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## TRICOUNTY AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



### Empowering and Connecting Women Through "REACH"

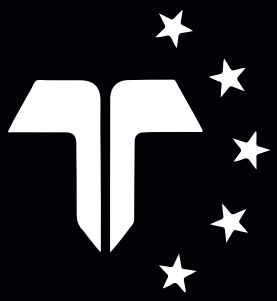
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# TRICOUNTY AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



*Eileen  
Dautrich,  
TCACC  
President*

## *Empowering and Connecting Women Through "REACH"*

**W**ith nearly half the seats on its board of directors filled by women, the TriCounty Area Chamber of Commerce (TCACC) has traditionally been and continues to be a strong advocate for women in the business community. Throughout nearly a century of serving and supporting its member businesses in Western Montgomery, Northern Chester, and Eastern Berks counties, the Chamber has worked diligently for all of its business members, male and female, but women in particular have been historically under-represented in the business arena, and through special programs like Women of the Workforce (WOW), TCACC has pro-actively served as a valuable resource and created numerous networking opportunities for female entrepreneurs, managers and executives.

The WOW program was rebranded in 2019 and is now called REACH. "The idea was to expand the program that we were offering through WOW," explains TCACC president **Eileen Dautrich**. "The philosophy behind calling the program REACH is to REACH out and take the hand of someone who needs us to help to pull them up. We REACH out and share our time, talents, and gifts with others, and we REACH for our goals – our next success," she said. "We want to REACH that point where we are proud of accomplishing our objectives, and we want our program to support our participants at all stages of their careers and wherever they are in their professional or personal journey."

When the COVID-19 epidemic emerged in March 2020, TCACC's operations, like those of many of its member businesses, were adversely impacted and challenged. "Several times over this organization has worked to reinvent itself for various reasons at various times, and this time was no different," Dautrich said.

PHOTO BY STYLISH IMAGES





**TCACC women board members, (L to R): Eileen Dautrich, TCACC President; Elaine Schaeffer; April Barkasi; Peggy Lee Clark; Therol Dix; Wendy Moyer-Drabick; and Lisa Lightcap**

The TCACC board of directors embraced the challenge, turning adversity into opportunity. Through the leadership of Dautrich and the support of the board of directors, the Chamber revamped and re-energized its focus as well as many of its platforms and outreach efforts. "The (COVID-19 crisis) has been an opportunity for us to take a hard look at who we are, what we are offering, who we are offering it to, what our key base of members truly need from us," Dautrich said, "and we'll continue to do that as often as we need to and adapt to meet those needs."

"Obviously the "look" of networking changed drastically as "zoom" became the most popular word in our vocabulary." "At the start of the pandemic, as part of the REACH program, the Chamber began hosting a bi-weekly "Coffee Chat" series via zoom where women members can check in, network, and connect with other professional women in the tri-county region. "Coffee Chat" was created in response to a suggestion from Chamber member Carina Hatfield of Weigner Insurance. "Carina was offering to coordinate a "happy hour" get together for the REACH Committee Members but instead I reached out to her and asked if she would help me facilitate a call with women who were interested in getting together and being a sounding board for each other," Dautrich said. "We had women members trying to work from home and help their kids with online schooling, as well as dealing with the multiple other issues that were resulting from the pandemic, so we set up Coffee Chat.



We meet every other Tuesday at 10:00 AM, and it's just an opportunity for women to support each other. Sometimes it's somebody having an issue and most of the hour is spent helping them through it," she explains. "Sometimes it's educational, and there's something that we want to talk about in greater detail and invite in a guest speaker. We've done some sessions on goal setting, and then, it's open conversation of tips and tricks from the rest of the group. Sometimes it's re-introducing businesses just so everybody remembers who is on the call and what their area of expertise is, because everything Chamber is relationship based. We want this group to form relationships." The Coffee Chat group began meeting in April of 2020 and continues to meet every other Tuesday.

"REACH is an amazing redevelopment and refresh of what were some previous women's groups, with the new aspect and the new focus being on mentorship, which is incredibly rewarding and refreshing for everyone who is involved," said TCACC board member **April M. Barkasi**, President, Cedarville Engineering Group, LLC.

The REACH committee, comprised of women on the TCACC board of directors and women from other Chamber Member businesses, has also continued quarterly luncheons that were a regular part of the WOW program, and have organized a half-day conference featuring a slate of inspirational professional speakers, to be held Thursday, November 4, 2021.

*Continued on page 8)*



**TCACC Chairman Elect April Barkasi, REACH Co-Chair, and President, Cedarville Engineering Group**



## REACH — Empowering and connecting women!



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Beyond events, the REACH committee will also work on developing an informal mentoring program to assist and support women who are relatively new to the challenges of starting, owning and/or managing a business.

“The REACH program is about empowering and connecting women, as the tagline says, and that is what it’s about,” explains TCACC board and executive committee member **Lisa Lightcap**, Vice President, Tompkins VIST Bank. “Taking women either from their infancy of just getting out into the business world, to mature women, and even pairing them up (with a mentor). It gives women in business another opportunity to see what’s working for other women and gives them that network and support group that is really needed.”

“I was thinking about REACH and the impact that REACH intends to have and does have on young women and wish that I’d had such an organization to be mentors for me when I was making decisions as a very young person out of college trying to figure out what I wanted my career to be,” adds board member **Therol Dix**, VP, Montgomery County Community College Pottstown Campus. “It’s a real pleasure to be a part of an organization that has such a key focus on building relationships and improving the core possibilities for young women.”

TCACC Board member **Peggy Lee Clark**, Executive Director of PAID, Inc., concurs. “My thoughts on REACH are how important it is for experienced women to help younger women, and to share all of the lessons we’ve learned, and also how we can support women not only in the workforce, but in society in general.”

Fellow board member **Wendy Moyer-Drabick**, Moyer-Drabick & Associates, Accounting Systems & Consulting, adds, “I recently joined as a board member, but I’ve been involved with REACH since the very beginning, and I like the networking. I like how it empowers women, and I hope we can do some mentoring for women-owned businesses that are trying to get established,” she said. “I would like to see us do some kind of program that is led by women, specifically in our industry, like maybe a marketing person, an accounting person, or a lawyer, to do a series of workshops in a day, for women who are thinking about getting into business,” she said.

“We have a number of women (in the Chamber), especially on the committee, who are business owners advanced in their careers, and have accomplished certain things in their own right,” explains Eileen Dautrich. “We want people to be able to learn from those individuals, not only their successes and how they achieved them, but obstacles that they were able to overcome,” she said, adding, “Everything kind of took a pause at the beginning of 2020. Our hope is, as we move forward with 2021 and 2022 programming, to develop mentoring opportunities, even if it’s just starting out with a first coffee, and scheduling time to get together. We will start with our committee members, and they will meet with women who are not necessarily on the committee, just for something they may need help or want help with. It is not a formal mentoring program as of yet. We hope to grow the program into that opportunity. It’s about helping women reach their own goals and the support we can offer to help them get there.”

Of course, the TriCounty Area Chamber is focused on supporting all of its members, male and female, and the



**TCACC Treasurer Lisa Lightcap,  
REACH Co-Chair, and Vice President,  
Tompkins VIST Bank**



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**Contact Alice at the TriCounty Area Chamber of Commerce for more information, [alice@tricountyareachamber.com](mailto:alice@tricountyareachamber.com) or 610-326-2900.**

philosophy behind the expansion and development of the REACH program is reflective of the Chamber's overall intensified efforts to increase opportunities for its membership from the spring of 2020 to present.

"That is who we are," Dautrich said. "That overarching idea (of expanding opportunities for members) has just led us on different paths. REACH is one example. I remember many years ago when we first started WOW. The idea was, why should women be treated any differently? But if you look at the demographics of a typical room back in the late 1990, early 2000s, women were not the key demographic."

"We have worked hard to get the women that are on our board to be able to sit in those seats, and to really change the look of our board," she said. "That opportunity spurred us to find a different way to reach a population. We do the same through Leadership TriCounty. That is a program of our Foundation which is an educational arm of the Chamber. The Leadership TriCounty program provides members with an opportunity to connect with individuals, give them some assistance in a particular area that they need, very similar to REACH," she said. "It's more limited participation with a particular focus on professional development, but again it's just an opportunity for us to help people make connections," she continued. "Those classes stay in contact with each other when they graduate. We're helping to support their leadership development and professional growth. They are helping to support each other. And the same thing with the Young Professionals program that we started a couple of years ago. It's just creating an opportunity for people to network in differ-



ent groups, to feel supported or more comfortable in different environments, and again, trying to provide whatever we can to our members. We want to create those additional environments where they feel comfortable and can be successful on their terms," she said.

"I think the true philosophy of REACH goes back to who we are as an organization. Whether you are a business that was suffering through COVID, we were trying to be there to support you and "REACH" out our hand to help you up. Whether you were able to stay open and you were successful, we were trying to learn success from those organizations in terms of what they may have been doing for social distancing, new employee policies, masking, PPE, etc., having their REACH be lifting up and supporting fellow Chamber Members. We were

also trying to give all businesses access to resources, even though they may not have been as in need as some of our other members, and we worked to celebrate successes, we continued to offer members the opportunity to post press releases, be on Chamber Chat live on Facebook Live and help tell the stories of our members. So, it is not necessarily a word we use in our everyday marketing of our organization but it, the word REACH, touches on the same principles and cornerstones of who we are and will always be at the core of our organization," she said.

Dautrich's fellow board members concur. "The TCACC is an incredibly important community asset in that it provides support to all of our businesses and non-profits and especially in this post-pandemic era," said Elaine Schaeffer, Executive Director, Schuylkill River Greenways National Heritage Area. "This type of networking and support is just so important."

The TriCounty Area Chamber of Commerce has been tremendously helpful for myself and the businesses that I am involved in for the business-to-business support," adds April Barkasi. "The community overall, which includes those who are directly affected in investment, those who have businesses within the region, also non-profits and the community resources that are members of the organization, just make it a holistic group to support the overall economy in this area."

**For additional information about the TriCounty Area Chamber of Commerce and its REACH program, please call 610.326.2900 and visit [www.tricountyareachamber.com](http://www.tricountyareachamber.com).**