

I am composing this article for our quarterly newsletter looking out our 4th floor window at a beautiful sunshine filled, blue-sky with puffy white clouds, the downtown courthouse reflecting the sunlight off the granite stones, the Fox River meandering to its destination with the Illinois, a truly perfect picture!

But as we all are aware, the picture has been far from perfect for us and many of our members this year and adjustments had to be made. For the Chamber, that meant reducing staff by one, taking on additional responsibilities, focusing harder on retention of both members and businesses and yet still providing and responding to the needs of our members who in turn have continued to support us. We sincerely appreciate each and every one of you.

We continue our core programs, Farmers Market, Welcomeburger, Legislative Lunch, State of the City, Educate and Relate Programs, Business After Hours, Annual Dinner and Annual Golf Outing. In addition, we have already begun planning for a Business Expo for 2010. This project will be spearheaded by a planning team from ONYX; the Chamber sponsored Ottawa Network of Young Executives. Not held since 1989, the Expo's goal will be to showcase to our community the many business and services available to the citizens of Ottawa. It will be an event to bring the entire family to visit the exhibitors, sample food from our restaurants, and enjoy some entertainment plus other attractions.

We also realize that "Social Networking", Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and other social media sites are the new norm and the Chamber will be joining those networks. ("Times, they are a changing").

Economic Development is also changing. Ottawa has been fortunate to see the completion and openings of the Kohl's, Clover Distribution Centers, Toyota's new automotive facility, St Mary's Healthcare Ottawa facility and the Ottawa Regional Hospitals Renal Care, MRI , Cancer Centers as well as their ongoing construction in expanding their footprint. In addition, Pilkington completed its \$45 million restoration of two new furnaces' and is now a prime supplier of solar glass to that market. They have added 25 new employees this year due to the demand for its solar glass. Soon, International Titanium Powder will open the doors to its \$65 million dollar manufacturing facility in the Ottawa Industrial park. In addition to adding 60 new manufacturing jobs, it is hoped that we will be able to attract end-users of ITP's titanium product to locate in our industrial park. That said, new economic development project requests for information have been few since the downturn in the economy. We have responded aggressively to those requests, but realize that retaining the industries we have is now more important than ever. Therefore, we are concentrating our efforts on retention calls to our major industries and making sure they know the Chamber and City appreciate them and their contribution to our community and learn from them how we can better serve their needs as well as being able to observe their operations. Dave Noble, City Engineer, and I have conducted these one a month calls since June 2007.

Now, I want to go back and talk about the ONYX team. What I write about now is taken from a media interview with Neil Howe, co-author of the seminal work on generational cycles. He is also a Washington DC-based economist and demographer.

ONYX members are what has been termed the “Millennials”, individuals born between 1982 and 2004 and are a “Hero” generation, just like the G.I. Generation that coped so well with the turmoil of the Great Depression and World War II. “Coddled as children, the G.I.s were ultimately called upon to help society through a dark and dangerous period and rose to the occasion.” Again quoting Howe..

“These are today’s young people, who are just beginning to be well known to most Americans. They fill K-12 schools, colleges, graduate schools, and have begun entering the workplace. We associate them with dramatic improvements in youth behaviors, which are often underreported by the media. Since Millennials have come along, we’ve seen huge declines in violent crime, teen pregnancy, and the most damaging forms of drug abuse, as well as higher rates of community service and volunteering. (Underlining mine) Millennials are good team players. We hear a lot these days about working together for a common cause, volunteerism and the need for stronger government institutions, largely because these are the new priorities of the Millennial Generation.”

So what does this mean to Ottawa, the Chamber? Howe states “the Millennial Generation places a great deal of weight on teamwork and the notion of doing things “smart”. That doesn’t mean, of course, that the various programs that are kicked off in an attempt to fix the many problems now confronting society will in fact turn out to be technically smart. But they will almost certainly be better thought out. You can take some comfort in the fact that Millennials are builders, not destroyers. Millennials want to skip the philosophical debate and get straight to fix things.”

The above observation by Mr. Howe is why I am so excited about having this group of young executives as part of the Ottawa Area Chamber of Commerce and Industry. I hope you’ll support them as they take on projects for the betterment of our community.