

ANNUAL REPORT

20
26

WE ARE THE CHAMBER



WHO WE ARE

The Abilene Chamber of Commerce is more than an organization. We are a network of businesses, leaders and community partners working together to help strengthen Abilene and the Big Country.

We connect businesses to resources and relationships, advocate for a strong business climate, develop leaders, support economic growth and create opportunities that move our community forward.

From small businesses and entrepreneurs to major employers and community partners, our members are at the heart of everything we do.

Together, we are building business. We are building community. We are the Chamber.

**TOGETHER, WE ARE
BUILDING BUSINESS.**

**WE ARE BUILDING
COMMUNITY.**

WE ARE THE CHAMBER.



OUR LEADERSHIP



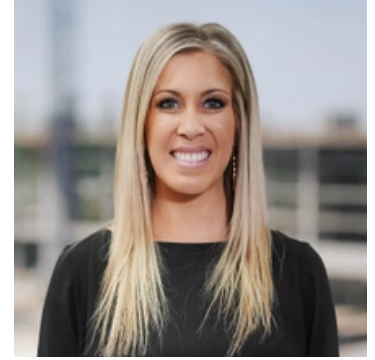
Brad Benham
Chamber Chair
Hendrick Health



Will Dugger
Chair-elect
Jacob | Martin, Ltd



David Bailey
Secretary/Treasurer
First Financial Bank



Dr. Kelsi Mangrem
Immediate Past Chair
Holland Hearing Center



Mike Perez
Executive Committee
Abilene Environmental
Landfill



Jodi Hierholzer
Executive Committee
BODY WORX PT
& Performance



Doug Peters
President & CEO
Abilene Chamber
of Commerce



2025-2026 Board of Directors

AFFILIATE + COMMITTEE CHAIRS

ACVB: Travis Ruiz · KTAB/KRBC
Cultural Affairs: Stephen Jones · Clear Fork Bank
Growth Alliance: Will Dugger · Jacob | Martin
Young Professionals: Shelby Villarreal · County Waste Service
Business Advocacy: Gary Grubbs · Lawrence Hall Abilene
HBC: Michael Gutierrez · TTUHSC - Abilene
Leadership Programs: Robb Walker · West Texas Rehab
Military Affairs Council: Katie Alford · Community Foundation of Abilene

TERM ENDS 2026

Will Dugger · Jacob | Martin
Ken Hogan · Abilene Assoc. of Realtors
Doug McIntyre · Hardin-Simmons University
Mike Perez · Abilene Environmental Landfill
Kimberly Prater · Gary's Floral Gallery
Fran Stone-Beale · A-Town Cleaners

TERM ENDS 2027

Tim Cooper · Clear Fork Bank
Gerardo Duarte · AbiMar Foods
Nathan Hathorn · Silverthorne Insurance
Cristal Hita · Abilene Housing Authority
David Kasselmann · Grain Theory
Clint Wilson · Communities of Abilene Federal Credit Union

TERM ENDS 2028

Andrew Harmon
Amit Bhakta · Nansad Group
Stephanie DeLaGrazia · Alvarez Drywall & Acoustics
Ryan Kana · DATROO Technologies, LLC

MEMBERS AT LARGE (one-year term expires Sept. 30, 2026)

Brooke Higginbotham Bailey · Arrow Ford
Jodi Heirholzer · BODY WORX PT & Performance
Bryan Robinson · Rentech Boiler Systems

WE ARE A VOICE

A strong business community deserves a strong voice. The Chamber works to ensure the needs, challenges and opportunities of Abilene businesses are heard by decision-makers at the local, state and federal levels.

By bringing business leaders together, building relationships and advocating for policies that support growth, we work to create an environment where businesses and our community can thrive.

BUSINESS ADVOCACY

- **Hosted a town hall** with State Senator Charles Perry.
- **Represented Abilene in Washington, D.C.** at the Texas Association of Business Fly-In, meeting with U.S. Senators Ted Cruz and John Cornyn, Texas congressional leaders and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.
- **Joined the West Texas Legislative Summit** in San Angelo alongside seven representatives from Abilene.
- **Partnered with The Texas Tribune and Google** to host a community forum on data centers and the future of Abilene.
- **Participated in an Oncor public hearing** regarding proposed 765-kV transmission line routes and their potential impact on the region.





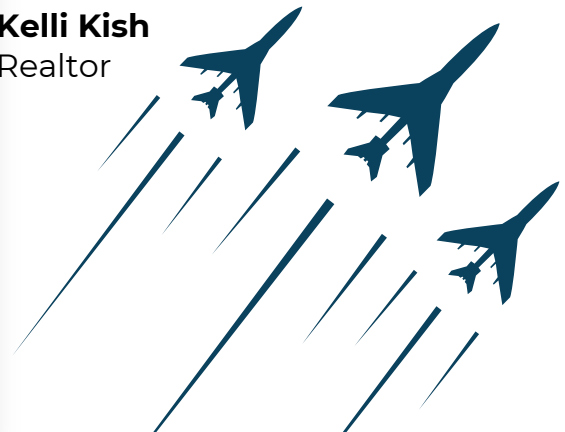
PROUD PARTNERS OF DYESS

- Co-authored **Fiscal Year 2027 Military Construction** legislative priority lists for elected officials in D.C., including \$160M in bundled B-21 infrastructure projects.
- Increased **MAC Corporate Sponsorships** 242% over the past year. Five levels of sponsorship (1-star to 5-star) increased revenue to support Dyess AFB.
- Signed a joint **Statement of Position related to the Oncor Longshore-Dinosaur 765kV Transmission Line** proposal to protect Dyess' critical airspace from encroachment.
- Organized and executed the **World's Largest BBQ** event at the Abilene Convention Center where hundreds of volunteers served 2,000 meals to military members and their families.
- Raised \$230,000 in community support for the construction of the **Dyess Pickleball Court**.
- Awarded the **Abilene Trophy** to the Tampa Bay Florida Chamber, in partnership with the South Tampa Chamber and Tampa Bay Defense Alliance, for their support of MacDill AFB.
- **Hosted the 4-star Commander of Air Force Global Strike Command** at a Welcome-to-Abilene reception attended by Abilene community leaders.



"If you have a heart for our military members, get involved. You never know how you might be able to contribute."

Kelli Kish
Realtor



WE ARE GROWING ABILENE

Growing Abilene takes all of us. It means creating jobs and attracting investment, welcoming visitors, strengthening our quality of life and building a community where people want to live, work and do business.

Through the Chamber's affiliate organizations, we work together to drive economic opportunity, showcase Abilene and invest in the experiences that make our community a great place to call home.

GROWTH ALLIANCE

The **Abilene Regional Growth Alliance** attended Retail Live and ICSC Red River, making **78 new retail contacts** and strengthening relationships that support continued retail growth in Abilene, including new businesses like **Chuy's** and **Jersey Mike's**.

ARGA also released its **Housing Study**, providing local employers and organizations with valuable insight into the region's current housing needs as Abilene continues to grow.



"Abilene was ready for a downtown bookstore, and I knew I wanted to be the one to make it happen."

Arlene Kasselmann
Owner, Seven and One Books

DOWNTOWN INITIATIVE

The **Burger Brawl** had an incredible showing this year, with nearly **2,000 burgers** sold from January 15 through February 15 and an estimated **economic impact of more than \$213,000**.



ARTS & CULTURE

- **Clear Fork Bank Storybook Garden Expansion:** More than **\$1.5 million was raised** to complete the expansion, featuring colorful arbor lighting and the new Hundred Acre Wood with nine Winnie-the-Pooh character sculptures. The expanded garden opened in June 2026.
- **CALF 2026:** Welcomed **6,606 attendees** representing 178 Texas cities and communities across **27 states**.
- **Young Audiences:** Engaged nearly **12,000 children, families and community** members through enriching arts education programs and experiences.
- **Children's Performing Arts Series:** Reached more than **3,500 children, families and community members** through public and school performances, including programs for second-grade students in Abilene ISD and surrounding rural communities.

TOURISM

2025 was a record-setting year for Abilene's tourism economy:

- **\$687.6 million** in direct visitor spending, a 21.3% increase year over year.
- **#1 in Texas for hotel occupancy at 72.4%**, compared to the statewide average of 58%.

- **#1 in Texas for hotel revenue growth**, with a **75.5% year-over-year increase**.

These record-setting numbers reflect Abilene's continued growth as a destination and the significant role tourism plays in our local economy.



WE ARE BUILDING THE FUTURE

Abilene's future is shaped by the people we invest in today. Through leadership development, workforce initiatives and opportunities for the next generation, the Chamber is helping build a strong pipeline of leaders, professionals and entrepreneurs ready to move our community forward.

From the classroom to the boardroom, we are creating connections and experiences that help people see a future for themselves in Abilene.



LEADERSHIP ABILENE

The Leadership Abilene Alumni Association continues to grow, now reaching nearly **100 members** who remain connected and engaged long after their Leadership Abilene experience. This year, alumni also turned connection into community impact. At their most recent reunion, members collected **nearly \$1,000 worth of school supplies** to support local students in need, demonstrating that Leadership Abilene is about more than developing leaders. It's about creating a lasting commitment to serving Abilene.



ABILENE YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

A major highlight for Abilene Young Professionals this year was the **West Texas Leadership Summit**, which brought together more than **300 attendees from across the West Texas region**. The event created an opportunity for young professionals to connect, learn and grow alongside emerging leaders from communities throughout West Texas, strengthening relationships and building a network of leaders invested in the future of our region.



680

AYP Members



INTERN ABI

Intern ABI continued strengthening the connection between Abilene's three universities and the local business community, helping students connect with employers and explore opportunities to build their careers right here in Abilene. Looking ahead, the program is expanding its impact with the launch of its first **Internship in a Box** seminars, designed to give local employers the tools and resources they need to build successful internship programs of their own. By supporting both students and employers, Intern ABI is helping strengthen Abilene's talent pipeline and develop the workforce of tomorrow.



"AYP has given me a network of personal and professional relationships that have been critical to my success."

Stephanie DeLaGarza
Alvarez Drywall & Acoustics

CHILDREN'S BUSINESS FAIR

This year marked our **largest Children's Business Fair** yet, bringing together more than **100 young entrepreneurs** to showcase their creativity, ideas and growing businesses.



WE ARE CONNECTED

Connections are at the heart of the Chamber. Throughout the year, we created opportunities for our members to meet, build relationships, celebrate milestones and become more engaged in Abilene's business community.

From a first introduction at a networking event to a packed ribbon cutting celebrating a new beginning, every connection helps strengthen the network of people and businesses that make Abilene thrive.

2,084

TOTAL MEMBERS

123

NEW MEMBERS

94%

RETENTION RATE

MEMBERSHIP MEANS MORE

Chamber membership opens the door to connections, visibility, resources and opportunities to get involved. Whether a business has been a member for decades or joined us this year, every member adds another voice, perspective and connection to our business community.



"I would absolutely recommend joining the Chamber. It's a great way to make connections, meet new people and connect with other business owners."

Carol Dromgoole
Texas Star Trading Co.



63

RIBBON CUTTINGS

54

NETWORKING EVENTS

2,000

VOLUNTEERS



"One of the best ways I've met people and built connections is through being a Redcoat and being part of the Chamber."

Ernie Kight
Chamber Redcoat



OUR MEMBERS



“The Chamber gives us opportunities to network, learn and share our story of why we’re important to the community.”

Cynthia Pearson

President/CEO, Day Nursery of Abilene

“I’m an example of the growth that can happen by being part of the Chamber and connecting with other businesses and community leaders.”

Ricardo Gutierrez

Owner, RGF Insurance Agency



“We’ve met so many people and made connections that have helped grow our studio while allowing us to better serve our community.”

Miah Pullen

Owner, Prep Academy Dance Studio, LLC



OUR IMPACT INVESTORS

Driving Our Mission Forward: These members invest \$1,500 or more each year to strengthen our Chamber and community.

Legacy Investors



Lead Investors



Market Investors

- Abilene Christian University
- Atmos Energy
- Black Box
- City of Abilene
- Coca-Cola Southwest Beverages
- Condley and Company, LLP
- Directors Investment Group
- Eide Bailly LLP
- First Bank Texas
- KTAB-TV/KRBC-TV
- My Emergency Room 24/7 + Urgent Care
- Optimum
- Oracle
- Prosperity Bank
- Taylor Telecom
- Vantage Data Centers
- Vital Care Urgent Care

Engage Investors

- Abilene Independent School District
- Abilene Teachers Federal Credit Union
- AEP Texas
- B&J Welding Supply
- Ben E. Keith Beverages
- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas
- BSM Retail
- Buffalo Gap Instrumentation & Electrical Co., Inc.
- CORE Energy, Ltd
- DATROO Technologies
- Eagle Aviation Services
- Hardin-Simmons University
- HPF Consultants Inc. / HPF Automation LLC.
- HYTORC of Texas
- LearnAIR
- McMahon Surovik Suttle, P.C.
- Mercedes of Abilene
- Rentech Boiler Systems
- Richard Hardin
- Stellar Construction
- Tejon Exploration
- Terracon Consultants, Inc.
- Texas Oncology – Abilene
- United Supermarkets, LLC
- West Texas Health, PLLC
- West Texas Rehabilitation Center

OUR STAFF

Executive Team

- Douglas Peters, CCE,IOM, President & CEO
- Frances Williamson, CFO
- Lynn Barnett, VP, Abilene Cultural Affairs Council
- Ashley DiMauro, Senior Director of Operations, Chamber
- Robert Lopez, VP, Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau
- John Nichols, VP, Military Affairs Council

Cultural Affairs Team

- Beth Beam, CALF Director & Assistant Director of Development
- Tracie Hartmann, Co-Director, Young Audiences
- Vikki Head, Director of Operations
- Addie Helms, Marketing Director
- Emily Lomax, Co-Director, Young Audiences
- Dawn Ripple, Executive Director, Children's Performing Arts Series
- Susan Steele, CPAS Box Office Manager and Grants Administrator

Growth Alliance Team

- Kodi Collett, Marketing & Communications Manager
- Dianna D. Davis, Program Manager

Membership Team

- Norm Archibald, Government Affairs Director
- Nathaniel Ellsworth, Office & Events Logistics Manager
- Alessa Goldsmith, Events Manager
- Carmela Hernandez, Member Services Coordinator
- Cameron Sloan, Program Manager
- Kendal Subia, Senior Manager, Member Development

Visitors Bureau Team

- Kim Boshier, Sales Director
- Ashli Brooks, Communications Specialist
- Sierra Davenport, Sales & Operations Manager
- Terri Owens, Office Administrator
- Kailey Valadez, Visitor Experience Director
- Hunter Schmidt, Sports Tourism Manager



ABILENE REGIONAL
growth alliance



LOCAL.

RELIABLE.

INTERNET.



Taylor Telecom

**KEEPING YOUR
BUSINESS CONNECTED.**



For 75 years, Taylor Telecom has been connecting businesses and communities across the Big Country with reliable internet and support from people who call this area home.

Local connection. Local support. Built for business.

TAYLOLTEL.NET

325-846-4111



TOGETHER,

WE ARE THE CHAMBER