

Sevierville Chamber of Commerce Marks 50 Years

By Carroll McMahan

Fifty years ago today, Sevierville was recovering from two disastrous floods which occurred within two weeks' time in March, 1963. Although Gatlinburg had become a seasonal tourist destination, visitors drove through Sevierville without stopping to make Sevierville merchants' cash registers ring. Roy "Rusty" Newman was elected Mayor in May and Ray L. Reagan was serving as county judge.

Business leaders agreed that something needed to be done to promote and attract industry to the Sevierville area to provide much needed year-round employment. At the forefront of this effort was Judge Reagan, Mayor Newman, James "Jimmie" Temple (who had just completed a term as mayor), Hugh "Skip" Trotter, John B. Waters, Jr. and Bo Roberts.

Together these individuals and others spearheaded the movement to establish the Sevierville Chamber of Commerce to replace the existing Downtown Merchants Association.

Spreading the message by word of mouth and public service announcements on local radio station WSEV, a special meeting was set for June 18, 1963. About 60 interested businessmen and women attended the meeting at the Sevier County Courthouse where they formed the Sevierville Chamber of Commerce.

According to an official statement issued by temporary Chairman Hugh "Skip" Trotter, the purpose of the organization was to "advance the commercial, financial, industrial, and civic interests of the community, accomplishing collectively what no one can do individually."

A twelve-man Board of Directors was elected and in turn were to elect the first officers at the next meeting. Elected to serve a three year term on the Board of Directors were: James "Jimmy" Temple, Bo Roberts, Hugh Trotter and John B. Waters, Jr. To serve two year terms were; R.B Summitt, Sr., Judge Ray L. Reagan, Herbert Lawson and Dr. John Hickey. Elected to serve a one year term were: Norman Burchfiel, E.W. "Cap" Paine, Lyle McNabb and Charlie Bell.

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A week later, at the second meeting, the first officers were elected. They were: President Hugh "Skip" Trotter, Vice President John B. Waters, Jr., Secretary Lyle McNabb and Treasurer Ross B. Summitt, Sr. Charles Hurd, Executive Director of the Knoxville Chamber of Commerce and Gatlinburg Chamber Executive Director Zeno Wall spoke to the newly elected officers and other members present at the meeting.

Clyde Ownby was appointed by the board to head the dues structure committee, and serving with him were Harold Atchley, J.C. "Cliff" Davis, Dwight Wade and Fred Atchley. The dues were established as follows: business and professional- \$25.00 annually; multiple- \$10.00; associate - \$ 50.00 and individual - \$10.00. The multiple classification was for businesses wanting to join and then add extra members of its firm as voting members of the Chamber. This was limited to five members per business. Associate members were firms located outside Sevier County.

The first membership committee was chaired by Alf Newman. Other members were G.H. Conner, Gene Isenberg, Jim Atchley and Tom Harmon.

The committee on committees was headed by Dr. John Hickey, with Bo Roberts and Norman Burchfiel as members. They recommended the establishment of the following committees: finance, community betterment, merchants' activity, tourism, governmental relations and the continuation of the already existing by-laws committee. Named to head the By-laws committee was T.M. Wynn, Jr. Other members were Jack Delozier, Paul Atchley, Glenn McMahan and Edna Owens.

After the installation of the first elected officers, President Hugh Trotter stated that he was amazed at the spirit of cooperation and felt the people were really ready for a Chamber of Commerce in Sevierville.

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Armed with determination, the organization moved forward to establish the initial goals. With the support of Judge Reagan and the county court, a new industrial park, new hospital and a new airport were built in Sevierville within the following five years of that first meeting.

In the early days the board of directors held a monthly lunchtime meeting at the Steak House in Sevierville. The first paid staff member was Reba Huff who was hired in 1971 as a part-time secretary. Her first office was a little A-frame building located on Main Street in front of the Hotel Sevier. When Reba Huff resigned in 1979 Bobbie Williams joined the staff as office manager. The office was moved to the Sevier County Cultural Center when it opened in 1976.

In 1981, the Chamber of Commerce hired Ruby Fox as the organization's first Executive Director. Ruby ran the operation with only one assistant for seven years. During that time Sevierville's first brochure was published. When the Sevierville Community Center was completed in 1982 the office was relocated once again. Nancy Clabo was hired as secretary in 1985 and has remained with the organization for 28 years.

Jane Davis Rader followed as Executive Director in 1988. At the time she accepted the position the annual budget was a modest \$20,000. "In those days I had a hard time getting Sevierville recognized as a potential tourist destination when I attended meetings," Rader said. "Even the folks in Knoxville felt that Gatlinburg was the only tourist town in the area."

Jane Rader did not give up easily and by the time she resigned in 2000 Sevierville had joined Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg in the quest for the tourist dollar. In 1992 the offices were moved to a new building located at 866 Winfield Dunn Parkway where they remained until 2001 when the old Walters State Community College building in the Sevierville Metroplex was converted into a space to be used as the Chamber of Commerce office.

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When Jane Rader stepped down in 2000, Brenda McCroskey was appointed Executive Director and continues to serve in that role. In 2002 the City of Sevierville authorized the construction of a new Visitor's Center to be located near the 407 exit of I-40. The Sevierville Visitor's Center opened in April, 2003.

With McCroskey's guidance and a succession of dedicated board members, the Sevierville Chamber of Commerce continues to grow. Amanda Maples Marr, Chamber of Commerce Marketing Director, commented: "The Sevierville Chamber of Commerce has greatly expanded the services, educational and networking opportunities and marketing programs offered to our business members over the years. We also serve as the marketing arm for the city of Sevierville's tourism industry and have taken on additional responsibilities such as the marketing of the Sevierville Golf Club and the coordination of major events such as Bloomin' BBQ & Bluegrass."

Former Director Jane Rader said "I feel the Sevierville Chamber of Commerce is what it is today because so many dedicated members have given unselfishly of their time and talents to promote the organization throughout the years."

In the past fifty years the following 38 individuals have served as Chairperson of the Board of Directors:

Hugh "Skip" Trotter
Herbert Lawson
Tom Mitchell
Bill Kilpatrick
James "Jimmie" Temple
Mack Marshall, Jr.
Truett Frazier
Grant Cantwell
James B. Atchley
Jerry Latham

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R.B. Summitt, Jr.
Lyle Overbay
David Verble
Rick Harrell
Richard Wallace
Craig Ratcliff
Barbara Ely
Chuck Atchley
Emily B. Kile
John McClure
Ken Maples
Steve Lane
Cathy L. Reed
Brad Brodersen
Lori M. Moore
Billy Carroll
D.J. Atchley
Victor Weals
Jim Arwood
Kay Collier-Pittman
Linda Russell
John Rader
Ellen Wihoit
Sue Frazier
Ray Johnson
Ashley Johnson
Allen Robbins
Devin Koester

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In addition to the chairpersons, numerous members have served on the board and various committees.

The Sevierville Chamber of Commerce plans to celebrate the golden anniversary at their annual banquet scheduled for September 10th at the Sevierville Convention Center. As part of the milestone celebration, “Living Treasure Awards” will be presented to individuals who have substantially contributed toward the success of the organization over the past 50 years.

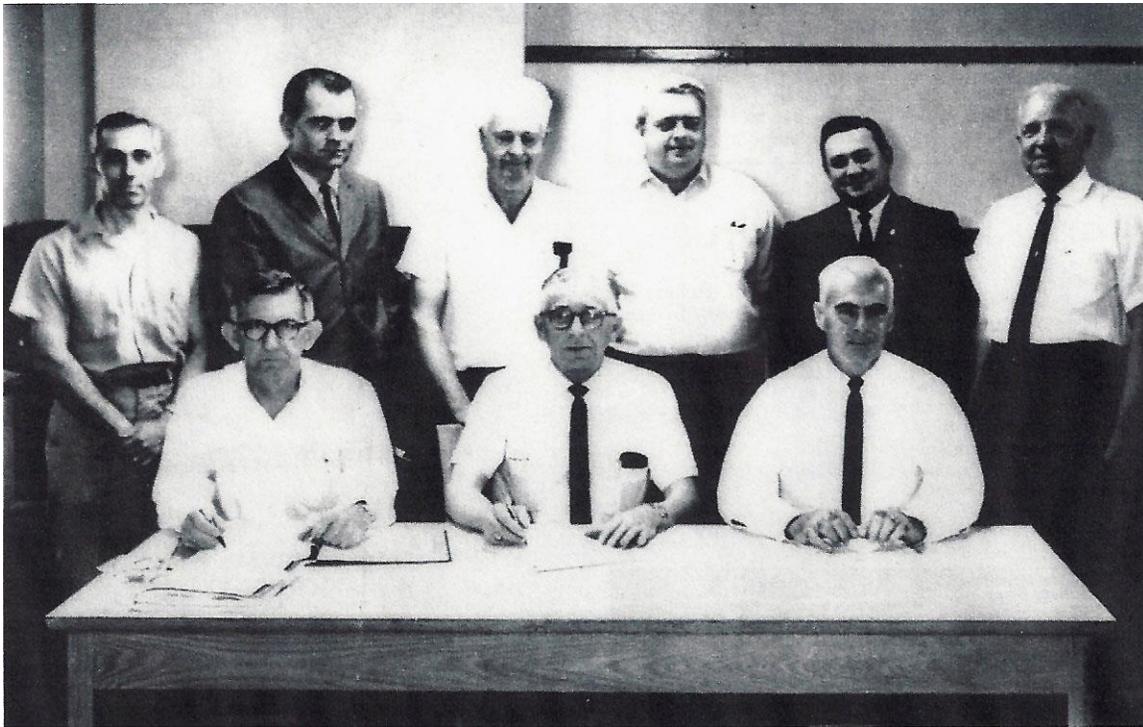


Figure 1- The first Sevierville Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors formed in 1963. Pictured from left to right are (seated) Lyle McNabb, Hugh Trotter, Ross Summitt; (standing) Jimmie Temple, Bo Roberts, E.W. Paine, Dr. John Hickey, Judge Ray Reagan and Charlie Bell.