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Centennial Salute

Greensboro Merchants Association

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GREENSBORO
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Happy 100th Birthday!



By Lynne Brandon ~ Photos by Steve Exum

*“We have become a place
that small businesses can call home.
Everyone is important to us – everyone is a VIP.”*

GMA President & CEO Michael F. Bumpass



President and CEO Michael F. Bumpass
with mural of Gen. Nathanael Greene



Three presidents, one mission, and a lasting legacy

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Greensboro Merchants Association, known to locals as GMA. Since 1906, GMA has helped the business community grow and prosper by providing a host of membership benefits and community support initiatives. The year-long centennial celebration includes a variety of events and activities and special gifts for the Greensboro community.

In February, GMA's annual dinner kicked-off the year-long celebration with over 1,000 business people. In April, GMA unveiled a public art project as a gift to the community – a stunning 24-foot mural wrap of Gen. Nathanael Greene – permanently placed on the Davie Street parking deck wall for all to enjoy. The innovative process used by local artists Erik Beerbower and Brian Hibbard was the first of its kind in the entire Southeast.

We've come a long way, baby

Three men have steered the destiny of GMA for 80 years with the help of dedicated chairpeople and board members: Bob Trosper, Stan Culbreth and current President and CEO, Michael F. Bumpass since 1987.

GMA history attributes Bob Trosper as instrumental in leading

the formation of the organization with an emphasis on education. Culbreth is credited with bringing the concept of technology to the association, positioning it for future growth. Bumpass continues to strive for GMA success with a strategic vision of diversification that will work effectively within the framework of a global economy.

Also key to the GMA story is the founder, J.M. Hendrix. Hendrix saw the necessity for relationship – building within the business community – a concept that was ahead of its time. He believed that the GMA was instrumental in building a spirit of fellowship and friendship among businesspeople that had not existed before. He was right.

Historians and those connected with the GMA smile when reminded of the Hendrix legacy and his words that captured the mindset of the 1900s. “In the gay nineties, many merchants up

ing instead of the customer for the credit,” said Hendrix.

Membership has its benefits

As time marched on, so did the number of merchant associations – from a reported 10,000 throughout the United States to approximately 50 associations still in existence today. Some would wonder how the GMA has survived when so many merchant-driven organizations have disbanded. Survival is a given, but the icing on the cake is that the GMA remains as one of the largest and most well-respected of its kind in the country. It is not just surviving, it is thriving. Today, GMA has over 1,400 members and still growing.

The benefits of membership and its stability over the last 100 years have contributed to the success of GMA. In fact, the group has moved only five times in 100 years – but always in downtown Greensboro.



Downtown Greensboro is thriving.

Also attributing to GMA success is FirstPoint, Inc., a for-profit subsidiary, that allows GMA to operate as a nonprofit entity.

"FirstPoint is one of the largest independent credit businesses in the region," says Bumpass. The man who is charged with running FirstPoint understands the role he has with GMA. "Merchant Associations have evolved into business service companies and GMA has specific needs to meet regarding Workplace Workshops, training and education for individuals, businesses and more. FirstPoint provides the funds to keep these programs running."

Bumpass points out the uniqueness of GMA and explains that there is a place for both the Chamber of Commerce and the GMA because they meet different needs. Most chamber organizations are focused on economic development while merchant associations have evolved as a necessary tool for small business. "We have become a place that small businesses can call home. Everyone is important to us - everyone is a VIP," says Bumpass.

What's so special about a GMA membership?

The membership covers all of a member company's employees, not just the CEO or president. Membership provides an entry into Workplace Workshops led by trained professionals, small business success seminars, crime prevention seminars, After Work Network events, networking referral and leads groups and other special events throughout the year.

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GMA brings businesspeople together through Workplace Workshops, After Work Networks and other events.

Bumpass believes a key reason for the continued success of GMA is due to the solid relationships with small businesses.

In the spirit of diversification and benefits for members, GMA has hit a homerun with its After Work Network events (bi-monthly) that continue to expose thousands of businesspeople to GMA each year and provide unlimited contacts for those seeking new business and information. Bumpass acknowledges the popularity of the networking events and its importance. “Most people are not extroverts and talking to 200 people is scary, so we try to create an environment that does it for you. We use games to ‘break the ice’ and allow people to meet each other. Our emphasis is on networking and meeting people and not socializing without an end in mind.”

A commentary of the times reflects the changing demographics of GMA membership that was once almost exclusively made up of retailers. Today, membership is about 12 percent

retailers with the majority coming from business-to-business and service companies. Noting these changing times, Bumpass has his sights on the future – the power of education and technology – that will shape the city and the global community.

What’s ahead for GMA?

According to Bumpass, it will take a concerted effort to continue working with educators, small businesses, start-ups and entrepreneurs of tomorrow. Those sectors, as well as Dell, FedEx hubs, etc., are the wave of the future. “Tradition is great and we should celebrate it, but we better embrace the future,” says Bumpass. “We don’t want to be caught looking in the rearview mirror instead of straight ahead.”

It’s all about people

Intertwined within GMA history are many families and individuals, too many to name, but all important for their contributions.

Synonymous with Greensboro is the Cone family, and their footprints are found all over town. They are known for having a commitment to the city that is virtually unparalleled. Some of their imprints include Greensboro YMCAs, Moses Cone Hospital and much more. Betty Cone continues the commitment that her family started and, in 1992, she served as chairman of the GMA.

The Joseph M. Bryan Foundation is best-known for its financial support of the downtown baseball stadium and other center-city projects. The foundation continues to invest in the community through support of Guilford County Schools, one of just a few endeavors of the foundation. President Jim Melvin has longstanding ties with the GMA as a previous board member.

“Greensboro has been blessed with one of the best merchants associations in the Southeast. They have always taken a stand on key social issues that affect our area like support-



The Schiffman Legacy

Arnold A. Schiffman Sr., Chair 1924 • Arnold A. "Tony" Schiffman Jr., Chair 1974 • L. Lane Schiffman, Chair 2006

ing the Chrysler Classic, integration in the 60s and so forth. It is a well-run organization and well-funded – a class operation,” said Melvin.

Current chairman for 2006, Lane Schiffman, is all smiles when asked about his experience with GMA. “I worked with my grandfather and still work with my father, who remains active at Schiffman’s Jewelers. In 1893, my great-grandfather started in the jewelry business and bought a store on Elm Street. He was a German watchmaker and believed in quality and commitment to customers. That strong foundation is one of our common threads with GMA – we both

have high ethical standards and unwavering commitment to clients. Even our mission statements are the same,” says Schiffman.

The tradition of Schiffman’s Jewelers and the GMA is a strong one dating back to Arnold Schiffman. The 1924 GMA chairman received the one-time Excalibur award for retail excellence for more than 70 years in the community.

Lane’s father, Tony, was president of GMA in the early 70s. “He had a lot of trophies but he was most proud of his GMA gavel,” says Lane. “He appreciated the need for good relationships in the marketplace and under-

stood the need for networking through GMA.”

Lane says he enjoys the privilege of being the current 2006 chairman and continuing the family tradition. “GMA has changed with the times and so have we. GMA taught us how to take risks and I continue to be impressed by their strategic, entrepreneurial nature and their wonderful reputation in the marketplace. I personally don’t know of another organization like it,” says Schiffman.

A modern organization built on old-fashioned values has stood the test of time. GMA might be getting older, but it is only getting better. ■

100 YEARS OF SERVICE TO GREENSBORO

1844 Greensboro College is the first college to open in the city...



1908 Greensboro Parade

1909 Greensboro Daily News founded

1924 Greensboro Historical Museum opens

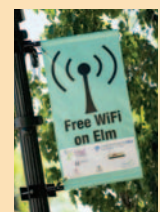


1927 Carolina Theatre opens

1960 Sit-in at Woolworth's downtown



1987 GMA begins Workplace Workshops



2006 GMA promotes revitalization of downtown Greensboro