



Recently, two guest columns in the Herald-Tribune were devoted to the Venice area business community and our area retirees. While the first, penned by former Herald Tribune publisher Kathy Silverberg, was thoughtful and on-point, the headline which it ran under was unfortunate. "Retirees vs. business in Venice" was very misleading and not at all descriptive of the article, which touched on government issues in a largely retired community.

The second guest column was in response to Ms. Silverberg and submitted by Ed Martin. The writer attempts to disparage the Venice Area Chamber of Commerce (VACC) by trying to paint this business and community resource as being anti-retiree. He also attempts to meld the Chamber with a local PAC, Citizens for Quality Government (CQG).

With over 1100 members, the VACC has crossover members with CQG, but not any more than we do with our local churches, nonprofit organizations and AARP for that matter. Furthermore, to imply that the Chamber is controlled by anyone other than our current Board of Directors and Chamber staff is false.

While Mr. Martin is welcome to his misconceived beliefs, I feel the need to respond with some facts regarding the Venice Area Chamber, now in its 86<sup>th</sup> year, and our retirement community.

As representatives of the business community in our area, we absolutely and unequivocally, support, love, and rely on our retirement community. Past and current retirees have helped shape the Venice area that the Chamber promotes to new and future retirees. Retirees are critical to the economic, social and philanthropic health of our area. Simply put: business could not exist without a steady flow of retirees to our community.

The VACC relies on retirees to staff our Visitors Center, providing information to our guests, new residents and the general community. We could not provide this free service without the 24 senior volunteers who devote 4 hours per week helping us. This past month, our longest term senior volunteer retired from active duty after 25+ years of service and at the age of 99 ½!

Within the Chamber, we recognize the value of retirees by our longstanding and very active Senior Outreach Committee. This committee is charged with connecting seniors to the business community. One of their activities, graciously supported through a grant from the Venice Lions Club, provides interested businesses with Senior Sensitivity Training (SST). SST teaches companies how the aging process impacts a business relationship, helping employees understand what it is like to suffer decreased eyesight as well as hearing and touch sensitivity.

Annually, Senior Outreach sponsors Intergenerational Field Days, creating interaction between the very young and the very elderly as they spend time with each other. This committee also helps low-income seniors unable to leave their homes by providing gift boxes of needed items annually at Christmas time. This year over 150 boxes were delivered thanks to this committee and the businesses that contributed items.

Fortunately Ed Martin's rhetoric is representative of only a small minority of our community and the VACC's actions contradict it. The Chamber understands that a successful community is one that appreciates the symbiotic relationship of businesses and residents. The Chamber will continue to provide events and services to bring our community together. We have all moved here or remained here because the Chamber and its members have been part of developing this community for the past 86 years.

The mission of the Venice Area Chamber of Commerce is "promoting business growth and success." We understand completely that we cannot achieve this without our retirement community.

To paint any other picture is simply wrong, or meant to mislead.

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