

## Bozeman's 160th Anniversary: **How Are Long-Standing Businesses & Chamber of Commerce Moving Forward?**

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Amidst the Rocky mountains and nestled south of the Bridger Range, its downtown offers casual and fine dining restaurants, art galleries, boutiques, and other retail shops, many of which supply the sporting goods for the area's many activities.

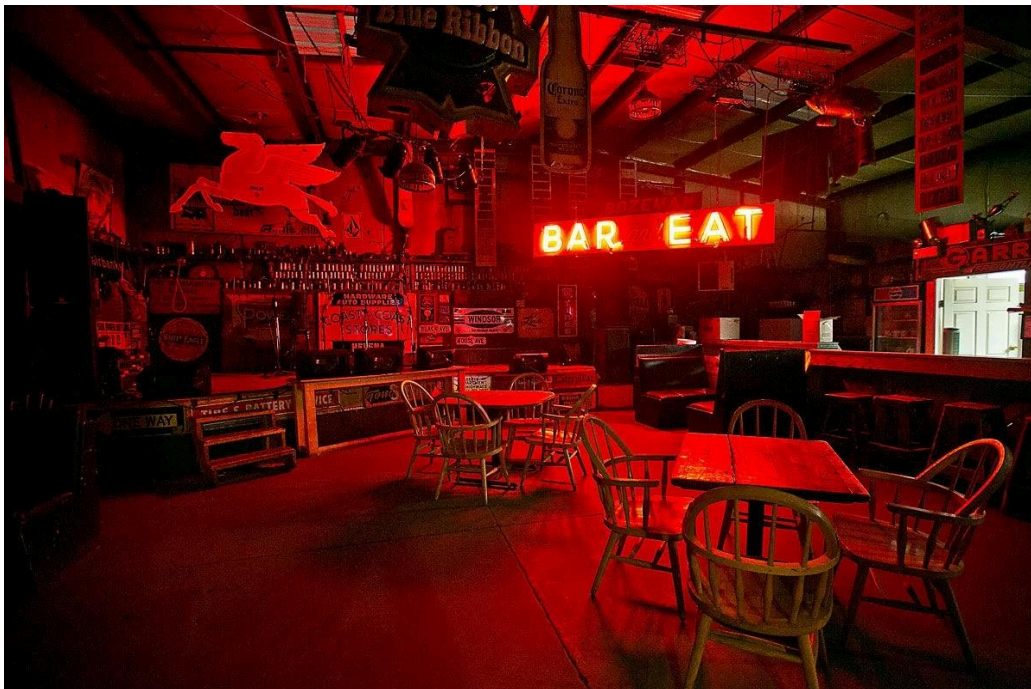
Many of its corners have taken on construction plans for new apartment buildings and businesses. Vintage neon signs hang off businesses' older brick faces that still line the downtown main street scene. This is Bozeman.

As the city approaches its 160th anniversary, Bozeman's population continues to grow, along with new establishments and residencies. However, the city's long-standing businesses remain consistent in their notable, traditional ways of business, as much as possible.

Bozeman's population grows at a [rate of 2.19% annually](#). Through rapid change, local small businesses lean on each other, the people of Bozeman, and the Bozeman Area Chamber of Commerce (BACC). How can the fourth largest city in the state of Montana maintain its reliance on "supporting local," and encouraging both newer and long-standing businesses, while still following through with its expansion plans?

Bill Frye and his brother, Don Frye, co-own The Filling Station and The Haufbrau, both local long-standing bars known for their nightly live music performances. The bars have identifiable, unique atmospheres with walls covered in old photos, notes, stickers and any other relics that have remained on their walls since their openings. Both bars share traditional layouts of a small performing area with casual seating to watch from, where guests can chat, order food and drink, and enjoy the performers. These bars remain a couple among Bozeman's oldest, still successful establishments.

Inside The Filling Station, located on 2005 North Rouse Avenue



Bill Frye explained, in an interview, that their mother and father, Don Frye, Sr. opened The Haufbrau in 1969, and The Filling station in 1975. When Don Frye, Sr. passed away in 2016, the two brothers officially took over the business having been involved in its running for the majority of their lives already.

Knowing that the bars hold reputations for their traditional bar settings and covered walls of old memories, the brothers strive to maintain their founding principles even in a rapidly changing city. “We’re trying as much as possible not to make major sweeping changes,” Frye said, as “everything else in Bozeman has already done that.”

In his interview, Frye explained that he and his brother want to maintain the “family community center” of The Filling Station and The Haufbrau, as that was “always dad’s goal.”

The [BACC](#) defines its mission statement as, “representing its membership” and “advocates economic vitality, high quality of life and preservation of the free enterprise system through leadership, vision, and communication.”

There is a disparity between supporting the interests of the business community versus only supporting those who are members. How is leadership defined in the climate of the city’s best economic and financially prospering interests to expand, while remaining loyal to the BACC’s mission statement?

Bozeman’s population has [increased by more than 50% since 2010](#), and is considered one of the country’s fastest growing micropolitan areas.

It’s now being regarded as [“Boze-Angelos” by some](#) for its high prices, being a micropolitan area, and its “trendy” and “aesthetic” coffee shops, restaurants, and retailers.

[Rosa's Pizza](#) is an MSU student favorite for its free delivery service, and affordable dining out option. Only a 5 minute walk from campus, Rosa's Pizza is located at 123 West Kagy Boulevard. The community go-to for fundraisers at the local schools and hospitals was founded in 1986, and is one of the longest-standing small businesses in Bozeman. Its owner, Dorothy Kincaid, spoke in an interview about how Bozeman's increasing population, and the progression of the city's way of life, compared to Montana's other old towns, is the cause of a few challenges to her business.

"No one does traditional advertising any more," Kincaid said, "everything is online, the phone books don't work anymore." Kincaid explained it makes conducting her business difficult in such a climate, especially for "someone who isn't used to that."

Another big challenge, Kincaid mentioned, is employee hire, especially since the influx of unemployment payments since the Covid-19 pandemic. People "have stopped working because unemployment pays more money than their wage."

Alternatively, when asked about any of the businesses' struggles in recent years, Frye accredited The Filling Station and The Haufbrau's main challenges to taxes, that property taxes and insurance costs have gone up, specifically mentioning liquor liability insurance costs.

While Kincaid still puts out box toppers and coupons, and relies on her long-standing employees, she would like to put out other advertising, but it's more expensive than it used to be. However,

in regard to the BACC, Kincaid said, “the Chamber does support us, when new people come in, they give them our contact.”

Frye, too, mentioned that his and his brothers’ sister locations have benefited from their long-standing membership with the BACC, since their father’s founding of The Haufbrau.

Along with the BACC, Kincaid said the people of Bozeman support Rosa’s, as Kincaid supports them, “I do a lot of giving to the community,” referring to the schools, MSU’s individual departments, the Lions Club for children with cancer, and discounts for nurses and doctor’s helpers to fundraise.

Frye had also mentioned that, “the whole community sort of supports you one way or another, we can’t do without them.”

Despite the BACC and community’s support of Rosa’s Pizza, Kincaid said the city “limits businesses in Bozeman,” said Kincaid, before explaining sign and visual appearance limitations for the city’s businesses. “They [the city of Bozeman] want their fingers in it and want businesses to do certain things, to show their authority.”

Authoritative intervention has been a concern for Bozeman small businesses in the past as well.

The MSU Renne Library archived a May 1986 Bozeman Daily Chronicle article, written by Terry Sacks, that covers “Small businesses call for end to government competition.”

“If 160 owners of Montana small businesses can agree on anything, they generally agreed at a conference Tuesday that the government should quit competing with them,” Sacks wrote.

The conference was intended to hear the concerns of small businesses and the outcome was the following three recommendations; that tax-exempt organizations should not compete with private firms, that local offices of government agencies should purchase from local suppliers, and that Congress pass a law to prohibit the federal government from competing with the private sector.

At the end of her interview, Kincaid recalled that she’s noticed other businesses struggle to keep up with the city’s regulations, and expansions. “There’s been a lot of businesses that have gone out of business,” Kincaid said, “sometimes when things get tough, it's tempting.”

Despite Kincaid’s positive words for the BACC, it has not, however, always received such a high regard. Another archived Bozeman Daily Chronicle article that was published January 22 of 1974, was titled “Author comes to attack, not praise in address of Chamber of Commerce.” Montana author A.B. Guthrie was selected to speak at the annual BACC banquet, where it was noted he had prepared a “two-pronged attack on Montana business organizations.”

“I recognize the problems businessmen face, but I cannot be uncritical,” Guthrie explained.

“Local organizations like yours vocally contend they are not involved in politics – but the rude fact remains that commerce and politics are inseparable.”

The Gallatin Development Corporation faced less scrutiny, evidently by a letter to a fellow chamber member, dated October of 1985. The letter cataloged the achievements of the corporation for the previous few months as having; developed and launched the Bozeman Certified Cities Program, more than 50 business persons, local officials, and MSU representatives were directly participating in that year's-long development planning process, supported MSU technology park, and handled nearly 30 inquiries from industrial prospects interested in relocating to the Bozeman area.

“As the above activities reflect, the Gallatin Development Corporation is implementing an ambitious work plan, aimed at creating new jobs and diversifying the economic base of Gallatin County,” the letter stated, “at the same time, we have doubled our membership.”

In the rising light of this Gallatin region's successful growth, Montana soon dipped in the following year. Steve Shirley's Gazette Helena Bureau article, published on June 12 of 1986 titled “Business rank in state sinks.”

Shirley detailed that Montana had “tumbled from 24th to 46th in the latest of the 48 contiguous states' manufacturing climates.”

As a result, the BACC worked even the smallest of opportunities to boost Bozeman's economy. One Bozeman Daily Chronicle article, by Gail Schontzler, was published May of 1986 outlining “Unsuspecting tourists get city's red carpet treatment.”





Bozeman Daily Chronicle article, May 25, 1986

The BACC was trying to attract new people, residents and tourists to Bozeman, to boost its hospitality economy. The hospitality industry is known as one of the easier and faster sectors to boost a local economy. This “red carpet treatment” entailed partnerships with local establishments to provide generous hospitality to the couple while staying in Bozeman.

With the tumbling of the state’s manufacturing rating, the Bozeman business climate was considered “over-retailed” as covered in Robert Ekey’s Gazette Bozeman Bureau article, published May of 1986.

“‘Going Out of Business’ signs have proliferated in Bozeman this spring, in storefronts from Main Street to the edge of town,” wrote Ekey, “while some people might think it is a sign of a



slumping economy, others say it is just an overdue shakeout in a city that is largely ‘over-retailed’ – there are just too many stores for the market.”

Darla Joyner, spokeswoman for the BACC, was featured in the article stating the local economy “is not rosy, but it's not as bad as other areas in Montana.”

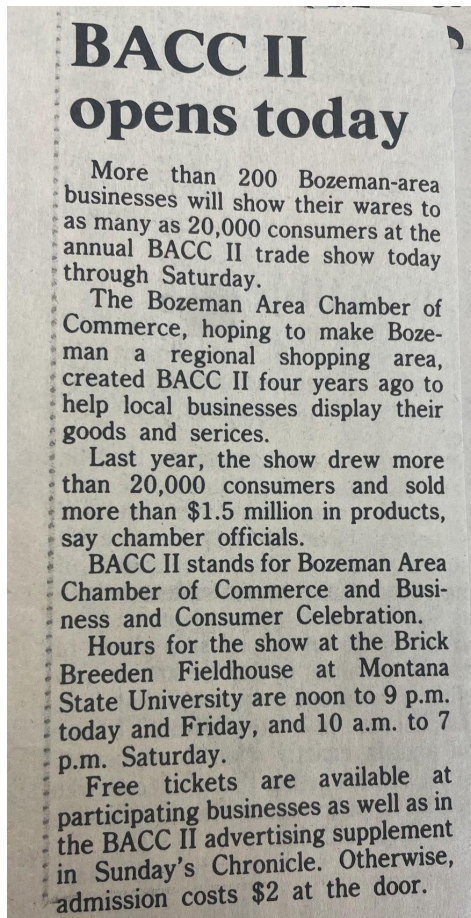
“We are a little behind everyone else and have hit bottom after everyone,” said Joyner, “a lot of our money depends on tourism and it was a bad ski season this year.”

During a recent interview, Darly Schliem, CEO of the BACC, explained the BACC is 100% funded by its memberships. However, businesses who do not hold memberships still receive benefits from the BACC’s annual business plans, in planning to keep taxes down, their representation of the economy, and mostly, the events the BACC holds.

Non-members do not receive the daily leads that get distributed to newcomers, Schliem explained. “We get about 4.2 million newcomers per year,” Schliem said, “and we tell them where to go as far as dining, lodging, shopping, and so on.”

Longer-standing and newer members work “hand in hand with one another,” Schliem said. The BACC offers seven tiers of membership levels, from \$350 to \$10,000. The higher the level of membership, the more benefits, opportunities, and exposures, the business will receive.

A BACC membership is “a very active” one, “where members attend almost all meetings, banquets, and events,” Schliem said.



When asked how long-standing businesses may be affected by the influx of new residents, and new establishments, Schliem responded, “you can’t always keep everyone, but the majority of our business plans satisfy new and long-standing businesses.”

“The older members have a big voice at the table when it comes to making policies, inputs, and regulations,” said

Schliem, in regard to regulations on matters such as Airbnb, housing, day care centers, urban transport, and homeless urban camping.

[A Bozeman Daily Chronicle Article, May 1986 on BACC’s notorious trade show for local businesses.]

“We take on projects that are not fun, not sexy, not publicly correct,” Schliem said, “and try to find solutions for them.”

“I do think it is somewhat of a misconception,” said Schliem referring to “recent rapid Bozeman growth.” Schliem proceeded to explain that, when observing the history of Bozeman’s growth, from the 1960s to now, the city has been growing at a relatively consistent rate. Though, “it is a very stretching growth rate on the workforce and economy,” Schliem said.

During the pandemic, Schliem noted that Bozeman passed the 50,000 population bracket, officially qualifying Bozeman as an urban area. “The pandemic exposed Bozeman as a natural place for people to come to,” said Schliem, “but I don’t think people realized we were already just about to hit that point before the pandemic hit.”

Though Bozeman holds a particularly high consistent growth rate, there is no evident data suggesting it has grown more recently than it has in previous years, despite what many may believe. Bozeman is simply a fast growing city, and always has been.

With consistent growth comes changes, updates, improvements, in all sectors of a metropolitan area. Despite this, Bozeman’s long-standing businesses have with stood both the city’s growth and changes, remaining true to many of their traditional ways of running their businesses.

Though these businesses have had to and will continue to have to keep dropping some of their older practices and adopt newer ones to compete and keep up with the economy, it seems that these businesses will continue to be successful. Bozeman’s community continues to support Bozeman’s history, and the older way of doing things.

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