

BUSINESS BRIEF

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2026



OWATONNA
AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

68 Member Businesses Share Struggles, Positives with Board & Ambassadors

Over the last 12 months, Chamber Board of Directors and Ambassadors have been conducting personal visits with Chamber members of all types, 68 visits to be exact.

The data from these visits are critical in guiding the direction of the organization to address the most pressing issues facing the business community. Thank you to the 16 Board members and 19 Ambassadors who conducted the visits and to each member who said 'yes' to talking with us.

What Business Leaders Are Watching in 2026

As 2026 approaches, OACCT members continue to identify workforce availability as their top concern, with staffing shortages—especially in healthcare, dental, skilled trades, and service sectors—impacting day-to-day operations and growth.

Business leaders are also closely watching state legislation, paid family leave implementation, and rising property taxes, underscoring the need for clear, practical policy guidance. Health insurance costs and benefit administration remain a challenge for employers of all sizes, while retailers and restaurants are focused on customer demand, foot traffic, and effective marketing.

Housing availability and affordability are increasingly recognized as a factor in workforce attraction and retention.

The Chamber Board of Directors is taking this feedback and inserting it as focus areas in the strategic plan. This includes strengthening the talent pipeline efforts, providing regular policy briefings and advocacy support, offering educational resources and enhancing marketing efforts. All to ensure members are informed, connected and positioned for success in 2026.

Top Themes (Challenges & Issues)		
	Theme	Mentions
1	Workforce/Staffing	44
2	Regulation/Legislation	25
3	Taxes/Property Tax	17
4	Health Insurance/Benefits	14
5	Customers/Foot Traffic	7



What Members Say They Value

OACCT members made it clear which programs matter most. Networking events topped the list, followed by communication efforts, marketing and advocacy efforts, and tourism initiatives. Members also highlighted gift certificates and sponsorship opportunities. Programs like Downtown Thursday and Business After Hours provide valued engagement. Young Professionals and Public Policy committees also show strong engagement, supported through on-ramp sessions to welcome and guide new members.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT Update

Brad Meier, President/CEO

How Businesses Want the Chamber to Help



Advocacy & Legislative Support

Guidance on workforce and tax issues to keep businesses informed and prepared.

Tourism Promotion

Boosting hospitality and retail traffic through seasonal campaigns and visitor engagement.

Communication & Marketing Support

Helping businesses reach customers effectively with tools, tips, and visibility.

Networking Opportunities

Connections and collaboration that drive growth and strengthen the local business community.

State Business Priorities for Legislative Session

The Minnesota legislative session starts on February 17th, but work is being drafted already for the short session. The Owatonna Chamber Board of Directors on the recommendation of the public policy committee approved support for the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce Federation priorities. Three business priorities include: Taxes-improving competitiveness; Workplace Mandates-employer focused flexibility; and Environment-balance regulations with protections.

The Owatonna Chamber looks forward to working with our representatives to support a positive climate for business.

Owatonna Development Projects to Watch in 2026

Ascend South: The younger sibling to the first Ascend project locating on Oak Avenue along the Straight River will take shape in 2026. Initial approvals have taken place with the City of Owatonna for the building that will span from Vine Street to the Firestone building. The building will be 5 floors including 42 lower-level parking stalls, 3,000 sq ft of retail space, 17,000 sq ft of office space, and 57 residential apartments. Plans are for demolition of the existing buildings in the spring and construction immediately following.

Mineral Springs Estates: new residential development on Owatonna's northeast side near the River Springs Water Park, designed to bring hundreds of diverse housing units (flats, townhomes, single-family) to address the city's housing shortage, offering modern living with a mix of ownership and rental options, built in phases to expand Owatonna's housing stock and amenities. This project has been on and off over the last couple years. We expect plans to move forward in 2026.

Project Location



Main Street Road Reconstruction: The Main Street Reconstruction is a major project by Steele County & Owatonna to upgrade the corridor from Oak Ave to Elm Ave, focusing on new pavement, sidewalks, and critical underground utilities, plus traffic signal updates, with construction in 2026.

Thank You to Three Outgoing Board Members

The Chamber appreciates the insight and direction from our member businesses who serve on the board. Thank you to Syd Briggs, Mike Herman and Scott Mohs for serving on the Chamber Board of Directors.



Syd Briggs
Steele-Waseca
Cooperative Electric



Mike Herman
Culligan ULTRAPURE



Scott Mohs
Mohs Contracting Inc.

Tribute to Lori Lair

Lori Lair lost her battle with cancer September 7, 2025. A bright light for the community, Lori was most recently serving on the Chamber Board of Directors initially as a representative of Carroll Seating company and then as an individual member. Lori served many years as a volunteer on the Golf and Annual Dinner committees and continued serving until her death. Her term started in 2024 and she brought ideas, energy and support to the organization. Outside the Chamber, Lori was positive energy to anyone she encountered. Her infectious smile was impossible to ignore. A week and a half before her death, Board Chair Deb Gillard and Incoming Chair Oscar Mazariego presented Lori with the Chamber's Extra Mile Award in recognition of her service to the Chamber Board, but more importantly for her service to the community.



Lori Lair

Welcome New Board Members

After the Annual Dinner, three new board members will start their 3-year term on the Chamber Board of Directors. Thank you for service!



Stacy Hanson
Grapeful Wine Bar



Steve Glynn
Mohs Contracting, Inc.



Brett Doreck
Culligan ULTRAPURE



OWATONNA
AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2026

Oscar Mazariego, Chair
American Family Insurance – Oscar Mazariego Agency

Deb Gillard, Past Chair
RE/MAX Venture

Shannon Cliff, Vice Chair
Mayo Clinic Health System-
Owatonna

Rylee Muhr, Treasurer
West Bank
(Young Professional Chair)

Kelly Boomgarden, At-Large
Country Inn & Suites-Owatonna

Bonnie Cole
Cole's Electric & Torey's
Restaurant & Bar

Brett Doreck
Culligan ULTRAPURE

Steve Glynn
Mohs Contracting, Inc.

Stacy Hanson
Grapeful Wine Bar

Matthew Hughes
Kowz & KRUE Radio

Cole Johnson
Haute & Company, LLC

Sara McKay
Owatonna Foundation, Inc.

Doug Meier
Christian Bros. Cabinets

Sammy Miranda
Lakeside Foods

Annie Priebe
Federated Insurance

Christy Tryhus
Riverland Community College

TOURISM update

Glenda Smith, Director of Conventions and Tourism



Building Owatonna's Reputation as a Destination Together

Owatonna's reputation as a premier destination for visitors is built on the strength of its local connections and the collaborative spirit of our business community. These partnerships are the invisible engine behind successful events that draw thousands to our city, ranging from the vintage elegance of the Model T Ford Club International Tour to the empowering atmosphere of the Women's Barbell Classic, and a destination for upscale home based businesses to share their talents at Rustic Mamas twice each year.

When local organizations team up, they create a seamless experience for visitors—whether it's providing top-tier facilities at Owatonna High School or coordinating the logistics between city, county and event organizers for the legendary Corky's Early Bird Softball Tournament, which has supported local youth scholarships for decades. Pair that with our rich history of the State School Orphanage, Village of Yesteryear, and architectural gem of National Farmers Bank, Owatonna doesn't just provide a venue; it provides a community-wide welcome that turns first-time visitors into lifelong fans of our city.

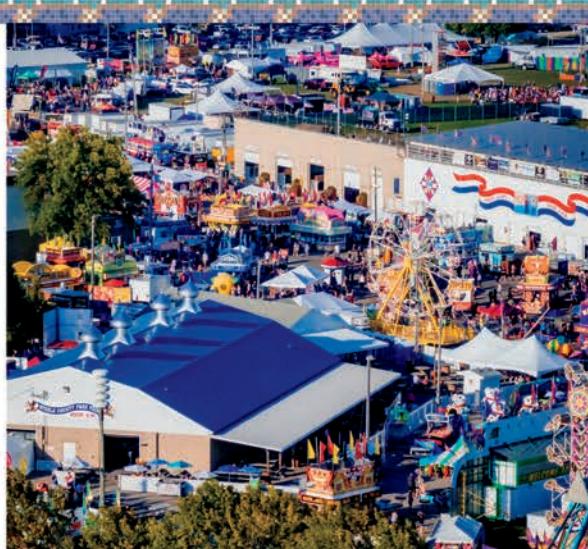
The economic impact of these gatherings is staggering, exemplified by the Steele County Free Fair, the largest free fair in Minnesota, which transforms our city into a regional hub of commerce and entertainment every August. Looking ahead, the arrival of the 2026 Minnesota State USBC Open Tournament to Sparetime Entertainment—spanning 14 weeks—represents a massive opportunity for our hotels, restaurants, and retailers to showcase Owatonna's hospitality on a grand scale. This momentum invites a compelling challenge for every resident and business owner: consider your own professional and social networks, who do you know, and how can the chamber help facilitate, and assist you with the opportunity to help host your next event?

It starts with a question, a connection, and a first step to invite. Let's work together in making Owatonna a premier destination!

Who do you know in a regional association, a sports league, or a hobbyist group that is looking for their next host city?

By leveraging your personal connections and partnering with local resources, you can help secure the next major event that will drive Owatonna's economic prosperity for years to come.

Contact Glenda Smith at gsmith@owatonna.org for any leads on upcoming and new events!





Life Fitness / Hammer Strength... Inspiring the World to Work Out



Life Fitness/Hammer Strength has been inspiring the world to work out for more than 55 years. Every day, exercisers in more than 150 countries log in 1+ million workouts on the company's connected fitness equipment – proving daily that Life Fitness/Hammer Strength is the world's workout partner of choice. The company manufactures and sells strength and cardiovascular equipment through its iconic Life Fitness and Hammer Strength brands.

The Owatonna facility is the lead production facility for the company. In 2025, more than 80,000 pieces of equipment was produced onsite - including plate load strength units, treadmills, elliptical cross-trainers, Arc trainers, upright and recumbent cycles and more. **In fact, there's enough steel tubing cut here to stretch from Owatonna to Texas on an annual basis!**

The more than 400 member local team proudly enjoys an average tenure of more than 10 years. Onsite production roles include machinists, welders, robot operators, powdercoaters, assemblers, material handlers and shippers. The team loves what they do, and they care deeply about doing great work for customers all over the world.

The Owatonna facility was named the winner in the **"Best Places to Work"** category in the 2025 Best of the Best – Southern Minnesota and the 2025 Best of the Best – Owatonna & Waseca Reader's Choice awards, hosted by the Owatonna People's Press. This recognition celebrates the company's exceptional workplace culture, employee satisfaction and commitment to the local community.

For more information about Life Fitness / Hammer Strength products and services, visit: www.lifefitness.com.

To learn more about employment opportunities, visit: www.lifefitness.com/en-us/careers.





Lighted Parade Draws Thousands, Hundreds from Out of Town

More than 5,400 people gathered for the Main Street Lighted Parade to enjoy the annual tradition and kick-off the Hometown Holiday weekend.

According to data provided by Placer AI, attendees spent an average of 2 hours downtown, enjoying the parade and visiting local businesses before and after the festivities. The Eagles Club, Elks Lodge, Courtyard, and Pizza Ranch were

some of the most popular spots. 66% of attendees were from the 55060-zip code, which means 34% of parade spectators traveled from outside Owatonna to attend the parade, eat, drink, and shop in Owatonna. **Save the date for next year: Friday, December 4, 2026!**

New Retail Incubator to Develop Young Businesses

In early 2026, a new way to develop business ideas is coming to fruition in Owatonna. The retail incubator will give people with an idea a way to develop it into a business and the support to determine its future.

Located at the Rose Street Center, this initiative will provide business plan support, financial guidance, and a realistic perspective on the viability of the concept thanks to the partnership with the Owatonna Area Business Development Center.

Vendors can rent a space to set up their shop by connecting with Main Street Director Lisa Cochran (lcochran@owatonna.org) or applications will be on line at OwatonnaMainStreet.org on January 15th.



Winter Walk with Beverages, Bites, and Brrr-ingو



Back as a part of the Bold & Cold Week in Owatonna, is Winter Walk. Bold & Cold Week started in 2018 as *Owatonna Winter Wonderland* with a Polar Plunge, Chili Cook-off and "Crazy Days" sales.

In 2019, it became *Bold & Cold: Owatonna's Winter Festival* adding the Medallion Hunt, Park & Rec Weekend Out activities and Ice Sculpting. Three years ago, Main Street added

the Winter Walk with Beverages, Bites and Brrr-ingо promotion.

Participating businesses will have the Brrr-ingо cards to mark when the brrr-ingо players visit on Friday, January 23 and/or Saturday, January 24. When players complete the card with at least 1 brrr-ingо, they leave it at the last establishment they visit. A random drawing will be held, and winners will receive prizes donated by participating businesses.

Hope you can join in the fun as a business or a brrr-ingо player.

EVENTS Update

Julia Seykora, Director of Events

Annual Chamber Dinner

Please Join Us in Celebrating the 2025 Extra Mile Award Winners:

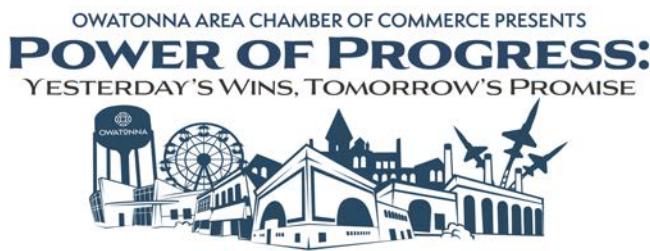
Denise & Jim Atkinson of Taco John's and the Hy-Vee Owatonna Team

Join them—along with fellow Chamber member businesses—at the Chamber Annual Dinner on Friday, January 23rd.

Space is limited, so please register in advance and show your support as we recognize outstanding community leadership and service. Contact Julia Seykora, jseykora@owatonna.org



2025 Extra Mile Award Winners: Hy-Vee Owatonna Team and Denise & Jim Atkinson of Taco John's.



HEADLINE SPONSOR



ANNUAL MEETING

January 23, 2026
Owatonna Country Club

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS



BEAUTERRE

Michael Kirschling
2480 County RD 45 South, Owatonna
507-933-5358
Michael.kirschling@eosisrecovery.com



PURE DETAILING

Justin Wier
600 Hoffman Drive NW, Owatonna
763-760-4940
pureowatonna@gmail.com

Broadway Global Mart

BROADWAY GLOBAL MART, INC.
Ibrahim Hussein
114 W Broadway ST, Owatonna
507-573-1427
bgmartinc@gmail.com

THE LUX
— MEDSPA

THE LUX MEDSPA

Andrea Berube
731 Main ST, Owatonna
507-416-7880
andrea@theluxmedspa.com

Broadway Kitchen

BROADWAY KITCHEN, INC.
Ibrahim Hussein
114 W Broadway ST, Owatonna
507-573-1427
bgmartinc@gmail.com

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

CHAMBER GROWTH BREAKFAST

January 15
7:30 – 9:00 AM
Location: Torey's Restaurant & Bar,
208 N. Cedar AVE
Topic: State of Business in Owatonna
Sponsors: Federated Insurance,
Keen Bank, Mayo Clinic Health System-Owatonna,
Riverland Community College



ANNUAL DINNER

January 23
5:30 – 8:00 PM
Location: Owatonna Country Club,
1991 Lemond Road
Theme: Power of Progress



BUSINESS AFTER HOURS

January 27
5:30 – 7:00 PM
Location: 141 E Vine ST
Hosted by: Big Brothers Big Sisters
of Southern MN & Torey's Restaurant & Bar



SESSIONS PRIORITY DINNER

February 17
4:00 – 9:00 PM
Location: St. Paul River centre

CHAMBER GROWTH BREAKFAST

February 19
7:30 – 9:00 AM
Location: Torey's Restaurant & Bar
208 N Cedar AVE
Topic: TBD



BUSINESS AFTER HOURS

February 24
5:30 – 7:00 PM
Location: 1700 Austin Road
Hosted by: Steele County
Historical Society, Izaak Walton
League of America & Hy-Vee

Chamber to Submit Reaccreditation Application in 2026



Accredited

Five-Star Distinction



Accreditation with the United States Chamber of Commerce is the only program of its kinds that defines excellence in chamber planning and recognizes chambers for outstanding contributions toward positive change in their communities. The Owatonna Chamber of Commerce and Tourism has been Accredited since 1975 and 5-Star Accreditation status from

2011 – present. In 2026 the staff will submit the application for reaccreditation and completion of the nine areas of focus including Governance, Finance, Human Resources and Staff, Government Affairs, Program Development, Technology, Communication, Facilities, and Benchmarking.

Owatonna Chamber is one of two Minnesota Chambers who have the prestigious honor of being a 5-Star Chamber.

CHAMBER PACK DEADLINE

Supply 550 copies of your promotional insert for January/February mailing; \$150 by **February 25th**.



OWATONNA
AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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Hours: Monday–Friday, 8 AM–5 PM



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Starts **Here.**

www.riverland.edu