

**12 November, 2020****Chair & Chief Executive Report**

Tēnā koutou

It's a pleasure to present the Whanganui Chamber of Commerce 2020 Annual Report to our members.

Well, we started 2020 with anticipation of what the year would bring, with increasing businesses in Whanganui, and a district that was enjoying a resurgence with people choosing to live here for lifestyle and business opportunities. Little did anyone anticipate a lockdown, with direct consequences on our business community particularly taking tourism, hospitality and retail instantly down a path that will take some time to recover.

Lockdown was an unprecedented time when we needed to jump in boots and all. Barely getting a breath as we phoned our members, heard their stories, connected members with members and provided relevant training at the time. Like many others, it was certainly no holiday for us during that time!

Whanganui is resilient though, and if we find ourselves in turbulent times, particularly with the up-coming Christmas shut down, and ongoing supply chain interruptions, Whanganui will be good at picking up the pieces, supporting each other and collaborating.

Collaboration with partners Mainstreet Whanganui, Ministry of Social Development, Te Manu Atatū, Thrive Whanganui and Whanganui & Partners ensured the business community was aware of and had access to business support and funding during the changing Covid- 19 Alert Levels.

Being part of the wider New Zealand Chamber network has been significant for us and enabled us to benefit from national expertise to support our members as we navigated our way through this year.

The Chamber is a member of the Economic Recovery Leadership Team that was formed to guide the development of the Whanganui Economic Recovery Plan. Members of this team are Mainstreet Whanganui, Te Manu Atatū, Thrive Whanganui, Whanganui & Partners, Whanganui District Council and Whanganui Maori Regional Tourism Operators.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the Board for their valued contribution throughout the year, and would especially like to honour the Board members standing aside this term who have served the Chamber significantly over the years. Raewyn who also served as the past president and who gave much of her time to the Chamber, particularly when she was CE as well as president; Rory, who also has served for 6 years with the last one as deputy-chair - Glenda has enjoyed working alongside you Rory, receiving advice when asked (and when not asked!) and Brendon, your insightfulness into many situations has been hugely appreciated, and the Chamber thanks you for your willingness to support new initiatives and your commitment over the years to the Chamber and the business community.

A special mention to Glenda, our Board Chair whose guidance, wisdom and encouragement throughout the year was very much appreciated.

And finally, a big thank you to Anita, and Glen who joined us in February. Together with Sue, they are our Chamber team and their commitment and unwavering support of our members, has helped the Chamber evolve into an even more effective and relevant organisation, supporting the Chamber to better serve the local business community in the future.

The Chamber has seen significant growth during this period, which signalled to us that business support is vital and needed, and we are happy to serve our members with support, training, networking and advocacy.

Despite the challenges, there has been many highlights. The introduction of the Chamber digital membership card (Kinkon app), proved to be invaluable during lockdown and continues to keep our members visible and connected. New features are coming in 2021 to further enhance the app capability.

We also introduced *Business Kickstart* which enabled existing members to sponsor a Chamber membership for start-up businesses, so they have the support and business expertise of the Chamber network wrapped around them. Thank you to Bartley Group Holdings and Thrive Whanganui for supporting this initiative and our start-up businesses.

The *Key Regional Partners Programme* is an exciting new step for the Chamber. It is an opportunity to develop and grow local business partnerships that not only offer benefit to the partner but also provide added value to our Chamber members. We are delighted to announce that Proaxiom are our first Key Regional Partner and we look forward to working closely with them to support our business community.

The introduction of member e-comms initiatives; *Business Snapshot*, *Business Focus* and *Member to Member* promotions helped to keep our members visible and connected. Our e-comms have become our primary source of communication ensuring members and the wider business community have up to date and regular business information and support.

Chamber events continue to be popular, supporting members to build networks and keep informed of what's happening in the Whanganui business community. Our training and event calendar however, looked very different this year with the impact of Covid. We held 15 networking events, with the same number having to be postponed or cancelled. Through collaboration with our members, we were able to offer 11 webinars that provided expert business support, information and advice. It was a time that challenged us all, but it also showed us that things can be done differently. Next year there will be a continued focus on business support and business retention for our members. You will see that our training program will be focussed on the same.

Thank you to all our members for supporting the Chamber by being here tonight and over the past year. Your support is key to our success and we appreciate your engagement. We are enjoying an increased awareness for the Chamber, with both a membership increase and attendance increase at our functions.

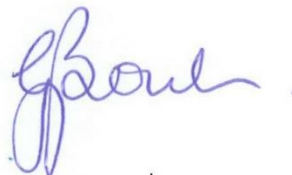
Lastly, a huge thanks to Sue, our CE for her tireless work especially during Covid19. Sue's ability to champion the storm and rise above the pressure to continue to deliver what our members required needs acknowledging and minuting. The value you have been able to instil within our regional chamber has provided stability, resources and support that our members were requesting and needing. Thank you.

We look forward to 2021 in anticipation of the continued growth in our region. Whatever next year may bring, the Chamber will continue to champion our members and provide business support and connection to create better business opportunities. Together we are stronger.

Ngā mihi



Sue Stuart  
Chief Executive  
Whanganui Chamber of Commerce



Glenda Brown  
Chair  
Whanganui Chamber of Commerce