

Greater Scott County Chamber of Commerce will soon be saying goodbye to longtime director

Written by Marty Randall

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Keith Colbert is retiring for the second time in his professional career.

Colbert is the well-known face of the Greater Scott County Chamber of Commerce, having served as the organization's executive director since March, 1998, when he stepped into the role after the death of the Chamber's first director, Phil Martin.

Who knew he was going to stay so long in this second career? Certainly, Colbert had no idea that, upon retiring from being a successful executive with GE in Louisville after 30 years, he would be taking up a position promoting Scott County that he would not leave for 17 years.

And it's been a pretty exciting 17 years, as Colbert reflected on his years of being a leader in his adopted home community.

He began life in Trimble County, Ky., the son of tobacco farmers. He met his wife, the former Becky Judd, in the early 1960s when he was working for the Federal Bureau of Investigation at a cousin's party in New Albany.

They married, and he began working for GE at the Appliance Park, climbing that company's corporate ladder. They built a new home in Middletown, but, three years later in 1979, Becky's father, Dr. Marvin Judd, died suddenly. They sold their home and moved to Scott County, where they raised their three children and remained close to Becky's mother until her death.

Now, they enjoy being a part of the lives of their six grandchildren ages four to 16. "It's been wonderful to watch them grow," nodded this fond grandfather.

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As his retirement from GE grew closer, Colbert rather wondered what he'd do to keep busy. Well, the job of the Chamber was offered to him, and it's certainly filled the bill all these years.

"It's been so good to work with Scott County people, to get to know so many in the community who only want the best for the county," Colbert related, adding, "and it's been a lot of fun, too!"

He's worked with six or seven Chamber presidents, each of whom brought new vision, and several administrative assistants. Carolyn Brown stayed with him ten of those years, a credit, he said, to "...her understanding of the role the Chamber plays, and her patience with me."

Reflecting on programs and highlights, Colbert proudly advised that the Chamber's monthly newsletter has grown from a single page to 12 full color pages. Another growth of which he is proud is the Regional Business Expo. In 2012 when it first began, only 34 businesses participated from the four communities. In 2015, the Business Expo exploded with 108 booths, allowing companies and small businesses in Scott, Washington, Ripley, Jefferson and Jennings counties exposure to fellow businessmen and the public.

He has also encouraged more interaction with children and youth of Scott County. From its Character Counts! program that promotes positive traits to its Dollars and Sense which teaches teens entrepreneurial skills, the Chamber is attempting to prepare the younger portion of the population for the challenges each will face as they take their place in the community as adults.

Businesspeople have also stepped up to make things happen for the Chamber during Colbert's term. Roxanna Bixler organized the Chamber Challenge fund-raiser, which in 2014 brought in a record \$13,888 to support the organization's efforts for children and youth.

Thanks to the Challenge's dollars, Colbert is an enthusiastic supporter of the annual Junior Achievement Biz Camp. For the past two years, the Chamber has been able to send 50 students to Biz Camp, an enclosed facility in Louisville where the kids literally operate their own town, operating businesses, electing officials and making day-to-day decisions which will affect their success.

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“This is such a great experience for these youngsters. I've had parents tell me how it's made their children realize that, with an education, they can become owners of their own businesses or successfully work for a large company. It's a terrific feeling to know you've help open the world to young people,” he said.

The Chamber has also provided leadership and collaboration for establishment of the facility now known as the Nelson Spaulding Community Clearinghouse; published two volumes of the Millennium Edition of “Scott County: A Pictorial History”; and established a scholarship fund through the Scott County Community Foundation.

Currently, the Chamber has 318 members, not bad for a small county which has certainly faced many hard problems just in the past few years, both economically and socially.

Colbert feels gratitude toward Scott County, for taking him in and making him feel at home. “I'm leaving thankful I have met so many good people who have a desire to see this county get better,” he commented. He is hoping that the next executive director will get the same reception and experience the same willingness to work together as he has.

“We're going to have to look out for ourselves. We're sitting in a prime area for expansion coming from Clark County up here, and we must be prepared to welcome new people with new ideas while maintaining our 'small town' atmosphere of friendliness and cooperation,” advised Colbert.

He said he'll be glad to watch from the sidelines as new leaders emerge. “It's going to be an exciting time,” predicted Colbert.