

Youth Movement

How Young Professionals Are Impacting the Southern Saratoga County Business Community

A new generation of business people is rising in the Capital Region, and our local chamber of commerce is inspired to have some active and aspiring individuals. Some of them have already risen to positions of leadership, with the others making their presence felt in a big way. We caught up to a few of our young leaders for this article.

Jenifer Marten, 2017 Chairwoman of the Chamber of Southern Saratoga County (CSSC) and Vice President, Commercial Relationship Manager of Ballston Spa National Bank, says of her experience, "I was extremely honored to be chosen as the Chairwoman. Having been a member of the Chamber for so long, I was also



fortunate to have a strong board of directors and a highly motivated staff to support my role in the organization. Marten is the youngest woman to ascend to the CSSC's top post, yet still has over 20 years' experience in banking. "This has given me a unique advantage as I am able to draw from my experience as well as the ability to adapt to the rapidly changing world of banking."

When the retired volunteers of the Waterford Canal and Towpath Society needed some help to update and maintain their educational canal barge replica, the Chamber of Southern Saratoga County and these students from Ballston Spa High School stepped in to assist, performing needed maintenance and adding a remote control rudder for safer operation and ensuring that a whole generation of new students learns something about the canals that helped shape our state's history!



OWN A PIECE OF THE ERIE CANAL? Yes, It's hard to believe that Anna has been a chamber member business for over 5 years! In this 2013 photo taken at Ballston Spa's Brookside Museum, the author holds a piece of wood taken from the mast of the USS Constitution that Ms. Williams will turn into high quality pens. She has specialized in commemorative collections – her customers can own pieces of the Erie Canal, Brookside Museum, the Constitution, homes of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, and more.

by **Pete Bardunias**
President/CEO, the Chamber of Southern Saratoga County



At the other end of the spectrum is Anna Williams, who at age 11 became the youngest member in CSSC history in 2012. She STILL is the chamber's youngest member more than five years later. "The hardest thing I had to overcome was being taken seriously," says Williams. "Because I couldn't drive, my Dad had to take me to mixers. Other members would introduce themselves and ask if it was "bring your daughter" day!

Lauren Valentine became the CSSC's youngest board member in 2017 while still in her twenties. She has found the perspectives and opinions of fellow (older) board members enlightening. "It's been a great experience to learn more about the different businesses that belong to the chamber and to be a part of the decision-making process for an organization that affects so many people," says Valentine.

The CSSC's youngest partnership is comprised of the martial arts duo Yumi Kageyama and Eugene Refino, owners of Risen Taekwondo in Malta. They are extremely excited to have gotten off to a fast start with their business. "The Capital Region is an amazing place to be young entrepreneurs!" says Kageyama. The resources and the support we have received from our families, the CSSC and the Stack Center at Siena College has been instrumental to our success. For us, Taekwondo is more than just a sport – it can change lives."

Ex-Chairwoman Marten is proud of the work the CSSC has done on behalf of members of all ages, backgrounds and business sizes. "The Chamber helps all of our members by providing connections to members, such as Leadership Circle events and monthly business mixers," says Marten. "I enjoyed my time as the Chairwoman of the Women in Business

Committee, which is one of the most active and dynamic groups within the chamber."

Sandler's Valentine concurs. "The CSSC has been a huge advocate for Sandler Training. I've been able to connect with businesses in the Capital Region because we had chamber membership in common. I don't believe those people would have been as open to my call if I wasn't a fellow chamber member."

Getting out of one's shell and learning to meet and interact with others is part of the growth process. For Valentine, "I can honestly say that networking changed my life for the better. There are so many misconceptions about what effective networking really is."

Anna Williams found ways to overcome the oft-intimidating world of being a business owner. "Over the last six years, I found myself in some interesting negotiations. I was so scared, but I didn't show it. I held my ground and went into the discussion knowing what I would and wouldn't agree to." Membership in the CSSC "family" helped ease her jitters: "The chamber has been a safe place where I could just "be me" and didn't have to always have the answers or be embarrassed when I didn't.

For Kageyama and Refino, belief in their craft as a conveyor of life skills is what motivates them to succeed: "Taekwondo not only teaches someone how to kick and punch to defend themselves, but also to develop well-rounded, respectful and hardworking children, teens and adults who will in turn change the world around them," she says.

These businesspeople and entrepreneurs are the up-and-coming backbone of the CSSC. It will be exciting to follow these careers as they mature into leadership roles within all of Tech Valley. "Walt Disney was fired from his job because he supposedly lacked imagination," says Williams. "I think the most important thing is to never let someone crush your dreams."

Young Professionals impact Capital business community and pack a real punch (L-R): Yumi Kageyama, partner, Risen Taekwondo; Anna Williams, owner, PensInk; Jenifer Marten, VP, Commercial Relationship Manager, Ballston Spa National Bank; Lauren Valentine, Certified Instructor, Sandler Training; Eugene Refino, partner, Risen Taekwondo. Photo courtesy Mark Morand, MPIPhoto.com

