

LAUREL BOARD OF TRADE
ANNUAL REPORT
TO
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING
DECEMBER 7, 2022

The Laurel Board of Trade is a membership organization focused on the support and growth of the business community. Our mission and purpose is to foster pride, esteem and self-respect in the Laurel business community and to encourage and promote the civic, patriotic and social responsibility of our business members toward our community. To accomplish this the LBOT offers many programs, events and services to its members, always looking to expand and improve on them and add others as need and interest become apparent.

Since January 2022 LBOT and its Board of Directors have:

- Finally, after much angst, including having to postpone it from May to October, hosted a successful Main Street Festival, the first since 2019
- Again, for the first time since 2019, LBOT hosted a fun-filled Trick or Treat on Main Street
- Restarted the About Town TV program where we interview member businesses to broadcast on Laurel TV and then store permanently on uTube and the LBOT website. Director Carla Conway is the Interview Host for the program
- The monthly Networking meetings on Zoom have become a looked-for staple by members and the general business community. The Networking

sessions have led to many businesses joining LBOT. The Networking Committee is led by Director Jody Broughton

- The LBOT has increased its visibility in the community by participating in the Juneteenth Day, Night Out Against Crime and Pride Day events. We set up a display table and shared member literature and business cards with event attendees. Again, this has brought in new members and made the general public aware of what we do. Thanks for staffing at these events go to Officers and Directors Jim Cross, Marilyn Johnson, John Donohue, Bob Mignon, Nadol Hishmeh, Carla Conway, Reshma Bourne, and Mike Leszcz
- The LBOT website continues to be a work in progress as we constantly strive to improve its effectiveness serving our members. We have added Announcements and About Town to the drop down menu under the NEWS tab, made the Home Page more organized, added member and community events to the Calendar and more.
- We have been able to convert vendor and parade applications for MSF to the website, including making payments. This alone has brought us into the 21st century. Membership applications and renewals are also handled on-line, again streamlining the process of welcoming members and maintaining an accurate membership list. This has been a full Board effort, everyone has had input and suggestions.
- Changes in the insurance market have upped our insurance needs so we now have to take out separate insurance policies for events such as MSF in addition to our regular liability and other policies. Director/Treasurer John Donohue, a former insurance agent, led the efforts to find the best policy at the best cost.

- Speaking of membership; 3 years ago our membership list was a work of fiction it was so inaccurate. Director/Treasurer John Donohue has been most responsible for tracking down actual members, weeding out those who were no longer in business or were inappropriately added. That left us with about 32 actual members. Today, December 7, 2022 our accurate membership stands at 115!
- Again, thanks to John Donohue, we have improved our use of Quickbooks so we have accurate information about income and expenses. John has also moved our Quickbooks program from the desktop version to the Cloud, another move to the 21st century
- We have met with and welcomed to the community our new landlords since the building our LBOT office is located in was sold to them earlier this year.
- LBOT received a \$30,000 EIDL loan in 2020. Payments on the loan began in June of 2022 and have been made monthly.
- LBOT received an ARPA grant from the City of Laurel and the monthly reports have been filed on time. The grant funds have been almost completely expended as of December 2022.
- These grants and loans have kept us financially viable since our main source of income, the Main Street Festival, was cancelled in 2020 and 2021 leaving us in dire financial straits.
- The monthly Newsletter continues to inform our members of all things business related from changes in rules, regulations, and programs to funding sources, grant opportunities, business support resources and so much more

- After years of effort, lots of walking and talking to Main Street Merchants, plotting and mapping, what we call the “Map Brochure” was finalized and printed. It is now available to all businesses on Main Street and beyond. This herculean task was led by Director Bob Mignon and his minions John Donohue, Carla Conway, Reshma Bourne, Nadol Hishmeh and special thanks to Sean LeVere who had the unenviable task of doing the graphics and having them printed
- A “rack card” to recruit members has been designed and printed thanks to Director Carla Conway. It is given to anyone who asks us about business in Laurel and is included in the Welcome Package each of you receive when you join or renew.
- Many of our business members have been promoted as our Featured Business of the Month on both the LBOT website and in the Newsletter.
- We have continued to strengthen our relationship with the Mayor/City Officials thru our monthly meetings, exchanging info, concerns, updates and issues of interest to the business and greater community. Part of that has also been welcoming Cesar Cucufate to the Economic Community Development department and working with him and his boss, Robert Love, to promote the Laurel Business community
- Our Administrative Assistant, Maureen Rogers, has been our resident whiz on Facebook as part of our Social Media Marketing efforts where we promote not only LBOT but our members and their events and triumphs.
- Because of issues, concerns and comments we have heard from our members, the LBOT Officers have arranged a Business Roundtable with the Laurel Business community and the Mayor and City officials to be held on

Wednesday, January 11, 2023 at 5:30 in the Council Chambers at City Hall.

This will be YOUR opportunity to speak directly to the City expressing your concerns and suggestions. Please mark your calendars and plan to be there

- In the past there was a feeling that LBOT was just an “ol’ boys club” and “they” just did what they wanted. The Board of Directors over the past 5 years have worked hard to overcome that misconception. We have done that thru the Networking sessions, the monthly Newsletter which includes a summary of our monthly meetings with the Mayor, keeping accurate Minutes of the BOD and Executive Committee meetings which are available on request, our openness to hearing what you say, good and bad, and trying to follow up on it, and the addition of an Annual Report to this General Membership meeting. We are trying to be as transparent and inclusive as possible
- And just today, the first tiny seeds for a Holiday Decorating Contest on Main Street have been planted to blossom during the Holiday season of 2023. That effort is being led by Directors Jody Broughton, Carla Conway and Nadol Hishmeh
- It’s been a busy year and I may have left something out

So, this is an overview of what LBOT has done over the past 12 months. A number of goals have been achieved, on-going programs continue to grow and strengthen and others are underway.

All of this has been accomplished by volunteers. Basically by 11 volunteer Directors, many of whom are also running their businesses as they share their skills and expertise with LBOT.

We have so many ideas, so many programs we'd like to run, so much more we'd like to do or be involved in but it comes down to manpower.

That leads to what are we looking forward to? What are the plans and goals for 2023? Glad you asked!

Certainly, we hope to continue the programs already in place. There is discussion about changing the term of office for a Director to two (2) years instead of the current one (1) year. This would require a change to the By-Laws. Another issue on the 2023 agenda is raising the annual dues, not by a lot, but enough to reflect the increased costs of running the organization. The annual dues have remained the same for at least sixteen (16) years. We feel that all the efforts of the past 4-5 years to bring LBOT into the 21st century, upgrade the organizational structure, provide value to members thru programs and services is a fair exchange for a \$25 increase. This does not require a change to the By-Laws but does require a vote by the full Board of Directors.

We need to look at additional ways of earning income. Although there had been rumblings in the past about this nothing concrete had been done. The COVID shut-down brought home that this is a vital issue if we are to continue to be a viable organization.

We want to dispel the myth that LBOT is only for Main Street. We have a good number of members who are not located on Main Street and hope to expand on that outreach in the coming year.

There are many other things we'd like to do in 2023 BUT the overall, overarching goal that will help make things happen is to reach out to each of you, LBOT members, to get involved. When you join or renew your membership I send you a Welcome package. In there is a list of current committees. Look at it. Find a

committee or two that matches your skills, interests and time schedule and volunteer for it. If you're not sure what the committee does, ask me or another Director, we'll be happy to answer your questions and get you involved.

Because, imagine...if 11 volunteers can accomplish all that has been accomplished over the past several years....what could LBOT accomplish with your involvement? Think about it, imagine it and call me.