



Rising to the Challenge

Christie Ransom, President & CEO  
Winona Area Chamber of Commerce

How Winona Businesses Are Navigating Minnesota’s New Labor Landscape

Minnesota’s business climate is evolving—and for the hardworking entrepreneurs and employers across Winona, the pace of change is both swift and significant.

From sweeping new employee benefit mandates to increased wage requirements and inflation-indexed taxes, businesses of every size are being asked to do more, often with fewer resources and tighter margins. For many, these changes aren’t just policy shifts, they’re operational turning points.

One of the most far-reaching is the launch of Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) in 2026. The program promises up to 20 weeks of paid leave for qualifying family or medical needs, funded by a payroll tax shared between employers and employees or burdened by an employer on their own. While its intentions are rooted in compassion, the realities for small businesses are complex: How do you provide extended leave, retain talent, and maintain operations—all at once?

Layered onto this is Earned Sick and Safe Time (ESST), now in effect. Requiring one hour of paid leave for every 30 hours worked, this law applies to all employees—part-time, temporary, and seasonal alike—regardless of employer size. For small teams, it’s not just an accounting adjustment; it’s a reshaping of workforce management.

Then there’s the elimination of the minimum wage exemption for small businesses and hospitality employers. This longstanding policy once gave relief to businesses

under a certain revenue threshold and allowed tip credits for service staff. Minnesota’s move to do away with that—while other states continue to offer flexibility—has caused a spike in labor costs for some of our most community-rooted businesses. Restaurants, coffee shops, retailers, and independent service providers now face a steeper climb just to meet payroll.

All of this is unfolding against the backdrop of a tight labor market that leaves no room for error. With more open jobs than qualified applicants, Winona businesses are competing fiercely—not just on wages, but on culture, flexibility, and purpose. Today, the best talent doesn’t just look for a paycheck. They look for values. And the businesses that prioritize people—those with healthy, empowering cultures—are winning.

Add in an inflation-indexed gas tax (raising transportation costs year over year) and the "captive audience" law (restricting employer communications on political or union-related matters), and the picture becomes even more complex.

At the Winona Area Chamber of Commerce, we understand the balancing act our members face. We believe in building strong communities and supporting workers—but we also believe in practical policy that strengthens, not stifles, the backbone of our economy: small businesses.

Our message is clear: Winona’s businesses are not asking for a pass. They’re asking for a partnership. One where growth, compliance, and sustainability go hand in hand.

If your business is feeling the pressure of these changes—or if you’re simply looking for guidance, resources, or a place to connect—reach out to the Chamber. We’re here to support you with legislative updates, workforce tools, business advocacy, and a community of peers who understand what it takes to lead in times of transition.

Together, we’ll keep Winona’s business community strong, adaptable, and ready for what’s next.

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:

Jon Olson – Chair  
Stan Breitlow – Past Chair  
Crystal Hiatt – Chair Elect  
Amber Hamernik – Treasurer  
Jason Gamoke – At Large

Retiring 2025:

Stan Breitlow  
Amber Hamernik  
Jason Gamoke  
Kevin Ritz  
Mandy Hansel

Retiring 2026:

Jon Olson  
Ross Lexvold  
Tina Lehnertz  
Mike Puetz  
Shawn Beier

Retiring 2027:

Rod Baker  
Anita Cisewski  
Jennifer Shabel  
Crystal Hiatt  
Neil Wieser

Staff:

Christie Ransom – President & CEO  
Kay Mathews – VP of Finance and Operations  
Jacob Ransom – VP of Workforce Strategy and Membership Development  
Travis Lybeck – Director of Main Street Programs



Careers in the Classroom

Jacob Ransom – VP of Workforce  
Strategy & Membership Development

Careers in the Classroom is our newest Workforce program. This program was formerly titled “CEOs in the Classroom” and we wanted this program to be less aimed at showcasing executive positions like a CEO, GM, or President and more aimed at showcasing all the different career options in our area. We go to the local Middle School and have professionals from different career fields talk to the 8th grade Career Exploration classes about what a day is like in their field, what education pathways it takes to get into that career and trying to answer all the questions that the students have for them.

Our first Careers in the Classroom happened on Wednesday, April 2 and it was Civil Service/Public Safety Day. We had two police officers from the Winona Police Department, a firefighter from the Winona Fire Department, and a paramedic from Winona Ambulance Service come in and talk to the students. The students had a lot of fun questions, and they even had time to go outside and check out the cops’ brand-new squad car!

We had our second installment of Careers in the Classroom at the Middle School on Tuesday, April 22. This was our Health Sciences day. We had Travis Kramolis from Winona Health come and talk to the students about his career as Physical Therapist and Christie Ransom talked about her previous career as a Surgical Technologist. We have two more Careers in the Classroom left this school year and can’t wait to showcase them in our next newsletter!

CHAMBER CHAMPIONS

- VISIONARY -



- PREMIER -



- EXECUTIVE -



BE SEEN • BE HEARD • BELONG

JOIN THE CHAMBER!

When you become a Chamber member, everyone benefits.

From business development to critical insights into public policy issues, your membership will give you access to events and programs focused on topics directly impacting your business.



May 2025

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

BIZ BITES



The Board of Directors of **Visit Winona** is pleased to announce the appointment of **Kate Carlson** as the new Executive Director. After an extensive search that drew candidates from across the Midwest, Visit Winona's board of directors appointed Carlson by unanimous consent. Carlson, who has served as Visit Winona's Partnership Director for the past 13 years, brings a wealth of experience, passion, and leadership to this new role. Carlson's leadership and vision have already had a lasting impact on the organization, from her role in developing the Partnership Program to her involvement in city initiatives, including the City of Winona's 2045 Comprehensive Plan and its Arts & Culture Strategic Plan. "I see Visit Winona not just having a seat at the table, but leading these important conversations," Carlson said. "As Executive Director, my goal is to streamline operations, set clear objectives, and prioritize communication internally and externally to ensure we continue to drive collaboration, growth, and promotion for our region."



**MWSCO** (Mississippi Welders Supply Co., Inc.) has named **Lisa Lorisch** as their new Operations Manager, replacing Paul Hengel, who will retire after 45 years of service. President Troy Elmer remarked, "Lisa has been with MWSCO for 12 years as Human Resources Manager, proving to be a great asset to the company. Most notably, she has done an outstanding job of building our employee benefit package." In the 12 years Lisa has been with MWSCO, the company has nearly doubled in size. Having been involved in many areas of the company, Lisa is well equipped for her new role having experience in safety, the employee wellness program, and the corporate management team. MWSCO highly values promoting from within the company as we continue to grow. Lisa's impressive background and dedication to MWSCO is a testament to her understanding of the company culture and values.

NEW MEMBERS



**ADAM'S**  
**PEST CONTROL, INC.**  
PROTECTING HEALTH AND PROPERTY

**Adam's Pest Control, Inc.**

We'll get rid of whatever is bugging you, guaranteed. Adam's Pest Control is a family-owned business based in Medina, MN and committed to friendly service, effective solutions, and 100% customer satisfaction. Since 1971, Adam's Pest Control has been the recognized leader in professional extermination and pest prevention services throughout Minnesota and surrounding areas. Adam's Pest Control offers both residential and commercial pest management services.

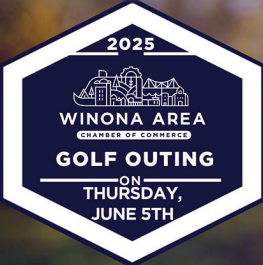
To learn more, visit [www.adamspestcontrol.com](http://www.adamspestcontrol.com) or call 800-227-2214

**NETWORK NITE**  
**MAY 8 5-7PM**  
NETWORK NITE IS OPEN TO ALL CHAMBER MEMBERS  
AND THEIR EMPLOYEES

HOSTED BY MAIN STREET PROGRAM

**PARLOUR**  
ROOM  
121 E. Third Street

JOIN US AT  

REGISTER AT [WINONACHAMBER.COM](http://WINONACHAMBER.COM)



*Come golf  
with us*

For more information or to register contact the Winona Area Chamber of Commerce at  
507.452.2272 | [info@winonachamber.com](mailto:info@winonachamber.com) | [winonachamber.com](http://winonachamber.com)



**ATV RAFFLE**  
**PURCHASE TICKETS AT**  
SUGAR LOAF AUTOMOTIVE  
WINONA AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

**TICKETS ONLY \$20**

**GRAND PRIZE**  
2025 Polaris Ranger  
XP 1000 Premium

**OTHER PRIZES**

\$1000 (1)  
\$750 (2)  
\$500 (3)  
\$250 (4)  
\$100 (10)

PRESENTING SPONSORS:



**WIN  
ME!**

Join us for a live drawing on **Saturday, September 6 at 4PM** at  
**Big Muddy Brew 'n Que** in Levee Park - need not be present to win.

Must be 18 or older to purchase ticket & win prize. Winner responsible for any applicable fees or taxes. 4,000 tickets being sold. Permit #: X-93936-25-009



**PARADE OF TRUCKS/  
TOUCH A TRUCK**

**Saturday, May 17th**  
**9am – 12pm**

**FREE FAMILY EVENT**

**9:00am - PARADE LINE UP** on  
Cal Fremling Parkway and Levee Park

**9:15am - VEHICLE PARADE** from  
Cal Fremling Parkway, South on Johnson  
Street, West on Third Street to Franklin Street

**9:30am - Noon – TOUCH A TRUCK** viewing on  
Third Street between Main Street & Franklin

**BROUGHT TO YOU BY**



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**RIHM KENWORTH**



**SEPT. 5 & 6**  
**2025**