

Our Businesses

# An interesting week at Chamber of Commerce



**Michael Nicastro**  
Chamber  
Chatter

The past week here at the chamber and in the community was interesting to say the least. We started the week with a report on the downtown parking study. The chamber hosted the legislative breakfast and the first in a long list of candidates for governor and then we were busy with the ongoing busway/ rail saga at the Central Connecticut Regional Planning agency.

Here's a quick review of each.

**Parking study:** Regardless of the minimal nature of retail businesses

in the Main Street area, there are daytime parking challenges. The chamber's staff along with those of the United Way and Main Street Foundation fills our rear parking lot and many times staff will find they need to park in the former mall lot. Parking on the street is short term only as the street parking is restricted to one hour and is regularly enforced.

Things really get exciting when one of our organizations has a board meeting, committee meetings or seminars. These meetings can have 30 to 40 people in attendance at one time and then parking truly becomes a challenge. The hospital's lot above the rail trestle is always busy. So despite the fact the city center is not a bustling shopping district, it does clearly have parking challenges. As such a parking study was clearly needed to come up with some short term ideas to resolve these challenges. That said drawing conclusions on what may or may not happen with Depot Square is a bit premature, especially when it comes to

paying for parking.

That's not to say that metered or card-based parking may not some day be needed. But before we can get there we need Renaissance to develop and market a plan that can succeed. The last thing we should do is compromise that effort by adding hidden costs to potential tenants or developers before they can have an opportunity to create demand. One step at a time, folks.

**Legislative Breakfast:** On Tuesday, Jan. 26, the chamber hosted its annual Legislative Breakfast at the Clarion Hotel. As usual, we had a great turnout from membership to listen to the thoughts of a number of legislators from the communities that make up the chamber's region. This year, we had representatives William Hamzy, John Piscopo, Frank Nicastro and Chris Wright and Senator Tom Colapietro. Representative Betty Boukus did visit with us for a few minutes, but unfortunately had a family funeral to attend.

The feedback from

each of our legislative leaders was somber at best. In fact, based on the structural deficits that the state faces in 2012 and beyond, the last two years of 2009 and 2010 will look like the "good ole' days."

All of the usual issues popped up including the size and scope of government, unfunded mandates and taxes. Suffice to say that when the session gets started next week it won't be pretty.

**Gubernatorial Candidates:** The chamber kicked off our plan to meet with each of the candidates for governor on Thursday, Jan. 28 with former Stamford Mayor Dan Malloy. Feedback from the 30 or so members of the chamber's board and legislative committees had very good feedback on the former mayor and found the format to be an easy yet focused discussion of the issues. Certainly having the former chief elected official of a large and successful city was a great start and helped to set the bar for future discussions.

We want to thank Mr.

Malloy for taking the first slot and for spending time with the chamber by sharing his vision and opinions for the role of governor.

**Bus/ Rail:** The chamber was asked to present our research on the cost and viability of a rail option for mass transit to the transportation committee of the Central Connecticut Regional Planning Agency. As was reported in the paper, the proponents of the busway (predominantly New Britain and Connecticut Department of Transportation) view the rail option as a threat to the busway and an attempt stop the busway project outright.

The biggest defense of the busway is that it is so far along that it would be a waste to stop it now and that canceling the busway for a new rail option will extend the process another 10 years. Maybe it will and maybe it won't but someone is going to have to explain how spending nearly \$600 million for what amounts to a nine-mile road is more cost effective versus a rail line that

stretches 70-plus miles, services numerous cities, could expand the movement of freight and will not destroy important right of ways.

With the anemic \$40 million the state received for the New Haven - Springfield line, you would think our federal contingent would recognize that maybe we're using up a little too much of our "dry powder" on nine miles of cement— \$450 million of "dry powder" to be exact. Oh well, at least in this last meeting, we finally got ConnDOT to state for the record that the busway if built will without question eliminate the rail right of way from New Britain into Newington. Since this would be the most efficient and effective route for the rail option, it does confirm that we can't do both. I guess we will see what happens next.

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The Bristol Plaza Merchants Association held a Winter Raffle recently . From the left, Ray Gagnon, vice president of membership of the Central Connecticut Chambers of Commerce; Rusty Cleveland, Stop & Shop, manager of perishable goods; Marilyn Perzan, vice president of Webster Bank; and Mike Nicastro, president and CEO of the Central Connecticut Chambers of Commerce.

## Drawing winners announced

The Bristol Plaza Merchants Association recently held a raffle and the winners were as follows:

\$250 Gift Card at Stop & Shop: Barbara Morin - Bristol .

\$25 gift card - Dee 'S Cleaners & Laundry:

1. Samantha Rahberg - Bristol
2. Suzanne L'heureux - Bristol
3. Kim Pelletier - Burlington

Cocoon sunglasses From Harvey & Lewis: Linda Miller - Bristol

\$50 bond From Webster Bank: Annette Weeks

\$25 gift certificate -

Chamber Of Commerce certificates:

1. Kim Larkin - Bristol
2. Claudia Curtiss - Bristol

\$25 gift certification - Dress Barn: Gretchen Gavette - Harwinton

\$20 gift certificate -

- Bagels Plus & Deli
1. Deann Cyr - Bristol
  2. Lisa Smead - Bristol

\$25 gift certificate - Jackson Hewitt Tax Service

1. Sharon Block - Bristol
2. Mechelle Bensavage - Bristol

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