

WESTFIELD AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PROVIDING FORUM FOR EXCHANGE OF IDEAS, INFORMATION FOR OVER FIFTY YEARS

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In April 1948, Harry S. Truman was in the White House preparing to run for reelection. The same year, *Gentlemen's Agreement* won the Oscar for Best Picture, the world was gearing up for its first Olympic Games since before World War II began to be held in London, and in Westfield, a group of business men and women voluntarily met for the first time and called themselves the Westfield Business Association (WBA).

The charter group of the WBA was made up of 29 business men and women. According to the piece of paper they signed, the aims and purposes of this organization were "to create greater opportunities for business within the town, to cooperate in every way to further the interests of legitimate business and to assist in making Westfield a better place in which to live."

At the first meeting, the WBA decided to meet monthly at the Rialto Theatre to discuss town-wide promotions and to address concerns. W. B. Cole of the Sports Center was named head of the new business group. The group's initial plans included acquiring town Christmas decorations, taking action on the parking problem and organizing special sales events. In May, the WBA managed its first retail promotion, "Westfield Gift Week," in which shoppers were awarded prizes at random for shopping in the downtown. Membership quickly rose to 80 members.

In 1957, the WBA incorporated itself as the Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce

(WACC). This was a significant step for the organization, as well as area businesses. It kept to



THE WESTFIELD RETAIL MERCHANTS ASSOCIATION WELCOMED HOME WORLD WAR I SOLDIERS WITH A PARADE DOWN EAST BROAD STREET (PHOTO CIRCA 1919).

The very existence of a local chamber of commerce is good for a business community. Recognition as a "Chamber of Commerce" provided the organization with "brand awareness" and an identity that helped it gain acceptance as business force.

Throughout the 1950s, the WACC con-

tinued to build its membership and serve as a voice for the business community. It kept to

its goal of introducing Christmas decorations by the late 1950s, by requesting that all downtown merchants pitch in to fund the cost. Soon after, many other familiar Westfield activities got their start, including the Town Tree Lighting Ceremony, Merchant Sale Days, also known as "Blue

Tag Sale Days," and the town-wide Flag Display.

Besides community outreach, the Chamber organized meetings for its members to discuss important business topics, such as taxes, health insurance and parking. It served as a source for information and as a representative of the business community to the local government and beyond.

In 1964, to assist with the lack of parking, the Chamber leased property on Central Avenue for consumers. They opened the lot in June. By November, they gave out an "award" or gift certificate for the 10,000th car to park in the lot.

Another of the Chamber's most notable triumphs came in 1982. The Town of Springfield planned to sell property in order to develop a shopping mall on Route 22. Such a mall would have overwhelmed Westfield with traffic and diverted shoppers away from the downtown. The Chamber organized its members in opposition to the proposal and saw it defeated by late 1982.

Then and now, the primary function of the Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce is to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and information among local business people in retail, service and the professions. The Chamber administers an on-going schedule of programs and activities designed to keep local business people in contact with one another, informed about important issues, and enthusiastic about business in Westfield.

The Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce is proud to represent over 300 mem-

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