

Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce

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Come and join us!

Enclosed please find a membership packet for 2024. The cooperative support of our members has made our past success possible. Investing in the Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce means you understand the importance of supporting an organization that works solely to make your business more profitable, both for you and your community.

What does the Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce do? *Please take a minute, this is good information!*

We sell Ashland ... in so many ways. We target a diverse market segment of travelers and niche sports enthusiasts through multiple marketing promotions, events and programs.

Let's start with Tourism. Tourism revenue is our main source of revenue. Room Tax is charged to out-of-town visitors when they stay overnight in a hotel in the city of Ashland. The Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce is the Destination Marketing Organization or "DMO", and receives the state mandated 70% of the room tax and the City of Ashland receives 30%. The city can do whatever it chooses with the room tax dollars, but the DMO must spend our room tax on marketing and development of tourism. The Chamber fulfills the obligations of the room tax statute to its fullest with our organization expending more than 70% of our income on tourism and development. Tourism is the purest form of economic development. Tourism brings in fresh dollars into our community and these dollars find themselves used and re-used in several businesses that support tourism. Question of the year? Are people still traveling with this economy? In our area... Yes, people want to take the time, but because time is so important, they are more careful when making travel plans. They want to know that the place they have chosen is actually going to help create lasting memories for themselves and/or their families. When we plan events, we always have that in mind and cross-promote the many outdoor recreation opportunities, hometown businesses, unique dining, and the simple, but immense beauty of Lake Superior. We wish you could hear what we hear from traveler's and event goers about Ashland. Words that describe their visit or experience are: fun, quaint, friendly, beautiful, charming, vibrant, safe, serene, and the list goes on. Our main objective is to create awareness, so travelers know that Ashland exists. Our tourism figures have definitely increased exponentially over the last 10 years. Even in the last 5 years we have continued to see increased tourism figures. In order to continue to compete in this extremely competitive market, we have to continually plant the tourism seeds, and marketing our area is the most important role of our organization. We bring them here, and the rest pretty much takes care of itself. Okay, JoAnn is probably shaking her head right now, yes... There is a lot of work especially for events when they get here, but primarily, if we target the right markets with the right messaging, when the snow falls or the ice is thick, or the colors of fall are in their glory, or the fish are biting on the bay, or the waterfalls are bursting with fresh spring water from the winter thaw, people want to see & experience all of it. Our goals are to continue to Sell Ashland through the eyes of our travelers and our objectives are for them to: Spend money... Lots of it... Love it here... and choose to either move here, start a business, or become a repeat guest AND tell all of their friends!

Business retention is also our goal at the chamber whether that means business support through revolving loans, grant programs, support through collaboration with other entities city, county, regionally, state, and federally. Personally, I feel that business retention is critical and more important than recruitment. Don't misunderstand, recruitment is also incredibly important, BUT retaining the existing businesses we have means we keep those people that have invested in our community with their livelihoods, raising families, and re-investing in Ashland. The makeup in Ashland of locally owned businesses is very high. Because of those high numbers, we have been able to sustain the diversity of our business makeup because the investment comes from local owners and operators, not someone from out of state. That is so important, and very few communities are able to enjoy that makeup like we do. That is the reason, I choose to say that retention is on the forefront in our chamber.

I think everyone knows how much time and effort we spend with our Downtown, and this year, we are working with the City of Ashland to transition the existing City of Ashland Main Street Program into a Chamber/Main Street Program. Because of the existing support and promotion, we do for our downtown, this won't be a huge transition, but we will be able to take advantage of some really great programs that can help not only the small businesses that populate Main Street, but many of the other small businesses that make up our economy. It's tough running out there, and any help we can give, ideas that we can pass on, grants that we can apply for, resources that may be the key to an expansion, that's what we thrive on. Supporting all of our businesses is so important for all of us. It's crucial to this organization and we take it very seriously. We will be Ashland's best, loudest, cheerleaders, and we hope you all know that at the end of the day Ashland and the entire Chequamegon Bay is at the center of everything we do.

Thanks for letting me share with you some of the day-to-day thoughts of what your Chamber of Commerce is here to do for you and your business. My staff and I thank you for all of the support you give us as a chamber member, and more importantly, through your investment in Ashland and the Chequamegon Bay.

Promotions and Promotional Material

The Ashland County Visitor Guide acts as the fulfillment piece for our marketing and we contract with 5-Star Marketing, a brochure distribution company, to place brochures in several WI and MN markets in all four seasons. In addition, we will partner with Bayfield & Madeline Island to have a large presence in the Beloit Welcome Center. Along with the visitor guide, we also print the Ashland Mural Walk brochures, and the Ashland Shopping & Dining Guide. ALL retail businesses with a storefront are listed in the shopping and dining guide, however, Chamber Members are given the opportunity to have a description of their business in the guide.

We currently administer 9 websites and a Facebook Page – www.visitashland.com is our main website and the County’s website is www.travelashlandcounty.com. WhistleStop, Apostle Islands Inline, Chequamegon Bay Birding & Nature Festival, Ashland Bay Days, Chick-uamegon and Muralbrick Road correspond with our Chamber and County sites.

Along with promoting the abundance of outdoor activities and events, the Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce continues to promote and invest in the sustainability of our historic downtown. We create events throughout the year that invite both tourists and locals to visit Historic Main Street and see the many stores, restaurants, museum, and beautiful murals, that are primarily located in the 8-block Main Street Business District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places. **Did you know? We have over 30 retailers in our historic district! That doesn’t include Food & Beverage.** That number is so impressive to see in a small rural downtown.

Ashland is becoming more and more of a destination because of the promotions, events, recreational opportunities, tourism businesses and the recognition of being the Historic Mural Capital of Wisconsin. Ashland also accommodates sports enthusiasts from both Silent sports groups and Motorized sports groups. The Ashland Chamber pushes messaging through a number of billboards in the Minneapolis, Duluth, and Superior areas. We also market through digital, social media, and have a large presence on television. Linear television through cable networks continues to see enormous changes. The adoption of streaming platforms continues to rise above the monopoly that broadcast and cable networks have had on consumers. It’s absolutely crazy keeping up with these changes. It’s exiting, but a little messy! We are very choosy on when we run our schedules for cable and network television, while expanding our digital footprint. Streaming has been on the forefront as well as we try and figure out how conversion works with streaming. Simply put, how do you really know if the customer is receiving the messages. Again, it’s a little messy, but the outcomes can be extremely plentiful in reaching potential travelers and customers. We continue to market through radio... (You can’t pause radio for commercials!) and we find in some demographics, print media is still pretty strong, with a market that has more ability for discretionary spending. Even so, consumer spending has remained strong despite the double whammy of rising interest rates and inflation. That simply means we continue to aggressively market this area to potential customers.

Thank you for partnering with us through your membership, volunteerism, sponsorship, and investment in Ashland*The Heart of Chequamegon Bay.* We know you have already found yourself *next to the water!*

Please know that our priority is to sell Ashland and we will fervently continue to sell Ashland!!

Thank you for your continued support of the Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce

The Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce offers so much to our members. Please review the many chamber benefits listed below. The Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce is a full-time, fully-staffed Chamber. The Board of Directors is dedicated to keeping you informed on programs and issues that are important to your business, community, and the region.

The Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce Mission Statement: **“We Sell Ashland”**

The Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce exists to identify, highlight and promote Ashland and the surrounding area. We accomplish this through:

Sponsoring special events and promotions designed to emphasize the diverse recreational, educational and tourism opportunities in our area.

Supporting a solid diversified economic base – one that ensures a healthy business climate and a prosperous, progressive community.

Collaborating with public and private sectors aimed at improving the quality of life in the Ashland area.

Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce Benefits

Business After Hours

A great way to showcase your business for any reason. Use this venue as a way to thank the business community, introduce new management, or promote a new business. The Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce is a partner with you in this event to create awareness of your business to our membership.

Business Retention and Expansion

The Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce is committed to growing the Ashland economy and consistently looks for programs that will help grow and sustain our economic condition. The Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce focuses on promoting the Ashland area in the fields of marketing, financial opportunities, and expansion of our business community. The Chamber Revolving Loan Fund compliments already existing programs available through the Ashland Area Development Corporation. Loans are available from \$5,000-\$15,000 and job quality is considered equal to job creation, meaning an independent business owner equates to one job created.

Chamber Dollars - Service, professional, retail, food, beverage, lodging ... it doesn't matter.

The Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce distributes over \$65,000 a year in Chamber Dollars. Chamber Dollars are spent at member businesses and redeemable for full value from the Chamber. This is an excellent way to **promote local spending**. Your name will appear on the Gift Certificate List, which is enclosed with each Chamber Dollar sale. **Chamber Dollars promote local spending!!**

Weekly E-Blasts...and more if needed to communicate with our Chamber Member Businesses.

Weekly E-Blasts highlights topics most pertinent to our Chamber and its members. A great place to send in **FREE** news tidbits about your business under "Business News." (Some restrictions apply.)

Website Listing

As a membership benefit, all members receive a **FREE** listing and to their website on the Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce website. Our website allows you the opportunity to have up to 4 images on your page and to have a map available to your business through Google maps. Websites, Facebook accounts and e-mail addresses are highlighted, allowing visitors to link directly to your site. We also highlight the Business of the Week on our website and our Facebook page in conjunction with the radio promotion. **Our website is another great way to promote our area and another excellent, efficient way to promote your business:** www.visitashland.com (Please check your page on our website.)

Bulk Mailing Permit

Direct mail to potential customers is one of the best forms of advertising. The Chamber has a bulk mailing permit, which is available to our members for use **FREE** on large mailings of 200 or more. Using the permit can save up to .18 per piece. Please call our office for more information. New changes in 2024.

Mailing Lists

Our membership list is available **ONLY** to members at no cost. (Mailing labels are available at a charge of \$15.)

Display your Brochures

Promote your business by displaying your brochures in our reception area racks.

The Chamber Map

City of Ashland maps are available at the Chamber office free of charge to members.

Visitor Guide

Ashland County Area Activity & Visitor Guides are available free of charge. Ask about advertising opportunities in the visitor guide. 35,000 copies are printed and the guide is the main fulfillment piece for the Ashland County marketing Campaign.

The Experience/Ashland Shopping & Dining Guide

Retail storefront and dining members receive a **FREE** listing and description in the area Shopping & Dining Guide, which is distributed throughout the community, in locations such as the hospital and clinics, as well as to the many visitors who travel to our area. Another **FREE** advertising opportunity for your business.

Business Directory

The Chamber Business Directory lists **all** Chamber Member businesses with a description, another **FREE** advertising opportunity.

Wedding Planner Brochure

A brochure listing Chamber Member business to help couples make plans for their wedding. This is also a great piece to promote larger meeting spaces and businesses that cater food and beverage.

Business Recruitment Tours

We offer personal tours for business recruitment. Whether a new physician or C.E.O. of a company, we will take the potential candidate on a guided tour through the area and familiarize them with our community with excitement and professionalism.

Business Referral System

Chamber staff gives referrals to Chamber businesses in response to the thousands of telephones, personal, and written inquiries each year.

Weekly Business Spotlight – “Business of the Week”

A 30-second commercial spot is created by Heartland Communications Group and played throughout the week. Businesses are drawn from our pool of members. This is an excellent way of creating awareness for our business and is heard throughout the region. An excellent value of over \$200.00 for **FREE**. The Ashland Chamber partners with Heartland Communications to feature 52 businesses throughout the year.

Ribbon Cuttings/Grand Openings/Ambassadors

New and existing businesses receive ribbon-cutting photo opportunities and community-wide exposure for grand openings, groundbreaking ceremonies or special anniversaries. Ambassadors get a chance to see new businesses. Businesses get the chance to receive great **FREE** publicity for new things happening in their business.

Relocation Packets

Relocation packets include specific information about the community and Chamber members.

Ashland County Affiliation

The Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce is the administrator for the Ashland County tourism budget. The website www.travelashlandcounty.com is provided by the county and accessed by thousands of interested persons.

Northwest Wisconsin Regional Tourism

The Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce continues to partner with the Northwest Wisconsin division of the state’s International Trade, Business and Economic Development Council (ITBEC) to promote tourism opportunities within our region. We market to all segments from silent to motorized sports and with a focus on the many trail systems throughout northwest Wisconsin. Check out the website at www.northwestwisconsin.com.

Board Representation

Mary McPhetridge was appointed in to a 2nd term on the **Governor’s Council on Tourism**. In addition, Mary is the Past President of the **Wisconsin Downtown Action Council**. A Statewide Wisconsin Downtown Advocacy Organization. She also sits on the Board of Directors of the Wisconsin Chambers of Commerce Executives advisory board.

Harbor Towns

Wisconsin Harbor Towns Association is a partnership of 18 Wisconsin Great Lakes harbor communities, formed to enhance their image and develop economic impact by promoting tourism through water-based, land and cruise ship recreation to the Wisconsin Harbor Towns. www.wisconsinharbortowns.net.

Your investment helps the Chamber support a variety of Chamber-sponsored functions and events in the community. The Chamber also works with other local organizations on community issues and acts as the destination and tourism liaison for Ashland and the surrounding area. Our office receives hundreds of phone calls pertaining to area information and destination services. **Chamber members are always promoted and referred over non-members.**

As you can see, there are many great benefits that come with your membership.

Our membership dues **continue** to remain among the **lowest** in the region. We will continue to support and promote our Chamber members statewide, regionally, countywide and locally.

If you have any questions about our dues, the direction of the Chamber, or any of our programs and projects, please feel free to give us a call. We hope you will see that membership in the Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce is an excellent investment in your business and your community. We welcome you!

Please return with:

- **Membership Application**
- **Website form**
- **Payment of dues**

Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce staff:

Executive Director – Mary McPhetridge
Office Manager – JoAnn Erickson
Customer Service Specialist – Heidi Hicks

Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors:

Executive Board Members:

John Beirl, Northern State Bank, President
Rick Forsythe, Northern Clearing, President Elect
Laurie Gregor – Choice Title
Matt Crowell – Chippewa Valley Bank

At-Large Members:

Paul Bretting, C.G. Bretting Manufacturing
Todd Chingo, AmericInn Conference Center
Lisa Gervais, Cobblestone Inn & Suites
Mari Kay-Nabozny, Northwest Workforce Investment Board
Bill Kacvinsky, Ashland Construction
Jessica Nuutinen, Tamarack Health - Ashland Medical Center
Tim King, Quality Inn
Wendy Phillips, Best Western/Hotel Chequamegon

Ex Officio Members:

Brant Kucera, City of Ashland
Carver Harries, Ashland Area Development Corporation

**Annual & Special events promoted, sponsored and/or coordinated
By the Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce:**

- *Tamarack Health WhistleStop Marathon/Half-Marathon/5K/10K*
- *Apostle Islands Inline Marathon, ALMT Half-Marathon & MadFun Skate*
- *Ashland Field Day Golf Outing*
- *Northern Wisconsin's Largest House to House Garage Sale*
- *Chequamegon Bay Birding & Nature Festival*
- *Ashland Bay Days Festival*
- *Customer Appreciation Day*
- *Garland City of the North Christmas Parade*
- *4th of July Parade*
- *Girls' Night Out*
- *Witches' Night Out*
- *Ashland Easter Egg Hunt*
- *Book Across the Bay*
- *Chamber Night at ABC Raceway*
- *Trolley Tours*
- *No Snow Snowman & Scarecrow Contests*
- *Ashland Mural Fest & Car Show*
- *Chick-uamegon Women's 1-mile/5K/10K*
- *Shop Small Win Big Promotion*
- *Other Christmas Promotions*