allowed at the site. 2. It met town requirements for approval. 3. It was recommended favorably by the Planning Board. There are many legitimate reasons to oppose development projects: traffic, lighting, environmental impact, public safety, etc. Westerly is an incredible community and The Chamber wants to keep it that way. Our mix of wonderful small businesses and our vibrant downtown are a major part of what distinguishes us from other communities that are over developed and have no "sense of place". We work tirelessly to promote those small businesses, create special events for downtown, develop marketing programs to encourage patronage and promote tourism that benefits these businesses. The Chamber cannot, however, oppose a project on the basis that we don’t want competition for a particular industry. It’s unconstitutional for the town to deny that right if all laws are followed and permits obtained. The Planning Board is the venue to bring forth all concerns, studies and opposition to commercial development. No zone change or special use project should EVER be approved without thorough review or even vigorous debate on the issues. We encourage residents to engage in the process and voice their concerns. We have tremendous respect for differing views and may even share in opposition on some issues- but never on the issue of free enterprise. When Two Little Fish set up in Misquamicut, they were not denied the opportunity out of fear they would impact Seafood Haven (two outstanding restaurants). They both thrive. When Malted Barley was opened by a former Perks and Corks employee, they were not denied an opportunity. Both businesses thrive today and serve to make the downtown night life even more attractive. Perks has since doubled their size! Our own Town Council president was not denied the right to move his auto parts store from Canal St to a parcel across from Auto Zone because it would constitute competition. It’s not the Town’s role to determine winners and losers. When everyone engages in the process, and debate, Westerly wins.