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THE CHAMBER Impact

MAR/APR 2025

Governor Jared Polis Share Insights on State Affairs

Governor Jared Polis was the special guest at the Government Affairs meeting on Tuesday, February 18, 2025, held at the Community College of Aurora. This highly anticipated event brought together business leaders, elected officials, and community members to discuss pressing legislative and economic issues affecting the Eastern Metro area and beyond.

Sunny Banka of Sunny Homes and Associates and Chair of the Government Affairs Committee opened the meeting followed by updates from Eastern Metro legislators and elected officials. Liz Rogers, intergovernmental relations manager for the City of Aurora, provided a legislative update, and Elizabeth Lo, legislative policy director with Husch Blackwell Strategies, discussed current legislation impacting the business community. Dr. Mordecai Brownlee, president of the Community College of Aurora (CCA) where the event was hosted, talked about some of the exciting projects at CCA, and introduced Governor Polis.

Governor Polis provided insights on both state and national matters. He talked about the importance of creating affordable housing for Coloradans and how his administration is working to expedite



Governor Jared Polis

sustainable housing development. In terms of public safety, Governor Polis has been an advocate for increased public safety investments. He has called for additional funding during legislative sessions to enhance crime reduction efforts and support local law enforcement agencies across Colorado. When asked about how over-regulation is hurting businesses, Governor Polis stated he is in favor of requiring the elimination of existing regulations with the introduction of any new regulations.

The Governor took questions from the audience, and in a light moment, when asked about his favorite restaurant in Aurora, he responded that "Aurora is the culinary capitol of Colorado."

Additional elected officials attending the event were Arapahoe County Commissioner Rhonda Fields, Centennial City Council members Amy Tharp and Mike Sutherland.

The Aurora Chamber of Commerce supports a diverse set of voices, working with elected officials, businesses, and community members to drive positive change. Through programs like the Government Affairs Committee, the Chamber remains dedicated to fostering economic growth and collaboration. ■

Leadership Legacies: Alumni Making a Difference



Full Circle Leadership: From Aurora to Nashville

By Sam McGhee

Some things just stand the test of time — Leadership Aurora is one of them.

For 40 years, this program has shaped leaders, inspired change, and persevered through some of our country's most challenging times. And in what can only be described as a happy coincidence (or a sign of great things to come), Leadership Aurora and I both began our journeys in 1984 — one as a leadership incubator, the other as a young recruit at the Aurora Police Department.



Sam McGhee

Fast forward to 2002: fresh off the heels of 9/11, I had the opportunity to attend the first Leadership Aurora class of the post-9/11 era. I was elected class president, and from that moment on, I never looked back. Over the years, I've had the privilege of serving as vice chair, chair, and past chair of the board of directors — and for about a decade, I had the honor of leading the Friday leadership seminars during the program's kickoff retreats.

What's kept Leadership Aurora thriving all these years? A powerful mix of tradition and evolution. Program Director Rene Simard has masterfully balanced continuity with growth, ensuring that each class walks away with not just knowledge but the ability to create authentic impact.

[continued on page 7]

Chair's Letter

Dear Chamber Members,

Time has flown! It feels like just yesterday that I stepped into the role of Chair of the Chamber Board, and now, as we move into the spring season, I find myself appreciating all that we have accomplished together. With just over a year behind me and only a few months to go in my term, I also reflect that I am grateful for the dedication, innovation, and commitment of our Chamber community.

Looking ahead, I am excited about the opportunities before us. We've made great strides in supporting businesses, strengthening connections, and driving economic growth, and I have no doubt this momentum will continue under the leadership of our incoming Chair, Tyrone Adams, whose vision and passion will take The Chamber to new heights.

The Chamber is a powerful advocate for businesses, ensuring that our voices are heard and our interests



Kristi Kleinholz
Chamber Board Chair

represented, while providing networking, development programs, and policy support. I encourage you to reflect on your engagement — how are you involved, and how can you deepen that connection? Your participation is what keeps our Chamber and our businesses thriving.

Let's continue working together to foster collaboration, advocate for business success, and ensure The Chamber remains a vital resource.

Thank you for allowing me the privilege of serving as your Chamber Chair of the Board. It has been an honor to work alongside such an inspiring group of professionals, and I look forward to a strong finish to this term and an exciting future

ahead for our Chamber.

With gratitude,

Kristi Kleinholz
Chair of the Chamber Board

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THE CHAMBER'S MISSION



*Our Mission is to serve and represent
our members so their businesses
and our community will prosper.*

ChamberCommittees

An Inside Look

ARTS + BUSINESS CONNECTION

The Tuesday, January 7 ABC meeting at Burrell Arts @ Central High School was cancelled due to arctic weather and snow. It is rescheduled for Tuesday, September 9, 2025.

Manos Sagrados: A Hub for Creatives

Tuesday, February 4, 2025

In February, the Arts + Business Connection (ABC) Committee visited Manos Sagrados at 9975 E Colfax Ave, Aurora, CO 80010. Manos Sagrados is an inclusive venue dedicated to music, art, and movement. Led by Executive Director Bruce Trujillo, the space serves as a hub for creatives, offering booking and consulting services while fostering a community-driven approach to the arts.

During the visit, the committee had the opportunity to explore how Manos Sagrados supports local talent, providing an accessible and welcoming environment for artists and performers. Trujillo shared insights on the venue's mission to exist by and for the communities it serves, emphasizing its role in empowering diverse voices through cultural expression and collaboration.

The ABC Committee's visit highlighted the synergies between business and the arts, highlighting how creative spaces like Manos Sagrados contribute to economic and cultural vibrancy in the Colfax corridor.



Manos Sagrados Executive Director Bruce Trujillo (far left) with the enthusiastic Arts + Business Connection group.

Hackenberger pointed out that transportation is not "up there" as a priority this session but there are a few bills being introduced by the Transportation Legislative Review Committee. These include bills to stress the importance of providing mode choice for citizens; provide funding to improve safety for vulnerable road users such as bicyclists and pedestrians; provide more transparency of railroad investigative reports; and standardize paratransit services. The Front Range Passenger Rail (FRPR) remains a high priority for Governor Polis but there are many questions about its future.

DEN on the Move: Project Update and Future Vision

Wednesday, February 5, 2025

By Tim Harris, Transportation vice-chair, Horrocks Engineers

The Transportation meeting on February 5, 2025, highlighted Denver International Airport (DEN), the third busiest airport globally and the largest in the Western Hemisphere.

DEN's Senior Vice President for Special Projects Michael Sheehan, discussed ongoing

projects totaling nearly \$7 billion, including the Great Hall program, baggage handling systems, capital improvements, North Terminal development, and a new consolidated rental facility. The meeting highlighted DEN's significant economic impact and future development plans.

The airport currently has six operational runways, including a 16,000-foot runway, and employs 40,000 people. In 2024, the airport served nearly 82.3 million passengers.



Michael Sheehan

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS, EDUCATION, AND ENERGY

The Legislative Breakfast scheduled for Tuesday, January 7, 2025, was cancelled due to the same arctic weather and snow that cancelled the Arts + Business meeting that day.

It is being rescheduled and reformatted as a visit to the State Capitol on April 1, 2025, to talk with Legislators. (Not an April Fool's Day Joke)

See article, page 1, about Governor Jared Polis presenting at the February 18, 2025, Government Affairs meeting.

WOMEN IN BUSINESS

Using the AI Edge to Your Advantage

Wednesday, January 15, 2025

The Aurora Chamber of Commerce's Women in Business Committee's January 2025 meeting hosted Kathy Basel, who

TRANSPORTATION

Current and Upcoming Transportation Legislation

Wednesday, January 8, 2025

By Tim Harris, Transportation vice-chair, Horrocks Engineers

At the beginning of 2025, the Transportation committee welcomed Managing Principal Micki Hackenberger, and Legislative Policy Director Elizabeth Lo, with Husch Blackwell Strategies, the Chamber's lobbying firm.

Hackenberger and Lo gave updates on potential transportation legislation, as the current legislative session began on the same day as our meeting. The session is likely to include consideration of 500 – 700 pieces of legislation under the cloud of a projected budget deficit of almost a billion dollars so there will be many tough decisions for all involved in the legislative process in the next few months.



Elizabeth Lo (left), and Micki Hackenberger with Husch Blackwell Strategies present about transportation legislation on January 8, 2025.

[continued on page 4]

shared her expertise on leveraging AI to build authentic connections and craft messages that convert to loyalty, sales, and engagement. Attendees discovered how to reflect their unique voice and foster trust through meaningful communication, using AI.

Chamber member Fidelity National Title sponsored the accompanying healthy and tasty lunch from Mad Greens.

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

Advocacy & Incentives

Wednesday, January 8, 2025

The Aurora Chamber's Young Professionals Committee hosted a dynamic event featuring key insights on the 2025 legislative session and tax-saving opportunities for businesses.

Elizabeth Lo of Husch Blackwell Strategies provided an overview of what to expect during the legislative session, sharing how she advocates for Chamber businesses at the Capitol to address impactful legislation.

Davis Oaks and Mikayla Brannon from DRCOG highlighted the Colorado Alternative Transportation Options Tax Credit, offering businesses up to \$125,000 in tax refunds for employee commute benefits. They shared practical tips, answered questions, and connected participants with transportation experts to streamline the process.



Chamber members at the January 2025 Women in Business meeting about AI.

knowledge to the test. Special recognition goes to Chamber Ambassadors Anne and Darin Overstreet, who impressed us all by answering the most questions correctly!

These types of events provide a fantastic opportunity for young professionals to connect, learn, and grow while gaining valuable insights into our local business community.

BUCKLEY REGIONAL MILITARY AFFAIRS

Senior Enlisted Leader Sensing Session Lunch

In early January 2025, the BRMAC sponsored a sensing session with 18 of Buckley Space Force Base's Senior Enlisted Leaders. Over lunch, the event created a valuable opportunity for candid discussions

between The Chamber's Director of Military Affairs Rob Devall and base leaders, on the needs and challenges facing service members across the installation. Topics ranged from quality-of-life initiatives to workforce development, reinforcing the BRMAC's commitment to supporting the Buckley community. By engaging directly with base leadership, The Chamber continues to strengthen our partnership and advocate for solutions that enhance the well-being of Buckley personnel.



Senior enlisted leader sensing session

Buckley Space Force Base State of the Base Address

Wednesday, January 22, 2025

On January 22, 2025, the Buckley Regional Military Affairs Council (BRMAC), part of The Aurora Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with the Aurora Rotary Club, hosted the third annual State of the Base Address for Buckley Space Force Base. The event brought together more than 200 elected officials, civic leaders, and base personnel to discuss mission updates and community collaboration.

Colonel Heidi Dexter, Space Base Delta 2 commander, highlighted Buckley's 2024 achievements, including a \$2.6 billion contribution to the local economy and the successful execution of \$102 million in infrastructure and quality-of-life projects. Chief Master Sergeant Sharma Haynes emphasized the impact of the Purple Star Initiative, supporting over 44,000 military-connected

[continued on page 5]

Chamber Trivia Night at Dry Dock Brewing

Wednesday, February 12, 2025

In February 2025, The Chamber's Young Professionals gathered at Dry Dock Brewing for an exciting evening of Chamber Trivia, featuring questions about how The Chamber supports businesses, and fun facts about the Aurora community.

A huge thank you to Dry Dock Brewing for hosting the event, and to everyone who participated in this fun and engaging evening. Attendees had the opportunity to meet new people, form teams, and even come up with creative team names before putting their



Young Professionals enjoying Chamber Trivia night at Dry Dock Brewing.

[continued on page 5]

CBCA to honor two Aurora organizations

The Colorado Business Committee for the Arts (CBCA) will honor two Aurora organizations as Arts & Business Partnership Award Honorees at its Business for Arts Awards Luncheon on April 22, 2025: The Havana Business Improvement District – On Havana Street working with Aurora's Art in Public Places program, for "Art 2C on Havana Street," with rotating exhibits and community cultural events, which benefit local businesses, artists, and the public; and The People's Building for providing high-quality, affordable and accessible space for artists to explore, educate, and perform, while engaging in vital economic stabilization and development.

There are a total of twelve awards given at the annual event, which celebrates the diverse cross-sector partnerships and individuals for their innovation and inspirational achievements and community impact," says Christin Crampton Day, CBCA executive director.

CCA President's Advisory Council Adds Commissioners

The [Community College of Aurora](#) (CCA) welcomes the newest members of the [President's Advisory Council](#), Arapahoe County Commissioner and former State Senator Rhonda Fields and Adams County Commissioner Lynn Baca. The two most recent members were approved by the Colorado Community College



System in December.

These latest additions round out the Council to full capacity. With the full roster of members in place, the group will now work on ideas to advance CCA's mission and goals.

Members of the Advisory Council collaborate closely with CCA President Dr. Mordecai Brownlee and the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education to address the long-term educational needs of the community served by CCA.



Adams County Commissioner Lynn Baca

Kristen Brantley Joins Painted Prairie and Windler



Kristen Brantley

Painted Prairie and Windler, two master-planned communities in the Denver Aerotropolis region, have appointed Kristen Brantley as broker and employer relationship manager.

Brantley, formerly a senior franchise development consultant at RE/MAX, brings extensive experience in brokerage growth and agent support. She will lead outreach and engagement for brokers and employers in the Denver Metro area. Painted Prairie, an award-winning community, and Windler, launching in 2025, continue to expand their innovative housing developments.

Veterans Corner at CCA

The Community College of Aurora (CCA) unveiled their new Veterans Corner honoring those who are serving and have served in the Armed Forces. CCA President Dr. Mordecai Brownlee and Colorado Freedom Memorial



CCA President Dr. Mordecai Brownlee (left), and Colorado Freedom Memorial Executive Director Rick Crandall

Executive Director Rick Crandall, along with The Chamber's COO Rene Simard, and Director of Military Affairs Rob Devall, attended the event.

Wings Over the Rockies Welcomes New Leadership

Wings Over the Rockies Air & Space Museum welcomed a new president and CEO in January 2025: Marcus A. Harshaw, Jr. Harshaw succeeds John L. Barry, Maj Gen, USAF (Ret), who led Wings since 2017.

As Wings' new president and CEO, Harshaw will focus on enhancing visitor experiences, expanding educational programs, strengthening community impact, and driving innovation at both the Air and Space Museum in Lowry and Exploration of Flight campus at Centennial Airport.

Harshaw formerly served as the associate museum director of experiences at Carnegie Science Center in Pittsburgh, PA, where he oversaw strategic development and operational director for museum and STEM outreach programs. ■



Marcus A. Harshaw, Jr.



COMMITTEES [continued from page 4]

children in Colorado. The address underscored the strong partnership between Buckley and the surrounding community.

See the Channel 7 story about the event: <https://www.denver7.com/news/front-range/aurora-buckley-space-force-base-generated-2-6b-economic-impact-on-surrounding-community-in-2024-officials-say>; Aurora Sentinel story: <https://sentinelcolorado.com/metro/buckley-space-force-base-grows-in-impact-contributions-reach-2-6-billion/>; Denver Gazette story: https://denvergazette.com/news/business/space-force-buckley-economic-impact/article_a14846d8-dda5-11ef-b4e1-3b64774fa093.html



Col Heidi Dexter and Chief Master Sergeant Sharma Haynes address the crowd at the State of the Base.

Defense Communities Caucus & ADC HOME Initiative

In February 2025, BRMAC representatives attended the Defense Communities Caucus meeting, co-chaired by Representative Jason Crow (CO-6), a former Army Ranger dedicated to strengthening military communities. The caucus fosters bipartisan collaboration to address defense infrastructure, military family support, and veteran transition services. Participation highlights a commitment to engaging with policymakers to enhance the resilience of defense communities.

Additionally, BRMAC supports the Association of Defense Communities' (ADC) HOME Initiative, which advocates for increased funding for defense infrastructure, community partnerships, and quality-of-life improvements for military families. <https://defensecommunities.org/securitystartshere/> ■

RibbonCuttings & OpenHouses

Ribbon cuttings
mean business: **55 Jobs**



Tri Pointe Homes at Painted Prairie – 20736 E 57th Dr, Aurora, CO 80019

It was a chilly and enthusiastic group as Tri Pointe Homes Division President Kelly Taga cut the ribbon for the grand opening of Tri Pointe Homes at Painted Prairie. Tri Pointe offers a collection of modern, two-story single-family homes designed to blend comfort and style. The community is strategically located just minutes from Denver International Airport and downtown Denver. Attending the event were Chamber Board member David Barber, RE/MAX Leaders; Chamber President and CEO Naomi Colwell; and Chamber Ambassador Chartashia Miller, TT Coaching with Results. (2/11/25)
<https://www.tripointehomes.com/co/denver-metro/painted-prairie> 720-386-2314.



Signal Security – 10800 E Bethany Dr, Ste 350, Aurora, CO 80014

For the Signal Security ribbon cutting, Brand Ambassador D'Amara Gray, Owner Jeff Chovan (to the left of Gray), and Director of Business Development Patrick Hansen (behind Gray), did the honors to celebrate the occasion. Signal serves in the local community, providing a suite of professional and industry-leading security patrol services for residential, commercial, retail, and industrial customers. In attendance were Ambassadors Rob Mathes, The Mathes Insurance Agency (Brokers); Jason Read, RTB Technologies; Danielle Lammon, Allstate Insurance, Danielle Shannon Agency; and Sanjay Tyagi, Schooley Mitchell of Denver. (2/5/25)
<https://locations.teamssignal.com/US/CO/Aurora/56/> 720-737-0888.

Member Contribution

In today's fast-paced world, constant news about cybersecurity breaches can be overwhelming. For small businesses with limited resources, these challenges might feel unmanageable. However, building a strong cybersecurity foundation doesn't need to be expensive or complicated.

Implementing new security measures may face pushback from employees. Address concerns by explaining why these steps are essential. Prioritize usability to ensure security doesn't disrupt productivity and integrates smoothly into daily operations.

Effective cybersecurity relies on layered defenses. Start small and build gradually, focusing on measures that offer significant impact:

- **Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA):** Adds an extra layer of protection, making it harder for attackers to access accounts
- **Employee Training:** Educate your team on identifying threats like phishing through trusted resources
- **Simulated Phishing Campaigns:** Test employees' ability to spot scams and build awareness
- **Regular Software Updates:** Patch vulnerabilities to reduce risk, such as fixing critical flaws in operating systems



- **Strong Password Policies:** Require passwords of at least 12 characters. Use a reputable password manager for secure storage
- **Regular Backups:** Back up critical data to secure cloud storage and test recovery processes regularly
- **Robust Firewalls:** Use firewalls on networks and individual devices to block unauthorized access
- **Least Privilege Access:** Limit access to sensitive data based on job roles to minimize risks

With careful planning, small businesses can improve their cybersecurity without overspending. Start with these simple steps and consult experts for tailored advice to stay ahead of potential threats. Protect your business today by focusing on practical, achievable measures.

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This article provided by Jason Balakier with ExecuTech: Security Focused IT. (720) 308-2033.

69th Annual Awards Banquet and Silent Auction April 11, 2025



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LEADERSHIP LEGACIES [continued from page 1]

A New Chapter: Leadership in Nashville

After nearly 45 years in law enforcement, I officially retired in October 2024 – but let's be honest, I wasn't about to sit back and take up gardening. Instead, I'm channeling decades of experience into helping leaders in high-stakes environments navigate burnout, decision fatigue, and the relentless stress of crisis management.

And that brings me to my next big project – one that I couldn't be more excited about.

After a year of careful planning, I've taken on a leadership development role with the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department, where my sister's company, InteraWorks, has officially launched an innovative, first-of-its-kind leadership training program. This nine-month immersive experience blends:

- In-person learning
- Group collaboration

- Personal coaching
- A hands-on practicum

The result? A transformative leadership journey.

These officers and professional staff aren't just learning about leadership. They're actively shaping the future of law enforcement.

Scaling Impact: 300 Leaders, 3 Years

With Cohorts #1 and #2 already underway, we've launched 60 officers and professional staff into this experience, with a bold goal of training 300 personnel over the next three years.

This initiative wouldn't be possible without the visionary leadership of Nashville's Chief Drake and his team, whose unwavering dedication has turned this idea into reality. It's also been made possible through groundbreaking partnerships with:

- InteraWorks – A next-generation learning and development company.
- Nashville Public Safety Alliance – Driving sustainable leadership investments.
- Best Year Yet Foundation – A game-changer in innovative funding models.

Looking Ahead

Leadership Aurora may have given me one of my first tastes of structured leadership training, but it certainly wasn't my last. The mission continues – not just in law enforcement, but for leaders in all walks of life. Whether it's Aurora, Nashville, or beyond, one thing is clear: the future of leadership in law enforcement and beyond is being built today.

And if you've been part of this Leadership Aurora journey, thank you. Here's to the next 40 years of leadership, growth, and impact. ■

MemberRenewals

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 BMO
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 MTS Mobile Staffing
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 Red Bird Counseling
 Renaissance Denver Central Park Hotel
 Schomp Subaru
 Signal Security
 STRIDE Community Health Center
 Susan Duncan, RE/MAX Professionals
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 The Mathes Insurance Agency (Brokers)
 TRA Insurance Broker - Brian Weiher
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HOPE CHALLENGE

June 9, 2025

Colorado Golf Club



Boys Hope Girls Hope
Colorado

The Hope Challenge combines premier golf, friendly competition, good food and a day of fun with your friends, clients and colleagues. Join in for an entertaining time while raising funds for Boys Hope Girls Hope of Colorado. Come tee off to help drive our mission!

Foursomes and sponsorship includes access to the driving range and Colorado Golf Club clubhouse, golf carts, brunch, dinner, drinks, caddies, and live auction.

ABOUT BOYS HOPE GIRLS HOPE

Boys Hope Girls Hope supports 130+ academically motivated youth to achieve their dreams of earning a college degree via tutoring, counseling, scholarship assistance and more.

Scholars are supported from high school through college, with the ultimate goal of graduating with a college degree prepared for a career.

Partner schools include Aurora Central High School and Regis Jesuit High School. Collegians attend colleges and universities primarily in Colorado.

COLORADO GOLF CLUB

Host of:

- 71st Senior PGA Championship
- 2013 Solheim Cup
- 2019 U.S. Mid-Amateur Championship

SCHEDULE

- 8:00am** Registration & Practice Facilities Open
- 9:45am** Putting Shoot Out
- 10:00am** Shotgun Start
- 4:00pm** Dinner, Awards Presentation

www.bhghcolorado.org/HopeChallenge