

Annual Meeting focuses on the Cost of Education



From Left: Bill Mathis, George Malek, Dona Bate, Richard Cate and John McClaughry

The topic of this year's Annual Meeting was "Controlling the Cost of Education". Panelists included William Mathis, Superintendent of RNESU, Richard Cate, Commissioner of Education and John McClaughry, President of Ethan Allen Institute who shared their ideas with a group of about 160 people.

The Chamber's public policy positions support regionalization of education and merging of schools as well as expansion of school choice.

Vermont Education Commissioner Richard Cate most closely reflects the Chamber long-standing positions. He has begun a series of meetings around the state for feedback on a proposal to cut the number of Vermont school districts from 284 to 63 and allowing more school choice.

John McClaughry of the Ethan Allen Institute suggests that consolidation won't work. The institute's report "Off the Rails," suggests that the squeeze on taxpayers will be crushing in the years ahead. McClaughry argues broad choice to public, private and charter schools as well as cyber-schools and internet classrooms, are needed to return educational affordability.

William Mathis says Vermont schools are terrific and relatively inexpensive – a bargain. Mathis, superintendent of the Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union, is a past president of the Vermont Superintendents' Association. He contends that Vermont schools are the envy of the nation, both in student-teacher ratios and in student test scores.



The Chamber's Annual Meeting drew 160 business leaders.

Central Vermont Chamber's Annual Meeting

The changing of the guard at the Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce took place January 30th at the organization's Annual Meeting where two-term president Dona Bate stepped aside. Treasurer William Cody was elected to succeed her.

During the meeting, Cody praised his predecessor for an extensive outreach to the community that brought 100 firms to Chamber membership during her two-year term. Cody said that effort will continue through an expanded Leadership Committee chaired by newly-elected vice president Joe Hayes.

Hayes, employed by Environmental Compliance Services of Richmond, held the post two years ago under Bate and played a key role in the outreach. The committee is currently composed of five directors and a dozen other members. "It's the largest the committee has ever been, and we're excited about what we can do in 2007," Hayes said. The chairman said he plans to add 70 new members this year alone.

Hayes noted, however, that he takes even greater pride in maintaining the Chamber's present membership base. "We retained more than 92 percent of our members last year, and we'd like to do it again."

Members are key to an effective organization, Cody explained. Membership fees underwrite the efforts of volunteers to boost the economy while more members provide a stronger voice in conversations with legislators and public officials. That voice will continue to address the region's need for more housing, regionalization of services, and sustainable tax policies, according to Rich Hansen of Union Institute. Hansen is the new chair of the Chamber's Planning & Development Committee. "The committee grapples with major economic issues and public policy, the chair said. Housing availability and affordability, along with the cost of education and health care, are among the region's most daunting issues.

Combining resources and regionalizing services are seen as key elements to coping with change and containing costs. The Chamber's public policy outline emphasizes economic development and regional services as vital to the region's quality of life. (www.central-vt.com/legis/pubpolicy.pdf)

A solid financial base is critical to the success of every organization, and Walter Oakes of Green Mountain Power succeeds Cody as treasurer. Oakes will seek to maintain Chamber momentum toward reducing debt. The organization incurred about \$150,000 more debt than planned when it expanded its



Bate thanks outgoing Director Todd Paton of Rock of Ages for his service.

Berlin offices in 2000, it has reduced debt significantly since. “Rental of meeting space has developed more rapidly than originally anticipated, and we’ve used that revenue judiciously,” Oakes explained. He noted that building revenues, not membership fees, are used to pay the mortgage.

Membership investments and program fees finance the organization. Rental of office space and conference rooms pay the building expenses, including indebtedness.

Cody, a financial advisor with UBS, praised the nominating committee chaired by Mike Donovan of Nassau Broadcasting. He said incoming directors Nancy Zorn of United Way, Mike Dellipriscoli of Sentinel Funds, Bonny Downing of Kelly Services, and Bob Lord Jr. of E.F. Wall and Associates are terrific, and the officers absolutely excellent. “Combining their talents with a board that has already been remarkably successful bodes well for the year ahead,” Cody remarked.

Bate’s responsibilities as past president will be less demanding than those of the past two years, and she will devote additional time and energy to her own consulting business, dbate speaking. Bate will, however, be available to assist and counsel the board as it moves forward.

Incoming directors and officers have large shoes to fill. Directors leaving the board are past president Brian Eagan, former President Lori Pinard, Scott Brooks and Todd Paton. Eagan, with Vermont Mutual Insurance, presided over a goal-setting retreat and vigilantly attacked the number one priority throughout his term, which was to pay down the Chamber’s debt. The second mortgage on Beaulieu Place was paid off during his tenure. Pinard, with Century 21 - Jack Associates, who was President in 1992 and returned for another directors term in 2004, has been a driving force in addressing the region’s housing crisis. Brooks, with TDS Telecom, was instrumental in increasing participation in the Chamber’s annual golf tournament, making the 2006 tourney the most successful in the organization’s history. Paton, with Rock of Ages Corporation, has been active with regional marketing and travel promotion. He led the effort to construct the new Rock of Ages Visitors Center, a tremendous asset to the area.

The strength of the Chamber is the combination of committed membership and quality volunteer leadership. These directors exemplify the talent and dedication of the board members who have served in the past and those who will be serving the membership in the year ahead.



Cody thanks Bate for her years of service.