

Economic Development Report



# Q1 By the Numbers

**Connect Free Memberships** - **93** Fox Cities small businesses joined the Chamber at its Connect Free level in Q1. To date, 1,118 small businesses have taken advantage of this unique free membership opportunity. Overall, the Chamber has 1,987+ members.

**YP Memberships** - Pulse Young Professionals saw continued membership growth in Q1. We welcomed **11** new Pulse members, bringing us to a total of 872 active members. Throughout Q1 Pulse held programs for young professionals that included Coffee & Conversation, Cocktails and Conversation, and partnered with Green Bay YPs for a Cross-City Speed Networking event. .

**Pulse Champions** - We continue to see strong support from our local employers who recognize the impact young professionals have on their workplace and within the Fox Cities community. As of Q1, **11** Fox Cities businesses participated as Champions of Young Professionals. By doing so, they're demonstrating their commitment to recruitment, retention, and overall development of their young team members.

**Employee Friendly Workplace (EFW)** - **Baisch Engineering** and **Ornuo Ingredients North America** celebrated 4 years as a gold level employee friendly workplace. **Ducommun** celebrated 3 years as a gold level employee friendly. The **Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region** celebrated moving from silver to gold level, driven by key investments in their workplace culture and overall benefits.

**Business Support** - The Chamber held Business After Hours networking events at three member businesses in the first quarter, providing the opportunity to showcase them: **Double Tree by Hilton Neenah, Slick**

**Mimic's Board & Card Games Shoppe,** and **Odyssey Climbing and Fitness.** First quarter milestone celebrations included: ribbon cutting and grand opening of **Integrated Sensory Health and Wellness Center,** ribbon cutting and grand re-opening of **Honey Baked Ham,** and ribbon cutting for **Family Care of the Fox Cities'** 25th anniversary.

**BRE Efforts:** Chamber staff met with **42** Fox Cities businesses in the first quarter of 2026 for business retention & expansion visits. Topics of discussion included: temporary road signage due to construction, seasonal employment, staffing, business expansion planning, renovation, and relocation.

**Media partnership supports local businesses:** The Chamber featured the following members on **WFRV-TV Local 5 Live** in Q1: **Best Western Bridgewood Resort, Team WinnebagoLand, Appleton International Airport, and Kaukauna High School.** We also highlighted results of our annual economic outlook survey as well as businesses who recently held ribbon cuttings.



**Questions or interested in setting up a FREE Business Retention & Expansion consultation?**

Contact Jack Herkowski, Manager of Economic Development, Fox Cities Chamber: [jherkowski@foxcc.net](mailto:jherkowski@foxcc.net)

**Find us online:**  
[FoxCitiesChamber.com](http://FoxCitiesChamber.com)

# Q1 Events & Programs

## Chamber Leadership Program updates

**Leadership Fox Cities** is approaching the class of 2026, graduation on May 19. There will be 43 graduates celebrating at Butte des Morts Country Club along with many guests and alumni. Applications for the class of 2027 on May 1.

**LFC alumni** will be receiving a survey regarding an LFC 2.0 program. The LFC alumni started hosting Coffee Hours every other month at 8:00 a.m.

**Leader Lab** launched 2026 with a cohort of 12 professionals representing diverse roles, including quality control inspector, HR manager, branch manager, senior analyst, wellness director, and underwriter. Participants spanned communities across the Fox Cities region, including Kaukauna, Appleton, Brillion, Grand Chute, and Greenville. The program achieved an impressive Net Promoter Score (NPS\*) of 88.

## Business/school alliance focuses on strategy

The **Emerging Talent Alliance** advanced workforce development efforts in Q1 through strategic collaboration and new program initiatives. With guidance from the Alliance, a hiring event for high school juniors and seniors was launched as an extension of the Career Expo, creating earlier connections between students and employers.

The second **Innovate for Tomorrow** session welcomed 34 attendees and highlighted successful business and education partnerships across the Fox Cities. Hosted by **Fox Valley Technical College**, the session earned a strong NPS\* of 82. The Alliance continues to play a key role in strengthening the region's future talent pipeline.

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*An NPS (Net Promoter Score) uses a simple formula to measure customer loyalty by asking one key question: "How likely are you to recommend (this event) to others?" on a scale of 0-10. It's a worldwide tool for measuring customer satisfaction and loyalty. A score above 0 is considered positive; 0-30 is good; 31-69 is great; and 70+ is world class.*

## Attendees rank Q4 Fox Talks high

Nearly 30 people attended the February 2026 **Fox Talk, How to Create More Happiness in Your Life**. Presenter Kari Meixl, MBA, Director of Business & Industry Services, Fox Valley Technical College, led a discussion focused on the 4 Gs of Happiness and earned achieved a perfect 100 NPS\* from attendees.

## Signature events start the year strong

Chamber events delivered a strong start to 2026 with three high-impact programs that engaged business and community leaders. **Celebrate** welcomed 340 attendees and honored five Lifetime Achievement Award recipients, earning an NPS of 67. Congratulations to the award recipients:

- Athena Award - **Dawn Ruchala, U.S. Venture.**
- Gus A. Zuehlke Distinguished Service Award – **Kim Underhill, Executive Coach**
- Joyce Bytof Exceptional Mentor Award - **Sharon Hulce, Employment Resource Group Inc.**
- Business Leader Hall of Fame - **Rich Batley, RB Hospitality**
- Legacy Award - **John F. Bergstrom, Bergstrom Automotive**

The **Economic Outlook Breakfast** brought in 350 attendees and provided key regional insights, achieving an NPS\* of 76. The **Excellence in Education Awards** concluded the quarter with 190 attendees and an exceptional NPS\* of 92, recognizing outstanding educators across the region. These programs continue to drive engagement, celebrate excellence, and support informed leadership throughout the Fox Cities.



# Chamber Strategic Updates

## Fox Cities leadership delegation explores Charleston economy

In March, Fox Cities leaders traveled to Charleston as part of the Chamber's **Leadership Exchange and Benchmarking Tour** to study how a high-growth, peer region has aligned public and private leadership around a shared economic vision.

What emerged was not a single strategy, but a disciplined, long-term commitment to regional collaboration that leverages tourism, aerospace, infrastructure, and quality-of-place investments to drive sustained growth.

The key takeaway for leaders was clear: competitiveness is defined at the regional level, and success is driven by consistent vision, cross-sector alignment, and a willingness to invest in core assets.



Charleston Leadership Exchange  
Presented by Miron

The group continues to meet to further strengthen alignment around our own regional strategy and continue building on the assets we already have to compete at the next level.

## Huntsville, AL selected as site of next Leadership Exchange

Join us February 16 - 18, 2027 for our next Leadership Exchange & Benchmarking Tour. Huntsville, Alabama (Rocket City) is a fast-growing innovation hub driven by aerospace, technology, and advanced manufacturing. It offers powerful lessons in economic growth, talent attraction, and regional success. Why Huntsville?

The city is a national and innovative leader in key industries.

- Huntsville has seen rapid population and job growth driven by high-skill industries.
- The community has a highly educated workforce and strong talent attraction strategies.
- Collaboration between business, government, and education partners has been key in their success.
- They have a proven model for balancing economic growth with quality of place and livability.

[Click here to join the list and be notified when registration opens.](#)

## Chambers from around the country meet in Appleton to learn and share

The Fox Cities Chamber was selected to host the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (ACCE) Major Cities Council in March. The Council is a national network of executives from chambers across the country. The group meets regularly to share ideas, discuss emerging challenges, and explore innovative strategies that strengthen regional economies. In addition to spotlighting our work, attendees engaged in conversations around workforce, economic development, talent attraction, and the evolving role of chambers in driving community impact.

