

March 2023

www.winonachamber.com | (507) 452-2272 | 902 E. Second St., Suite 120, Winona, MN



**A Legislative Session
Riddled with Mandates
and Increases**

Christie Ransom, President & CEO
Winona Area Chamber of Commerce

With imminent tax increases coming at our businesses from every angle, along with the increased cost of goods, supply chain shortages, and an extremely tight labor market, the time for ‘Do No Harm’ legislation could not be more important.

With the State Legislature in session, there are many things that hang in the balance. Some things to watch that are swiftly passing through the legislature with little to no amendments and without normal process include some workforce benefit mandates, an increase in capital gains tax, an increase in income tax, an increase in vehicle registration costs, and we still are not seeing any change to Social Security Tax. With a \$17.6 billion budget surplus, which will likely increase with the February forecast, it would seem only logical that adding more taxes is not the answer.

Currently there are two paid leave bills in the Legislature. One is the Sick and Safe bill, which mandates all employers with 1 or more employees (this includes all part-time and temporary employees as well) to offer paid leave of 1 hour for every 30 hours worked, up to 48 hours per calendar year and up to 80 hours of carryover. This time can also be used to care for a family member (or anyone that you have a close relationship with). When an employee leaves their employment, the employer is required to pay out this accrued sick leave. This is a very far-reaching bill with a lot of limitations on employers, but still a lot of regulations and requirements.

In addition to that bill, there is also the Paid Family Leave bill that will mandate all employers with 1 or more employees to offer paid leave of up to 24 weeks every calendar year (12 weeks of sick leave and 12 weeks of family leave, which again has very loose family terms). This is paid for by an increase in payroll tax of a currently undetermined amount since the Legislature has no fiscal note attached to fund this. The payroll tax increase that has been discussed is .7%, however it is likely going to be closer to 3% or more to fund this for the entire state. Additionally, employers can elect to impose 50% of that onto their employees, of which many employees are not aware. With business owners contacting me all the time upset about this mandate, the thing I am hearing most often (aside from closing their doors permanently or moving their

company to another state) is that they will cut the benefits that they already offer to their employees to pay for the employees of all of the other businesses in the state to have this benefit. Not only is this concerning, but I truly don’t believe that many people see the gravity of the impact that this will impose.

With all of that to worry about, we must also watch the massive capital gains tax increase that the Legislature is looking to impose. This will make Minnesota’s capital gains tax the highest in the entire country! Additionally, they are looking to add a 5th income tax tier of 12.45% for those grossing \$400,000 or more. With Minnesota already one of the highest tax states in the nation, this 5th income tax tier would make us the second highest income tax state barely behind California. While some feel that this isn’t an issue, what I am hearing, and we are already seeing, is those that would be impacted will end up leaving our state. That takes philanthropic dollars, property tax dollars, income tax dollars, and more out of our state. Now is not the time to increase taxes.

One last thing that I would like to note is that we have seen \$1.6 billion dollars in industry leave our state in the last 6-8 months, before ever getting started, because of our highly regulated processes that are currently extremely prohibitive. Those businesses are currently building in other states. We must create a process that is fair and impartial and transparent so that we can be a state where companies want to come to and to grow in.

While some may feel that these issues are not relevant to all members of our community and region, I assure you that they are. Businesses serve as the bedrock of our communities, providing an income for thousands of families and providing services or goods that help us thrive and get the things that we need. They support our schools, the arts, sports teams, other businesses, and so much more. When we add unnecessary strain on the businesses that we rely on, it is only expected that they will be forced to increase prices, cut products or resources, reduce staff and/or benefits, or worst of all, leave our state or close all together.

It is my priority for the Chamber to fight for businesses of every size and type and ensure that we do everything we can to ‘Do No Harm’. I will work tirelessly to make sure that their voices are heard. I hope that you will join me in being a champion for our businesses!

ABOUT THE CHAMBER

- OUR MISSION -

To Serve Businesses How and When
They Need Us

- OUR VISION -

Be the Foremost Resource and Advocate
for Businesses in the Winona Area

Officers:

Katrice Sisson – Chair
Stan Breitlow – Chair Elect
Andrew Puetz – Past Chair
Amber Hamernik – Treasurer
Andrea Northam - At Large

Retiring 2023:

Andrea Northam
Dave Pederson
Kelly Pronschinske
Andy Puetz
Mike Dieter

Retiring 2024:

Dr. Marsha Danielson
Janneke Sobek
Katrice Sisson
Jared Literski
Kendra Maggert

Retiring 2025:

Stan Breitlow
Amber Hamernik
Jason Gamoke
Kevin Ritz
Mandy Hansel

Staff:

Christie Ransom – President & CEO
Kay Mathews – Vice President of Finance
and Operations
Emma Ebbinger – Director of Workforce
and Business Development
Kateri Petry – Director of Marketing
and Communications
Anna Sibenaller – Director of
Main Street Programs



**WINONA AREA
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
YOUNG PROFESSIONALS**

SPONSORED BY


The Chamber’s Young Professionals (YP) program is for 21-40 year olds. Each month we have events based around 3 key areas important to YPs:

SOCIALS

1 Cultivate relationships at coffee and happy hour socials at local businesses.

VOLUNTEERING

2 Build a connection with the community in which you work/live.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

3 Hear from speakers and learn about opportunities that will help improve your life and career.



PAST EVENTS INCLUDE:

- Happy hour at **Muddled Thyme**
- Speaker **Carrie Tollefson**, Olympian
- Puzzles, Pints, & Pizza at **Island City Brewing Company**
- **Big Muddy Brew ‘n Que** volunteering
- **Eggs & Issues:** State of Local Government



MEMBERSHIP

\$300/person for employees of Chamber members. Cost includes registration for YP events and a beverage/snack at each YP event.

HOW TO JOIN

For more **information** or to **sign-up** contact Kateri at kpetry@winonachamber.com or call 507.452.2272

**CHAMBER
CHAMPIONS**

- VISIONARY -



- PREMIER -



- EXECUTIVE -



**Main Street Corner
March 2023**

Anna Sibenaller, Director of
Main Street Programs

Happy March, all. For some folks, it’s the slow season: catching up on projects set aside during the holidays, perhaps trying to get a head start on plans for Summer, or simply waiting for Spring to show up.

It’s the slow season for our Downtown businesses too. The holiday shopping season is over and not-quite-nice weather has a lot of us cozied up at home. But don’t forget, your favorite local shops and restaurants are still here with fun finds and

delicious delicacies to try! Embrace the cabin fever and venture Downtown to share some local love. Enjoying all that our small businesses have to offer helps ensure their success year-round, and that support goes straight back into our community.

So, where can you show some local love?



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BIZ BITES



Merchants Financial Group, Inc. (MFGI) made a preliminary earnings announcement for 2022 with net income of \$30,424,467, according to MFGI President & CEO **Gregory M. Evans**. The earnings, subject to external audit, exceeded MFGI's plan for the year by \$8.9 million and is an increase of 5.72% over 2021 earnings.

"This is the first time in the rich 147-year history of Merchants that annual net income has exceeded \$30 million – and extraordinary results are only possible because of a special group of people working together as a team," shared Evans. "Being disciplined in our balance sheet management, finding new ways to meet the needs of tremendously loyal customers, and adapting to the rapid changes in the market environment is what drove our success and made the past year extremely rewarding."

Playing a significant role in 2022 performance, new commercial loan activity was more than \$608.5 million, driving year-over-year net loan receivable growth of 17.3% to \$1.85 billion. In addition, disciplined balance sheet management and interest rate environment changes resulted in increased interest income of \$6.14 million on excess liquidity. Even with residential mortgage loan volume dropping to just 47.3% of 2021 volume due to the significant change in interest rates, Merchants' business diversification carried the Company through to a record year.

Merchants Financial Group, Inc. is a publicly-traded Company. Ownership is made up of its more than 450 employees and mostly individuals and families from southeastern Minnesota and west-central Wisconsin.



Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor **Kattie Tibbs** will provide mental health care for people in **Winona Health's** new Intensive Outpatient Program. The Intensive Outpatient Program helps fill a gap between regular clinic visits with a psychiatrist or counselor and 24-hour inpatient care.

"I believe in creating a welcoming atmosphere, getting to know each person and working toward what they want to accomplish," said Tibbs. My goal is to help people achieve positive change by providing a safe space to explore problems and develop the tools needed to resolve issues.

Tibbs noted that she was drawn to the integrative nature of Winona Health in working with others in the community. "The people at Winona Health care for people, not just focusing on their diagnosis," she said.

Born in La Crosse and raised in southeast Kentucky, Tibbs returned to the area for college and has spent much of her life in the Winona area. She graduated from Winona State University with a Master's Degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. She also received her Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice from Winona State. She is certified by the Minnesota Board of Behavioral Health.

For more information about, Kattie Tibbs, LPCC, and Mental Health Services including the new Intensive Outpatient Program at Winona Health, visit www.winonahealth.org or call 507-457-7731.



Saint Mary's University of Minnesota is announcing a \$25 million gift commitment — the largest gift in the university's 111-year-history — from an alumnus and his family. This unprecedented donation, directed to the university's endowment, will support current efforts underway to revitalize the university and cement the vision recently laid out by the president and university administration to position it for a strong and successful future.

"We are forever grateful for this truly transformational gift to Saint Mary's. Such a generous and major investment inspires and motivates us to advance our inspirational Lasallian Catholic educational mission, benefiting students and, in turn, society, as they work, lead, and serve others," said **Father James P. Burns, IVD, Ph.D.**, Saint Mary's president.

"Saint Mary's has refocused its program offerings to directly meet workforce needs while maintaining a liberal arts core," said Father Burns. "We know that today's students (both graduate and undergraduate) are looking for a solid return on their investment, which is why our university is partnering with health care and other major industry leaders to ensure that Saint Mary's can continue to respond to the evolving marketplace. We must ensure our graduates, who are tomorrow's leaders, have the right skills for both work and life including problem solving, critical thinking, and communication. This is because our liberal arts foundation remains central to our undergraduate experience thus providing students with a well-rounded perspective that will benefit them throughout their lives. Our work is guided by our identity as a Lasallian Catholic community, which calls us to be student-centered, welcoming, and forward thinking."

As a stipulation of the gift agreement, in order to inspire others to step forward to provide support, the family has challenged the university to raise an additional \$100 million between June 1, 2022 and May 31, 2024. The family also has set an expectation that the undergraduate enrollment will increase from 800 to 900 during that same timeframe. Both stipulations are intended to further position the university for the future.

"In addition to the historic magnitude of the gift, it is special for other reasons as well," said Gary Klein, vice president for advancement. "The benefactors' primary goal is to grow the university's endowment from \$70 million to close to \$100 million and — with the match — close to \$200 million, an increase of 180%. They believe strongly that with this solid foundation, and guidance by Father President James Burns and the Board of Trustees, many generations of students will benefit from a Saint Mary's education — and, in turn, society will benefit from graduates who are both skilled and demonstrate strong moral and ethical character."

NEW MEMBERS



Balloon Babe Winona was founded on the idea that your time is valuable! Leave it to the professionals to prep and install high-quality, unique balloon décor for celebrations, events, or to attract customers. "We offer balloon garlands, arches, pillars and more; anything you can Pinterest, we can do for you! I am excited to extend my services to the Winona area and surrounding communities."

To learn more about Balloon Babe Winona or to place an order, visit Balloon Babe Winona | Winona MN | Facebook, email Morgan at balloonbabewinona@gmail.com or call 262-434-9354



The Polish Cultural Institute of Winona educates visitors from across the country about the 150-year history of Polish immigrants. These immigrants came from the northern region of Poland known as Kashubia. The Polish Cultural Institute's building was built in 1980 by the Laird-Norton Lumber Company. The intention for the building was to serve as a museum-storage area and it took six years to become a showcase for the history of Winona's vibrant Kashubian Polish community. In 1979, the Institute obtained recognition as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Its mission is to preserve the artifacts and stories that were quickly being lost. Over the past 41 years, the Institute collected and preserved more than 8,000 items.

To learn more about the museum, website, online store, genealogy sessions, or any other topic related to the Cultural Institute, call 507.454.3431 or email info@polishmuseumwinona.org. The hours of operation are 10Am-3pm Monday-Saturday.

**BE SEEN
BE HEARD
BELONG
JOIN THE
CHAMBER!**



WINONA AREA CHAMBER'S ANNUAL BANQUET & AWARDS



Business of the Year
Riverside Integrated Solutions



Rising Star
Bluff View Estates



Volunteers of the Year
Paula and Gerard Beyer



Main Street Business of the Year
Peter's Biergarten



Young Professionals Best Place to Work
WNB Financial