

## Whitley County Chamber of Commerce History

The Whitley County Chamber of Commerce got its start in 1919 as **The Commercial Development Club** under the leadership of H. B. Clugston, its founder and first President. The organization continued under that name until July 1951 when the club reorganized and officially became **The Columbia City Chamber of Commerce** under the leadership of Paul Morsches. The newly organized Chamber of Commerce met quarterly, with their primary goal to attract tourism.

In July 1953 the Chamber was instrumental in establishing Chain O' Lakes State Park. To generate a better cash flow, they formed the "Eager Beavers Club" in which they were encouraged to pay their dues early in order to be considered an Eager Beaver. Membership soared to 165. By the end of the 1950's the Chamber was made up of 8 committees: The Youth Committee, the Fish Fry Committee, the Eager Beaver Committee, the High School Building Committee, and the Industrial Development Committee, the Recreation Committee, the Civic Affairs Committee, and the county's first economic development group. The Chamber started meeting monthly in 1958.

In 1962 the Chamber and the Lions Club worked together to get the Courthouse dome illuminated at night. At this point, the Chamber had 191 members and the Chamber name was officially changed to the **Columbia City Area Chamber of Commerce**. In 1976, the Community Facilities Committee raised money to build a medical building for four new doctors coming to town. In 1980, Dick Haworth was hired as executive director. He was the first to suggest the idea to honor a Citizen of the Year and Outstanding Service to the Community Award for Columbia City. At this time, the Chamber office was located on the second floor of City Hall before it was remodeled. Glenn Frank was executive director from 1986 through 1995. The Chamber moved from a two-room office on Main Street to the much more spacious office suite on South Chauncey across from the Court House. A visible presence downtown was still very important to the chamber board. A part of Glenn's job was to sell lots in the city's new industrial park. He was very instrumental in getting one of the lots designated as Indiana's only wetland property within city limits. The Peabody Library now has a wonderful view of these wetlands.

When Glenn Frank retired in 1995, the Chamber hired Dan Trenary as its executive director and Patricia Hatcher as its executive assistant. After six months Dan left and Pat Hatcher was then hired to be the executive director. Pat immediately started a mission to make the Chamber a more inviting place. Under her direction, membership grew to an all time high of 288 in September 2002. The Chamber was financially solid and is now the proud mortgage-holder of the beautiful historic house in which it is located at 201 N Line Street.

In September 2001, the Columbia City Area Chamber of Commerce expanded its mission to include the area of business and economic development as a prime function of the Chamber. The business sectors targeted for attention include retail, service and small commercial prospects.

In 2009 work began to investigate the prospect of becoming a county chamber, incorporating the communities of Churubusco, South Whitley and Larwill under the chamber umbrella. The chamber board voted to pursue this direction and in March of 2010 the name was once again changed. The **Whitley County Chamber of Commerce** reorganized with a new board of directors whose members were representative of the different communities. In August of 2010, Sara Lochner-Goff was hired as the President of the new chamber and to date is continuing to lead the organization as it redefines its mission and vision for the coming years.

