

CHAMBER DIRECTOR CELEBRATES 20 YEARS WITH CHAMBER

Do you know a job description that includes dancing with Elvis, riding on a Circus elephant, throwing out the first pitch at a minor league game, singing with a big band, climbing a cell tower, holding an alligator, dressing up as Santa, serving as a guest checker at a local grocery store, changing your organization's name four times, building I DOOD IT booths, giving the high school commencement speech, singing the National Anthem at a race, riding on the back of a convertible in the homecoming parade and driving around town in a big green Chambermobile? The job description would be for the Executive Director of the Troy/Maryville/St. Jacob/Marine Chamber of Commerce.

The Chamber's Executive Director, Dawn Mushill, celebrated twenty years in her position on June 6, 2020. "It has been quite a ride. If anyone would have told me that the journey would include everything that I have done, I would have never believed them" said Mushill. The journey has indeed been a fun ride, with the Chamber membership growing from 111 members in 2000 to 500 members in 2019, and Mushill contributes much of the Chamber's success to her Board of Directors, Ambassadors, staff and members. "If you surround yourself with great people, great things will happen" said Mushill. She has literally met thousands of people in her time at the Chamber and has built long-term relationships with many of them.

The Chamber Presidents have been a very intricate part of the Chamber's success. Some of the past Chamber Presidents include Gerry Eckert, Jeff Maclin, Jean Myers, Dr. Mike Johnson, Chad Davis, Linda Manley (who is serving her second term as president in 2020) and several more names you might recognize.

Mushill talks with us about her experience with the Chamber and remembers applying for the position. "I remember applying for the position in February of 2000. I had left a previous position in January and was teaching full time for Southwestern Illinois College while I was looking for a job. We had moved from Granite City and built a house in Troy in February. I saw the job advertisement in the Times-Tribune and applied, at that time knowing absolutely no one in Troy. There were 78 applicants for the position so I didn't think I had a chance. In the first interview, I remember taking a list of suggestions that the Chamber could do. I explained that even if I didn't get the job, the Chamber could use the list.

On the second interview, I arrived with even more suggestions. And guess what – on the third interview, I brought even more. At the end of that interview, the committee noted they would let me know if I did or not get the job. At that point, Jeff Maclin said 'I like what this lady has to say – I would like to hear more' and I think my smile was as big as it had ever been.

After a couple of weeks following the third interview, I received a call from then Chamber President Gerry Eckert. He said the Board had met and they felt like the budget could provide me a little more money than they were expecting to spend. At that point, I had no idea how much the job paid, but of course in my head I am thinking Executive Director, \$40K, full benefits, etc. I remember Gerry's call like it was yesterday 'Dawn, we think it might be a stretch but we believe you could help us bring in new revenue so that we could sustain your salary. We would like to offer you \$9/hour at 30 hours a week' and I said without hesitation 'I will take it'.

That was a 55% pay cut from my previous job and zero benefits but I felt like this position just had so many possibilities. There was no looking back then. The funniest thing that happened was on my first day the three sets of ideas were on my desk. And yes, we have accomplished those and I still have the lists.

People ask me the best day of my Chamber life. That is a tough question because there were many but this one does stand out. Well, there was a week that sticks out – the week of our membership drive. In addition to the terrible week, that day I actually had several bad as moments (remember, no bad days, just bad moments – Mushill). The Chamber had a ChamberNET at Gateway Center. We had set up a celebration that we had reached our 500 member goal so we were going to have a separate celebration prior to ChamberNet.

The 500 member celebration was somewhat anticlimactic because my experience that entire week was the worst week of my Chamber career. We were working with a membership group and let's just say the facilitator demonstrated less than professional demeanor with myself and many others. The entire process was a disaster and he ended up leaving. By that time, we were all done with his negative attitude. He had pushed every single button I had – and more.

I had driven the Chambermobile to Fairview Heights to pick up some items for the celebration and had completely filled the Chambermobile with bags and boxes and balloons. I was driving along and boom – I had a flat tire. Apparently I had ran over a rather large nail. So there I am, in Fairview Heights, with all of the items for our event in the Chambermobile -- and my tire was flat. Like anyone would do, I called Travis! Travis was at Gateway Center (waiting on me) and left to go and get me and we pulled all of the items from the Chambermobile and put them in his truck. We left the Chambermobile in the parking lot and called for a tow truck to fix the tire.

On the way to Gateway Center, I remember that my anxiety was all over the place. We were going to be late. We still had to unload everything. I was still reeling from that entire week of frustration. It was just a sinking feeling I could not explain. In fact, I think I might have shed a tear or two but I made Travis swear he would not share - lol.

I remember arriving at Gateway Center and two of our Ambassadors were waiting outside with a cart so we could unload everything. I stopped in the restroom to “get it together”. When I walked into the room, there were people at the door, standing and applauding. I remember the feeling of just extreme joy. Those individuals knew I had struggled for the last week and the tire incident was just icing on the cake so they wanted to make sure I enjoyed the moment. I cried -- I had previously been touched by every single person in that room and at that moment, I knew I surrounded myself with the right people.

We had gathered to celebrate and give out awards but the truth was, I was given the best award of all. I remember standing there, just taking in the moment, and creating a memory in my brain that I would never forget. Everything ended up going very well and we were able to move past any negativity from the previous week.

Now let's talk about more positive moments. In 2003, we were hosting our Business After Hours in our Chamber office building. We were going through the usual networking, announcements and food. Mayor Tom Caraker asked to give a few announcements and we welcomed him. What I didn't know was that he was preparing to honor me with the Key to the City for the City of Troy. If you have seen the picture, you clearly are aware that I had absolutely NO idea. I remember getting in the car and calling my mom and dad and letting them know that I had just received the Key to the City. They were both so proud of me.

Now move forward to 2019. Same scenario -- we were hosting a Business After Hours at the City of Troy. We were going through the usual networking announcements and food. Mayor Adomite asked to give a few announcements and we welcomed him. What I didn't know was that he was preparing to honor me with a SECOND Key to the City of the Troy. I remember I was sitting up front in a

City Council member's chair and was totally clueless that he was talking about me. I called my mom when I got in the car and I remember she didn't really hear what I said and she said 'don't you have one' – yes mom, I do.

I truly believe you do not get where you are without a whole lot of support. I mentioned the Chamber Board, Ambassadors, staff and members above but they deserve to be mentioned again. In this job, the hours are all over the map. You might have events, meetings, ribbon cuttings, speaking opportunities or anything else that would not be between 9-5. My husband has been a trooper, understanding that sometimes I would need to miss dinner or be unable to attend a family event. He has also served as the Chamber's maintenance person, mover – twice and he even worked on those I DOOD IT booths I mentioned earlier.

My family has been so supportive as well. All of our members have met my mom. You know it is Chamber Auction time when you get the call from Sue. She has been known to tell stories about me playing violin when I was 3 ½. Surprisingly we always get a donation from the company being called. So, we let her call every year. The rest of my family and friends are the best. Just knowing you have a tribe supporting you is everything.

If you have a passion for your job, it is really never a job. I have truly enjoyed the last twenty years at the Troy/Maryville/St. Jacob/Marine Chamber of Commerce."

Mushill has an Associate Degree from Southwestern Illinois College, a Bachelor Degree from Southern Illinois University Carbondale and a dual Master's Degrees from Webster University. Mushill also owns her own company, Customer Service and Beyond and has published a book "Customer Service and Beyond ... it is all about the WOW". She is also a member of the National Speakers Association and has received numerous honors and awards from a variety of organizations and has been interviewed on many television and radio stations.

For more information about the Troy/Maryville/St. Jacob/Marine Chamber of Commerce, e-mail Mushill at dawn@troymaryvillecoc.com or visit the Chamber's website at www.troymaryvillecoc.com.