

**2021 FALL CONFERENCE  
SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES**  
*(In order of appearance on the agenda)*



**Barry Wilfahrt**

President and CEO

The Chamber Grand Forks, ND/East Grand Forks, MN

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Barry is President and CEO of The Chamber Grand Forks, ND/East Grand Forks, MN. The Chamber focusses on relevance, advocacy for business and providing tangible value to its 1,100 Chamber members. In his 39 year Chamber career he has served as CEO of 4 different chambers.

Barry has a BS degree in Government from Saint John's University in Collegetown, MN and his MA degree in Urban Studies from Minnesota State University where he was the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Fellowship recipient. Barry has served as President of the SD, ND and MN Chamber Executive Associations. Barry is also a graduate of the Chamber Institute for Organizational Management Program (IOM), US Chamber Academy Program and is a Certified Chamber Executive (CCE). He also serves as a US Air Force ACC Civic Leader.

Barry has served on more than 140 national, state and local boards over his career including the US Chamber's "Committee of 100" which he continues to serve on.

Barry also personally owns a billboard company and has a lobbying/consulting firm.

He and his wife Kristi enjoy traveling, kayaking and spending time with the children and grand children.



**Kelsey Johnson**

President, Iron Mining Association

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Kelsey Johnson is the president of the Iron Mining Association. She has a bachelor and masters in ethics and leadership from St. Catherine University. Prior to joining the Iron Mining Association of Minnesota, Kelsey was the Director of State Affairs for an international trade association, the Grocery Manufacturers Association or GMA. Prior to working at GMA, Kelsey worked at the Minnesota Attorney General's Office, the Minnesota State House and Minnesota State Senate.

As President of the IMA Kelsey represents the largest industry in northeast Minnesota. Kelsey also holds many other titles; she's secretary of the Lake Superior College Foundation Board and on the Northeast Minnesota Workforce Development Board, the board for Minnesota Center for Mineral Resource Education, the Minerals Coordinating Committee, the STARBASE Board, and participated in the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce's Leadership Program and the Minnesota Young American Leaders Program. Kelsey previously served on the Duluth Area Chamber of Commerce.



**Frank Ongaro**

Executive Director, MiningMinnesota  
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Frank Ongaro was named executive director of MiningMinnesota in December 2006. In this position, Ongaro serves as chief spokesperson for the trade association representing nonferrous copper-nickel mining in Minnesota. MiningMinnesota supports sustainable and environmentally responsible copper-nickel and precious metals mining development in Minnesota. MiningMinnesota works with local citizens, businesses, government, and other organizations to bring growth and job creation to the state through responsible development of natural resources.

Prior to his MiningMinnesota appointment, Ongaro served as president of the Iron Mining Association of Minnesota (IMA). He has also served as executive director of the Range Association of Municipalities and Schools (RAMS), director of Intergovernmental Relations for the City of St. Paul, assistant to the commissioner of the Department of Labor and Industry, and assistant director of legislative relations for Minnesota Governor Rudy Perpich.

Ongaro's recent professional affiliations include service on the Natural Resources Research Institute Community Advisory Committee, a Governor's appointment to the Minnesota Minerals Coordinating Committee, the Minnesota Minerals Education Foundation, the Laurentian Vision Partnership, the Governor Rudy Perpich Memorial Committee, and various charitable foundations and organizations.

Ongaro holds a bachelor of science degree in business administration from the University of Minnesota.



**Shawn Herhusky**

Workforce Strategy Consultant, DEED  
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Shawn Herhusky, M.A, M.B.A is a Workforce Strategy Consultant with the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development whose work focuses on talent attraction and retention, economic development, and issues of diversity and inclusion. Shawn is also the Vice President of Revive Virginia, a 501c3 dedicated to restoring and enhancing the downtown of the City of Virginia. He earned his graduate degrees from the College of Saint Scholastica in Management with a focus on Organizational Development and Business Administration. Shawn is also a Certified Workforce

Development Professional with the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals and a Business Retention and Expansion Coordinator with Business Retention and Expansion International. Shawn also serves on the Laurentian Chamber of Commerce's Emerging Leaders Committee, Hibbing Chamber of Commerce's Business Retention and Expansion Committee, and the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce's Workforce Committee.



**Brad Gruhot**

Chamber Director, Marshall Area Chamber of Commerce  
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Brad started his Chamber career as the Membership Director for the newly formed SouthWest Metro Chamber in 2009. From there, he worked for the Bloomington Chamber in Membership from 2011-2014 before deciding to move his family back to his home town of Marshall to be closer to his mom who was having health issues. Brad was the Membership Director from July, 2014 until and then was named the Chamber director of the Marshall Area Chamber in January of 2016 . Prior to Chamber work, Brad worked for the Southdale YMCA in Edina for 11 years.

Brad is very active in the community and serves on the Board of Directors for the Marshall Area YMCA, SMSU Booster Club, MACE & MCCE and also sits on various committees throughout the Marshall community.

Brad has been married to Karen for 20 years and has two children, Jonathan-16 and Alayna-13. In his spare time, he enjoys traveling, visiting friends and even through all of the heartbreak, he is an avid MN sports fan.



**Doug Loon**

President, Minnesota Chamber of Commerce  
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Douglas B. Loon is president of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, a position he has held since September 8, 2015. The Minnesota Chamber represents more than 2,300 Minnesota companies, 130 local chambers and 65 business trade associations at the Minnesota Legislature on a variety of issues that impact Minnesota’s economy.

Prior to assuming leadership of the Minnesota Chamber, he spent 20 years at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 17 of those in Minnesota. As the vice president for regional affairs and advocacy, he managed the seven regional offices that provide political and grassroots outreach across the nation. He also managed the U.S. Chamber’s Midwest Region that includes Minnesota. He was intimately involved in supporting state and local chambers and businesses to move public policy in a direction that helps them be successful.

Loon received his bachelor’s degree in government and international affairs from Augustana College in Sioux Falls, S.D. He is a graduate of the Congressional Research Service’s Institute for Legislative Staff as well as the Federal Election Commission’s program on campaign finance laws for incorporated trade associations and membership organizations. He also graduated from Leadership Minnesota, an exclusive program of the Minnesota Chamber addressing the economic and public policy issues of Minnesota businesses. He is past chair of the Eden Prairie Foundation Board of Directors.



**Jennifer Byers**

Vice President, Grassroots and Chamber Relations | Executive Director, Minnesota Chamber Foundation, Minnesota Chamber of Commerce  
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Jennifer is responsible for directing the Minnesota Chamber’s grassroots outreach, candidate recruitment efforts and supporting local chambers of commerce across the state. She manages the Minnesota Manufacturers Coalition, and is engaged in a wide variety of issue advocacy coalitions. She also directs the activities of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce Executives (MCCE), the professional association for local

chambers and enjoys many days on the road with members, local chambers and volunteer business leaders across Minnesota.

Jennifer is an alumni of the University of Minnesota, with a degree in communications. She is also a graduate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Institute for Organization Management. A long career in the chamber profession includes a staff position with the TwinWest Chamber of Commerce and the president of the Stillwater Chamber before joining the Minnesota Chamber in 1991.

She serves on the board of directors for the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce Executives; the Mid-America Chamber Executives; and Jobs for Minnesotans. Outside of Jennifer's professional career, she plays a leadership role with the Lakeville South Hockey and Lakeville South Lacrosse booster organizations. She and her husband Rich are parents to three teenage boys.



**Nevada Littlewolf**

Campaign Manager and Executive Director, Page Amendment  
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Nevada Littlewolf is the Page Amendment Campaign Manager & Executive Director. Before joining the team, Nevada served as Minnesota's state Political Director for the 2020 Biden Presidential Campaign. She brings years of experience to the team, having worked across sectors of community, government, philanthropy, non-profit, and business. Nevada served on the Virginia City Council for ten years from 2008-2018. Nevada is a citizen of Leech Lake nation and has two children.



**Elissa Hansen**

President and CEO, Northspan  
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Elissa Hansen leads Northspan with more than 20 years of experience in business, community, organizational, and economic development across Minnesota and Wisconsin. She invests her time creatively advancing others' capabilities. In Elissa's role at Northspan, she engages with and elevates every client by facilitating tough conversations and moving organizations forward with action-oriented strategic methods. She works to create a setting for meaningful communications that respects diverse perspectives, creates joint resolve, and inspires individual and group action.

Hansen grew up in central Minnesota and achieved her undergraduate and master's degrees from Northern Arizona University. More recently she has completed certification coursework with the Institute of Cultural Affairs - USA in the Technology of Participation. She is a certified Economic Development Finance Professional with the National Development Council and a graduate of both the Leadership Duluth and Blandin Community Leadership programs. Hansen has also been honored as one of the Duluth News Tribune's "20 under 40," which celebrates professionals who are making a positive impact and working for change in the region.



**Claire Peterlin**

Director, Itasca Area Schools Collaborative (IASC) Next Career Pathways Program  
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Claire Peterlin is the Director of the Itasca Area Schools Collaborative (IASC) Next Career Pathways Program, which is available in Nashwauk-Keewatin, Greenway, Grand Rapids, Bigfork, Deer River, Hill City, Northland, and Floodwood High Schools. IASC Next provides career exploration opportunities for Itasca area high school students through partnerships across school districts, with local community colleges, and with businesses in Manufacturing, Healthcare, Natural Resources, Construction, Business, Education, and Computer Science. The goal of Next Career Pathways is to allow all students to

explore career options to inspire hope and curiosity, provide relevant experiences and intentional opportunities to students that will allow them to imagine a future vision of themselves, and give hands-on learning partnered with colleges and industries so students can excel in their futures and unleash endless possibilities. Claire has also held various project coordination positions within the Northeast Higher Education District (NHED) including the VisionNE College Merger project and coordinating operations for the Applied Learning Institute (ALI). Claire's background is in Chemical Engineering. She is a graduate of Minnesota State University, Mankato - Iron Range Engineering, and is completing a Master of Engineering in Chemical Engineering through the University of Minnesota, Duluth, and pursuing a Master of Business Administration in Leadership and Change through the College of St. Scholastica.



**Brooke Sticha**

Executive Director, New Prague Chamber of Commerce  
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Brooke Sticha is the Executive Director of the New Prague Chamber of Commerce. She has led the Chamber for 3 years, working as the assistant for the Chamber in New Prague for 4 years prior. With 7 years in the Chamber industry, she has learned a variety of valuable skills including relationship building, mentorship, advocacy, and leadership; among various others. In 2020, she completed the MCCE Leadership Program for new directors, a valuable program lead by experienced leaders in the industry, which allowed her to learn and grow as a leader in her community.

In 2011, she graduated from the University of MN – Twin Cities with a Bachelor's degree in Journalism-strategic communication and advertising with a minor in new media. She enjoys volunteering on a few local community boards and spending time outdoors with family and friends.



**Christie Ransom**

President/CEO, Winona Area Chamber of Commerce  
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Christie is the President & CEO of the Winona Area Chamber of Commerce. Over the past two years in this role, the chamber has gone through an entire rebranding process, created new and innovative events, changed the membership strategy, is in the process of re-tooling the workforce initiatives and programming, and tripled the Chamber's reserves. Her background in marketing, sales, and customer service is key to providing value to the Chamber's members and their goals.



**Lori Higgins**

President, MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce  
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Lori Higgins has been the President of the MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce since 2010, becoming their first female chief executive officer. As President, she oversees the advocacy, programming, operations and strategic initiatives of the organization. MetroNorth is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest chamber of commerce in the metro and serves over 700 businesses.

Being an active community member is a passion of hers. She currently serves on the Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission, the Anoka County Workforce Development Board, and is the President of the Augsburg University Alumni Board of Directors.

Lori lives in Blaine with her husband and two daughters.



**Natalie Peterson**

Executive Health and Happiness Coach  
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Natalie Peterson is an executive health & happiness coach. She is the creator of *The Stamina Protocol™ Stamina to Care™* and *Fuel & Fit – Habits for Life™*. She helps busy professionals and organizations increase their leadership effectiveness and alleviate their symptoms of burnout to increase results, productivity, energy, health, and happiness.

Natalie has 15 years' experience in organizational development and human skills training. She holds a MasterTrainer Certification in Situational Leadership®, The Leader's Protocol®, The Service Protocol®, Forte Communication, and is a Marshall Goldsmith Certified Executive Coach.

Natalie has traveled all over the United States and Latin America implementing stamina and leadership curriculum into organizations, across every industry, from healthcare, to retail and global call centers.

She has a Master's degree in Exercise Physiology, a certification as a Strength & Conditioning Specialist through the NSCA, a Precision Nutrition Certification, Reiki Level 2 Certification, and a 200 hour Yoga Teacher Certification.



**Melissa Cox**

Marketing Specialist, North Star Credit Union  
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Melissa Cox has a passion for people who live and work in our communities and enjoys working with the business community. Melissa has a Master of Business Administration, and a Communications / Journalism degree. Her background highlights include project leadership, nonprofit management, marketing, communications, grant writing and reporting, and board governance. Her involvement with chambers includes serving as former President / CEO of the Laurentian Chamber of Commerce, previous ambassador, and current board member of the Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce. Melissa loves her role as Marketing Specialist for North Star Credit Union. She also has the opportunity to write for Real Ranger, pen a monthly column for the Mesabi Tribune, and provide marketing assistance, including helping businesses that work with the Small Business Development Center. Her website is RangeofCharacter.com. She and her husband have a daughter and two morkies. Melissa appreciates spending time with family and friends, traveling, and being outdoors.



**Laura Bordelon**

Senior Vice President, Advocacy, Minnesota Chamber of Commerce  
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Laura Bordelon is senior vice president for advocacy at the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, a position she has held since November 2011. In her role, she leads the organization's public policy, grassroots and political engagement strategies.

She directed the Minnesota Chamber's education, telecommunications and energy policy from 2000-2004. She was a policy director for Governor Tim Pawlenty from 2004 to 2005 and then was named director of legislative and cabinet affairs in 2006. She most recently was director of corporate state government affairs for Medtronic Inc.

She graduated with a bachelor of arts degree from the University of Minnesota. Her community involvement includes being a board member of the Minnesota Government Relations Council and the Minnesota Zoo.



**Representative Spencer Igo**

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State Representative Spencer Igo is currently serving in his first term as a member of the Minnesota House of Representatives. Since entering the legislature in January, he has quickly emerged as a leading voice on issues related to mining and the environment. As a representative, he is committed to working to build a prosperous Northern Minnesota that retains youth, builds the local economy, and invests in the future of communities in the Northland. Igo lives in Grand Rapids.



**Representative Dave Lislegard**

Minnesota House of Representatives  
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Representative Dave Lislegard was elected to the Minnesota House of Representatives in 2018 to serve District 6B, which includes the Mesabi Range. Prior to heading to the State Capitol, Representative Lislegard served as Mayor of the City of Aurora for two years, and before that was on the City Council for 14 years.

Professionally, he worked at the former LTV mine as a member of the United Steelworkers Local 4108 until its closing in 2000. He then went back to school and earned an undergraduate degree from UMD, and now works in business relations for Lakehead Constructors.

Representative Lislegard serves as vice chair of the House Taxes Committee, and has seats on the Commerce Committee, the Climate and Energy Committee, the Industrial Education and Economic Development Committee, and the Subcommittee on Legislative Process Reform.

His legislative priorities include investing in our schools, creating good-paying jobs, building economic prosperity for Iron Range Families and businesses, and making sure everyone has access to affordable health care. This includes expanded access and outreach for mental health services and substance abuse treatment, including for students, veterans, farmers, and tribal members.

Representative Lislegard lives in Aurora with his wife Lisa and has two grown daughters.



**Lorraine Little**

Director, Community Engagement, Enbridge  
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Lorraine has been with Enbridge since 2008 in various stakeholder and community engagement roles. Her team supports existing pipeline operations and new project development through community engagement programs. Lorraine's team leads the stakeholder engagement efforts for the Line 3 Replacement Project in Minnesota. Her team has conducted a seven year public education and engagement campaign that has included thousands of outreach meetings, media engagement, and coordination with multiple coalitions which has garnered the support of thousands of Minnesotans.

Prior to coming to Enbridge, Lorraine worked in the non-profit sector in public education, training, and program development. She earned a bachelor's degree in international business and finance from the University of Wisconsin-Superior and her master's in business administration from Bethel University in St. Paul. Outside of Enbridge, Lorraine serves on several local boards including the Northland Chapter of the American Red Cross, APEX, and the North Shore Bank of Commerce.



**Jerritt Johnston**

Owner, True North Consultants  
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Jerritt Johnston is the owner of True North Consultants, a leadership development and organizational consulting business. He holds a Master's Degree in Education and has spent his professional career training individuals and facilitating organizational growth. He has held leadership positions in for-profit and non-profit organizations and he brings that unique experience to his training.