

# COMMERCE GAZETTE

JANUARY AND FEBRUARY, 2024

## CHAMBER AWARDS BANQUET HELD ON JANUARY 16<sup>TH</sup> AT THE AURORA CLUB



Over 100 members and friends gathered at Ironwood's Aurora Club for great food, friendly networking, and to honor our 2023 award winners. Chamber member Chris Lahti created a wonderful banquet meal! And, the ever-thoughtful M.C. (the Office Guy) kept his exact timing streak

going: we started at 6:00 and ended at 6:59 p.m.!

**Business of the Year – Higher Love.** While there were many really deserving candidates for this award, Higher Love's locational, operational, and community support impact throughout 2023 was really award-worthy. A shabby ½ block along U.S. 2 has been transformed, a professional, customer-helpful retail



experience developed, and active community involvement pursued—not only by organizational support, but also through actual volunteer work by store employees. As the first official retail cannabis business to open in Ironwood, HL has set a great example for those who have followed. Both economically and in business operations modeling, HL has had a tremendous impact on Ironwood commerce.

**Organization of the Year—SISU Ski Fest.** While our 2023 mega-snow-deficient winter mandated the cancelling of this year's SISU Ski Fest race, the record number of registrants (necessitating closing registrations in November!), gave testimony to the value and economic/marketing impact the SISU Ski

Fest has to the Ironwood area. To create this impact, over 350 local volunteers work for many months to



put this event on, and do so in a well-run and friendly home-town manner. The fact that 100s showed up at the SISU Expo on January 6<sup>th</sup>—even when

there was no race--demonstrated just how valued SISU and the folks who make the Ski Fest happen are by ski aficionados from everywhere!

**Volunteer of the Year – Brad Kusz.** Whether organizing cornhole tournaments at Festival Ironwood & the Gogebic County Fair or serving as biking/hiking trail developer and maintainer for Copper Peak, Miners Memorial Heritage Park & Welcome Center/Cemetery trails, Brad Kusz's long track



record of both planning and doing as a community volunteer has been exemplary. In serving on the original Iron Belle Trail "start" committee, he foresaw just how important this project would become for the Ironwood area, and that it would in turn become a catalyst for further trail developments (which he has lead and continues to lead). Cooking turkey for Festival, brushing trail, mentoring budding youth sportsmen—Brad Kusz has given his time, passion, and talent to the Ironwood's betterment.

**Gus Swanson Educational Award—Karl Zinsmaster.** Gus Swanson was a long-time Ironwood industrial arts teacher at LLW High School who, in addition to his teaching, was a community benefactor to many organizations. The Gus Swanson



award is presented to those who educate, mentor, and inspire youth in their personal growth. Karl Zinsmaster established St. Maud's workshop and makerspace in Pence, WI (his hometown) in 2022, following education in furniture design in Minneapolis and New York. At St. Maud's, he

then implemented the Finnish *Sloyd* handicraft-based "learning by doing" program for area youth. Working with 4-H, schools, home-schoolers, and individuals, Karl and St. Maud's have provided resources and facilities "for people to come together to do good work, learn from one another, and feel at home."



**"LIGHT UP THE NIGHT" OFFICIALLY CLOSES THE JACK FROST SEASON**

Saturday, January 27<sup>th</sup> officially

brought the end of the Jack Frost Festival Season of Wintertime Events. Chamber member Norrie Club's volunteers collected old "retired" Christmas trees for a month, resulting in a goodly pile to "light up the night." The bonfire was lit at 7:00, to the accompaniment of DJ music, a beverage tent, campfire marshmallow roasting for kids, and fireworks!

Given this year's unusual weather, the Jack Frost Festival event period (11/16/23 to 1/27/24) certainly had a very different feel to it, and some popular events could not be held (Snowmobile Olympus & SISU Ski Fest among them). Chamber Office Guy hopes that the November 21, (3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday), 2024 Jack Frost Tree Lighting Ceremony will see Depot Park in all its traditional snowy wonderland enchantment, and that the full panoply of Jack Frost Wintertime Events will be able to be held.

**FEBRUARY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS**

Membership renewals continue to come! Thank you to everyone who is renewing for 2024. **February members who come up for renewal are:** Aurora Athletic Club, Coleman Engineering, Black River Lodge, Gogebic Country Club, GTE Electrical, Heritage Chapter-NCT, JDM Woodworks, R.E.D. Construction, Rigoni's of Ironwood, and Silver Properties. As soon as renewals are received, your 2024 sticker will be mailed out.

I hope all of our members know that a) the Ironwood Chamber of Commerce is not funded in any way by the City of Ironwood, and b) the Chamber gets NO money from the room tax. In Ironwood, room tax money goes to the Ironwood Tourism Council, which is its own legal entity and marketing organization, directed by its own Board.

All of our Chamber operations are funded by membership dues. **Every member is crucial** to maintaining a daily open visitor help center, area promotional marketing (print, broadcast, web, social), organizational and community event help, educational membership events/speakers, & completely in-house creation of the Ironwood Destination Guide (print & digital).

**BUSINESS AFTER FIVE RETURNS ON FEBRUARY 13<sup>TH</sup> AT MICHIGAN WORKS!**



No, the Christmas decorations will not be up, but the hospitality inside will be spirited! Organized by Chamber Board members Kari Klemme and Miquel

Lewis, the BaF series returns **Tuesday, February 13<sup>th</sup>, at Chamber member Michigan WORKS! new Ironwood location at 101 South Suffolk** (corner of Ayer and Suffolk) **at 5:00 p.m.** Chamber members will get a tour of the new offices and the new services that MIWKS is able to offer [e.g., they will be hosting Marshalls' store employee interviews during February 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup>].

If your business would like to host a BaF, message the Office Guy: [chamber@ironwoodchamber.org](mailto:chamber@ironwoodchamber.org) Serving both educational and networking goals, BaF's also highlight vital parts of our commercial sector.

## NEW 2025-2027 IRONWOOD DESTINATION GUIDE TO BE CREATED THIS FALL



It's that time again! Our current Ironwood Guide copies are almost all gone (900 went 3 weeks ago with 5-Star to Chicago, Madison, Milwaukee, Wausau sport & travel shows this month [picture at left], and 1,800 went last week to St. Ignace and Ironwood Welcome Centers). I

have only 1,500 copies left of the initial 17K printed in December of 2022. **Preliminary plans are for a new 20K copy, 40-page Guide to be printed & ready for distribution in January, 2025.** We are adding 4 pages and looking to engender a “youth” theme (along with the regular every-issue sections). In continuing to entice folks to visit and relocate here, we want to showcase that Ironwood is not just for the 40+ age folks, but also for the young—both school aged kids and young adult families. So, if YOU have pictures of kid's events and family adventures (recreation, sports, music, drama, art, skill development, etc.) send them in to the Chamber. Photo credit will be given!

More information will be available this summer as we develop our advertiser grouping. In order to use all advertising revenues for printing and distribution, the Guide is created in-house, with text writing by the Office Guy and layout/design by Sharp Graphic Design. **Only Chamber members can advertise in the Guide, and the whole cost of the Guide is covered by these ads**—no regular Chamber operational monies (save office time) are used for its production and distribution. Ad rate cards will be sent out in June for all those who advertised in previous two-year guides.

## FELIVELIFE ALL-EVENT COMMUNITY CALENDAR WEBSITE TO ENLIST PARTNERS AND BANNER AD SPONSORS

As explained in the December GAZETTE, FeLiveLife is now moving to become self-sustaining through the establishment of yearly partners and weekly/monthly sponsored banner advertisements. Partner logos will be on the home page & partners will receive 5+ free banner advertisements per year. Revolving home page banner ads can be purchased for a 4-week

duration (\$60) or a 2-week run (\$40). FeLiveLife has



now set up a direct on-line PayPal and credit card system, so that becoming a yearly website partner or promoting your event through a banner ad can be done easily and quickly. If you would like to be an

FeLiveLife year partner, go here:

<https://felivelife.org/partner-request-form/> If you would like to sponsor a banner ad for your event, go here: <https://felivelife.org/banner-ad-request-form/>

According to **Google Analytics**, the Fe website garnered 16,288 web clicks from March to December in 2023. Moreover, web impressions (when a user has seen a link to Fe in Search, Discover, or News on Google) for the same time period were 575,000. These numbers are only for Google—other search engines also carry FeLiveLife, so these numbers represent only a part of total search activity.

## \$\$ AND THE ARTS IN THE UPPER PENINSULA APRIL 13<sup>TH</sup>, 1:00 P.M. PUBLIC PRESENTATION

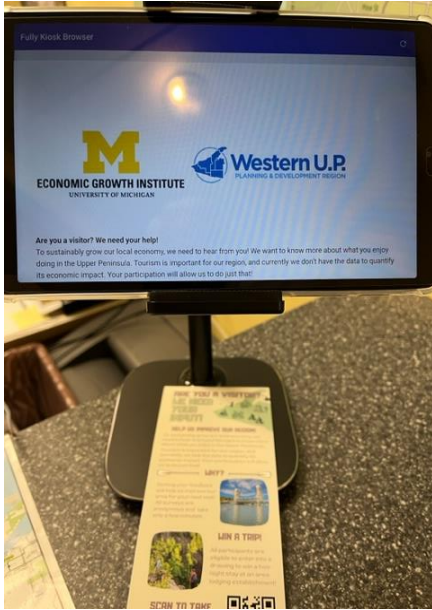
Last October's GAZETTE included a 2-page overview of the \$\$ impact that non-profit Arts and Cultural organizations & their audiences have in the U.P. On



**Saturday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, at 1:00 p.m.**, Sue Roll, the President of the Upper Peninsula Arts and Culture Alliance, will give a 1-hour presentation at Cold Iron

Brewing Company on the full findings of this 1<sup>st</sup> ever **Arts & Economy study, with special reference to the Ironwood area.** Sponsored by the Ironwood Chamber of Commerce, this event is free and open to all of our members, friends, and public. With the non-appearance of “Winter” this year, the summer festivals take on increased economic importance, and Sue's presentation will provide numbers on overall and daily U.P. tourist spending and attendance at arts activities—both performing and visual.

## CHAMBER TO SPONSOR UM & WUPPDR SUMMER TOURISM IMPACT FORUM ON



**TUESDAY,  
APRIL 16<sup>TH</sup>, @  
5:00 P.M.**

Those of you who visited the Chamber office last summer will remember this tablet & rack card on our counter. The results of this Summer Tourism Study by the **University of Michigan Economic Growth Institute**

are now being finalized. [The Chamber is sponsoring Dr. Sarah Crane & Eli McClain from the Institute, along with WUPPDR Director Jerry Wourenmaa](#) in a public presentation of the results of this survey at Cold Iron Brewing Co., on Tuesday, April 16<sup>th</sup>, at 5:00 p.m. We will have free pizza and chips for munchies + a cash bar.

Because we were gifted with a Chamber office counter tablet last summer, as well as Office Guy pestering of visitors, our Depot office garnered about 180 individuals and families who took this survey. There were other tablet placements here in the Western U.P. as well, and some folks took the rack card which had the QR code on it to enable them to take the survey on their own. Thus, the Ironwood area had a VERY GOOD representation of summer visitor survey responders!

Among many questions, this survey asked for visitor origin, length of stay, where stayed (camp, AirBnB, motel, family), activities (events, arts, outdoor recreation, sites), and \$\$ spent per day. Like the 2022 Winter Survey, we can gain a good snapshot of WHO comes here, WHAT they do, and HOW MUCH they spend!

As local businesses and organizations begin their planning for this important upcoming Summer visitor season, having a good understanding of who comes here can help provide a well-marketed and welcoming outreach. It is so important that these folks have a GOOD EXPERIENCE here—word of mouth is just about everything (still)—especially

those folks who are “prospecting” in the Range with a view toward relocation to our community.

## 2024 FESTIVAL IRONWOOD ORGANIZING COMMITTEE MET MONDAY, FEB. 5



Apropos to the previous article, Festival Ironwood planning got underway on 2/5/24 at the Aurora Club. Tents have been reserved, as have most all of the musical acts. Over the next few months, the hour-by-hour schedule of events will be finalized. At present we have left the old 2023 schedule on the Chamber website to provide folks with an informational listing of last year’s happenings. **Festival 2024 will be from Wednesday, July 17 to Saturday, July 20<sup>th</sup>.** On the Chamber Festival Ironwood web page, you will find registration forms for various events and the craft show—these are LAST YEAR’s forms, but you can still use them—just realize that the dates are incorrect for 2024. We are having to adjust some of these forms for 2024 and the new ones will be up as soon as they are ready.

**The Festival Ironwood STEAK FEED FUNDRAISER will be held at the Auroa Club on Saturday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>.** Tickets will be available here at the Chamber office soon. This is one of the principal fund-raising events that help put on the Festival, and tickets will be limited in number, so don’t forget to get yours! Various raffles will also be featured as part of this Steak Feed event at the Club.

## 2023 IRONWOOD CHAMBER OF COMMERCE YEAR IN BRIEF REVIEW

Last year (2023) was a year which included some Chamber transitions as well as increasing outreach success in promoting the Ironwood area as a place not only to visit, but as an ideal re-location area for individuals, families, and enterprises.

In January of 2024, we welcomed our new Board of Directors officers: Kari Klemme, President, Mark Schwanz, Vice-President, Nicole Hellman, Treasurer, and Randy Kirchoff as Secretary.

During 2023, we changed our web hosting/operations to Faster Solutions, Duluth, MN, all the while retaining our two long-time Chamber member web and computer experts, Scott Bertz of WebWorkLife and Al Estola, of Al's Computer service--who provide wonderfully prompt and knowledgeable Chamber computer/web help. While the IronwoodGO app is still not launched, all the preparatory work has at last been completed.

Kris Darrow became the FeLiveLife content manager in 2023, and through her expertise and energy, FeLiveLife has garnered major growth in both its website outreach and functionality. FeLiveLife, linking as it does Iron County, WI and Gogebic County, MI from an all-event perspective, is the "go-to" place to learn all about event happenings on the Range, AND to link directly with the event organizers.

Perhaps one of the most visible capital transitions occurred this Fall with the re-stringing and re-bulbing of the Depot Park Jack Frost tree by Chamber member Joe's Tree Service. Chamber interns, volunteers, and the Office Guy bulbed 10 new 100' strands with 1,000 LED bulbs, and Joe and Penny Merz very artistically arranged these lights on our ever-growing-larger Jack Frost Tree, resulting in a wonderfully bright "Jack Frost Festival of Lights" symbol this Festival year.

The Jack Frost \$10K raffle sold out this 2023, thanks to the combined efforts of our ticket sellers AND ticket purchasers. The Jack Frost Fund made monetary community contributions to the following: Wolverine Nordic Challenge, GCC "Fire On The Hill" snowmobile race, Emberlight Festival Performance Infusion, Bessemer 4<sup>th</sup> of July, Wakefield Powerboat Races, Festival Ironwood, GCC Career Exploration Day, GCC Civic Center Cornhole Tournament, Range Art August Studio Tour, Rotary Club Golf, Wakefield Gus Macker, GCC Summer Youth, Polar Bear Hockey, Gogebic County Fair, Copper Peak Trails Fest, Friends of the Miners Park, Northwind Co-op Kids Food Program, GCC Samson Golf, Wakefield Danny B. Tournament, Historic Ironwood Theatre, City of Ironwood Hiawatha Playground, Upper Peninsula Arts & Cultural Alliance, SISU Ski Fest, Ironwood Twp. Santa, Santa's Headquarters, and Gogebic Range Trail Authority. All told, over \$8,763

in Jack Frost funds were returned to our community through the above sponsorships!



**The Chamber Depot Office and Counter played Monday through Friday host to over 3,059 folks during 2023.**

Visitors, tourists,

"prospective re-locaters", and recreationists stopped in to inquire about local life, get a map, an area Guide, site brochures, Ironwood resource guides, and Chamber member business rack cards. As the "front porch" to Ironwood, the centrally located Depot office (with its 24/7 outdoor lighted Chamber City Map), offers in-person greeting and informational resources. In this day of the iPhone and on-line registrations, keeping and valuing the personal welcoming visitor "meet and greet" remains a powerful U.P. promotional and marketing strategy.

The Chamber Director ("Office Guy") is a member and officer of the Ironwood Economic Development Corporation Board, attends and contributes to all Downtown Ironwood Development Authority Meetings, writes requested economic grant support letters, provides office support to some member organizations (such as Festival Ironwood), calendars the Jack Frost Festival of Wintertime Events and organizes the Festival of Lights Parade, partially or fully edits/admins the FeLiveLife, Festival Ironwood, Jack Frost Festival, Ironwood Chamber, and Ironwood Historical Society Facebook pages, updates the Chamber website business and event profiles, develops/operates the Jack Frost \$10K raffle, organizes and runs the Chamber November Volunteer Fair at the Memorial Building, partners with GCC and MI WORKS! to plan the high school Career Exploration Fair, and (this coming year) writes, sells ads, and produces the Chamber of Commerce Ironwood Destination Guide. Of the total Chamber operating expenses of 2023, the Director's salary only composed about 22% of the budget, with all the rest going to structural Chamber operations and direct Ironwood marketing, advertising, and promotion.

The Office Guy is most thankful to each and every Chamber member—it is your \$ support that enables this office and its outreach to expand each year! Wishing you all a healthy life in 2024, and increasing success in your individual enterprises!