

Fall Conference Agenda

September 17-19, 2025

Sugar Lake Lodge

37584 Otis Lane, Cohasset, MN

(Speakers, presentations, and sessions are subject to change)

Wednesday, September 17

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|--------------------------|--|
| 10:15 a.m. | Board of Directors meeting – Maple Room |
| 11:45 a.m. | Registration opens |
| Noon | First time attendee orientation – Facilitated by Nort Johnson and Robin Anthony – Main Dining Room
<i>(reserved seating for orientation guests)</i> |
| Noon to 1:15 p.m. | Luncheon buffet – Main Dining Room |
| 1:15 p.m. | Conference welcome and introductions – Alexander I and II
<i>Nort Johnson, President, Faribault Area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism</i> |
| 1:30 p.m. | Cannabis and its impact on Minnesota’s economy
<i>Hear from industry and training leaders on how Minnesota’s cannabis sector is creating jobs, driving investment, and shaping local economies—and what chambers can do to prepare their communities.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Melissa Stopka, Hwy 35 Cannabis Park</i>• <i>Andy Nintzel, M.N. Technologies</i>• <i>Derek Fox, MN North</i> |
| 2:30 p.m. | Minnesota’s economic future: the role of policy, politics, and the chamber community
<i>Doug Loon, Minnesota Chamber and Anne Johnson, Redwood Area Chamber & Tourism</i> |
| 3:15 p.m. | Break |
| 3:30 p.m. | Your Chamber’s role in civility - Braver Angels + local chamber panel discussion
<i>Braver Angels is national grassroots, non-profit organization that seeks to depolarize American politics by transforming attitudes towards each other. They work to heal the wounds between partisan divides in the process of fostering and sustaining more civil communities. In addition, industry executives will share their recent experiences and perspectives as local chambers navigate uncertainty in their communities.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Jeff Thiemann, Braver Angels</i>• <i>Matt Kilian, Brainerd Lakes Area Chamber</i>• <i>Lori Higgins, MetroNorth Chamber</i> |
| 5:00 p.m. | Adjourn |
| 6:00 p.m. | Reception - Lobby Bar sponsored by Sugar Lake Lodge |

- 7:00 p.m. **Dinner – Main Dining room**
- 8:00 p.m. **Campfire and hospitality suite – Asplin Suite**

Thursday, September 18

- 7:00 a.m. **Breakfast buffet - Available anytime from 7:00 to 8:00 a.m. – Main Dining Room**
- 8:00 a.m. **Outperform the norm – prioritize and step up your game – Alexander I and II**
Scott Welle, speaker and author
Today's world is different. It's full of unpredictability, competition, cynicism and distraction. How do you rise above it, focus on what matters and stand out as your Outperforming best?
- 9:15 a.m. **H.R. for chambers: best practices, policies, handbooks, compliance issues**
Cynthia Bremer, Ogletree Deakins
Chambers are great at helping members solve problems—but sometimes overlook their own. This session focuses on strengthening your organization with HR best practices, solid policies, up-to-date handbooks, and compliance essentials to keep your chamber running smoothly and protected.
- 10:15 a.m. **Break**
- 10:30 a.m. **The revenue roundtable: What's working, what's next**
Discover fresh ideas and proven strategies for growing revenue. In this interactive roundtable, share what's working in your chamber, hear what's driving success for others, and explore new opportunities to boost your bottom line.
 - *Membership – Brad Gruhot, Marshall Area Chamber*
 - *Events – Christine Fenner, Waconia Chamber*
 - *Foundation – Matt Baumgartner, Duluth Area Chamber*
 - *Programs, resources and products – Kim O'Brien, St. Paul Area Chamber*
- 11:45 a.m. **Luncheon buffet – Main Dining Room**
- 12:30 p.m. **Breakout session I**
 - **How and why to start a foundation** – *Tim Zunker, Shakopee Chamber and Vistors Bureau*
 - **Workforce development best practices (BEN)** – *Whitney Harvey, Minnesota Chamber*
 - **Community partnerships** - *Robin Anthony, Greater Stillwater Chamber*
 - **Civic engagement/candidates** - *Barry Wilfahrt, The Chamber Grand Forks East Grand Forks*
- 1:30 p.m. **Breakout session II – repeated from above**
- 2:30 p.m. **Breakout session III by Chamber member size/staff size**
 - **One person chambers** – *Sarah Ferguson, Blue Earth Chamber*
 - **Small chambers** - *Nannette LaNasa, Forest Lake Area Chamber*
 - **Medium chambers** - *Tim Zunker, Shakopee Chamber*
 - **Large chambers** – *Matt Baumgartner, Duluth Area Chamber*
- 3:30 p.m. **Adjourn for free time – Golfing, watersports, shopping, and more**

Pontoon available for a lake cruise (first-come, first served via sign-up), complimentary golf, and more

- 6:00 p.m.** **Reception – Lobby Bar**
- 7:00 p.m.** **Dinner and MCCE scholarship auction – Main Dining Room**
- 8:30 p.m.** **Karaoke – Lobby Bar**

Friday, September 19

- 7:00 a.m.** **Breakfast buffet - Available anytime from 7:00 to 8:30 a.m. – Main Dining Room**
- 8:30 a.m.** **TED Talks - Alexander I and II**
- **Board training 101** – Jennifer Harmening, Burnsville Chamber
 - **AED safety program for your community** – Tara Bitzan, Alexandria Lakes Area Chamber
 - **Strategic planning** – Vicki Stute, MCCE
 - **Chamber Bucks** – Tara Bitzan, Alexandria Lakes Area Chamber
 - **Community Expos** – Laurie Staiger, Woodbury Area Chamber
 - **Scaling up and growing your team** – Stacie Michels, Sauk Centre Chamber
- 9:30 a.m.** **AI 2.0 Workshop: Smarter, faster, more creative chambers**
Frank Kenny, Chamber Pros Community
Discover how next-generation AI tools can streamline daily tasks, supercharge your marketing with video and voiceovers, sharpen your value proposition, and even assist with HR. In this interactive, hands-on workshop, you'll go beyond ChatGPT to explore practical AI solutions you can start using right away.
- 11:45 a.m.** **Closing comments**
- Noon** **Adjourn**

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