

# GET YOUR STORY STRAIGHT

THE STORY YOU THINK YOU'RE TELLING VS  
THE ONE YOUR MEMBERS (AND PROSPECTS) ACTUALLY HEAR

Michelle West  
Chamber Speak



# ABOUT ME

**Michelle West**  
**Chamber Speak**  
**[www.chamberspeak.com](http://www.chamberspeak.com)**

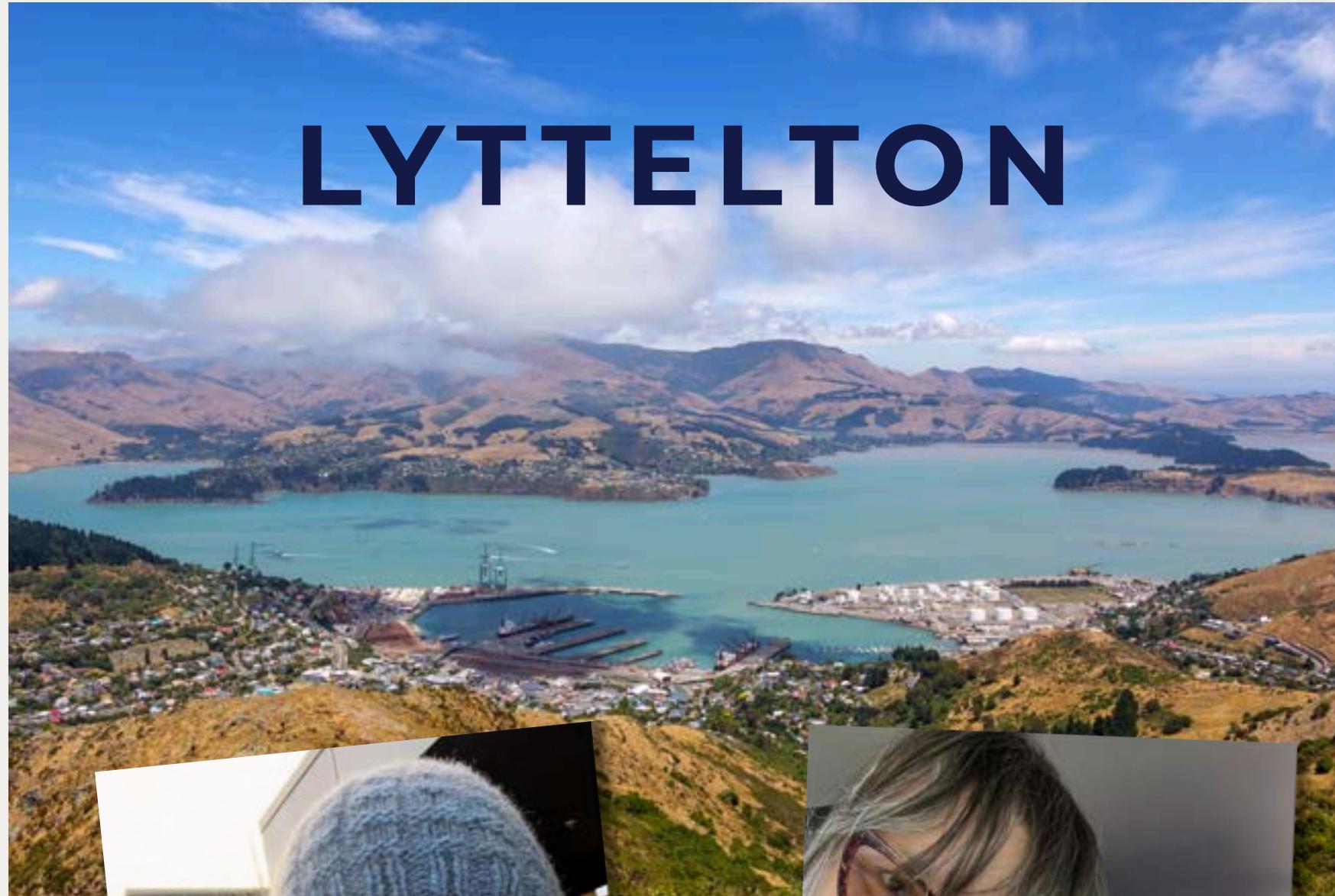
- Working at or with chambers since 2006
- Helped 100+ chambers with marketing/communications projects large and small

ACCE Convention  
circa 2012



[www.linkedin.com/in/mlwest](http://www.linkedin.com/in/mlwest)

# LYTTELTON



# ABOUT ME

**Michelle West**  
**Chamber Speak**  
**[www.chamberspeak.com](http://www.chamberspeak.com)**

- Relocated to New Zealand in 2022
- Work remotely with chambers in the U.S.
- Connect with me on LinkedIn!



[www.linkedin.com/in/mlwest](http://www.linkedin.com/in/mlwest)



GET YOUR STORY  
**STRAIGHT**

**The story you  
think you're  
telling**

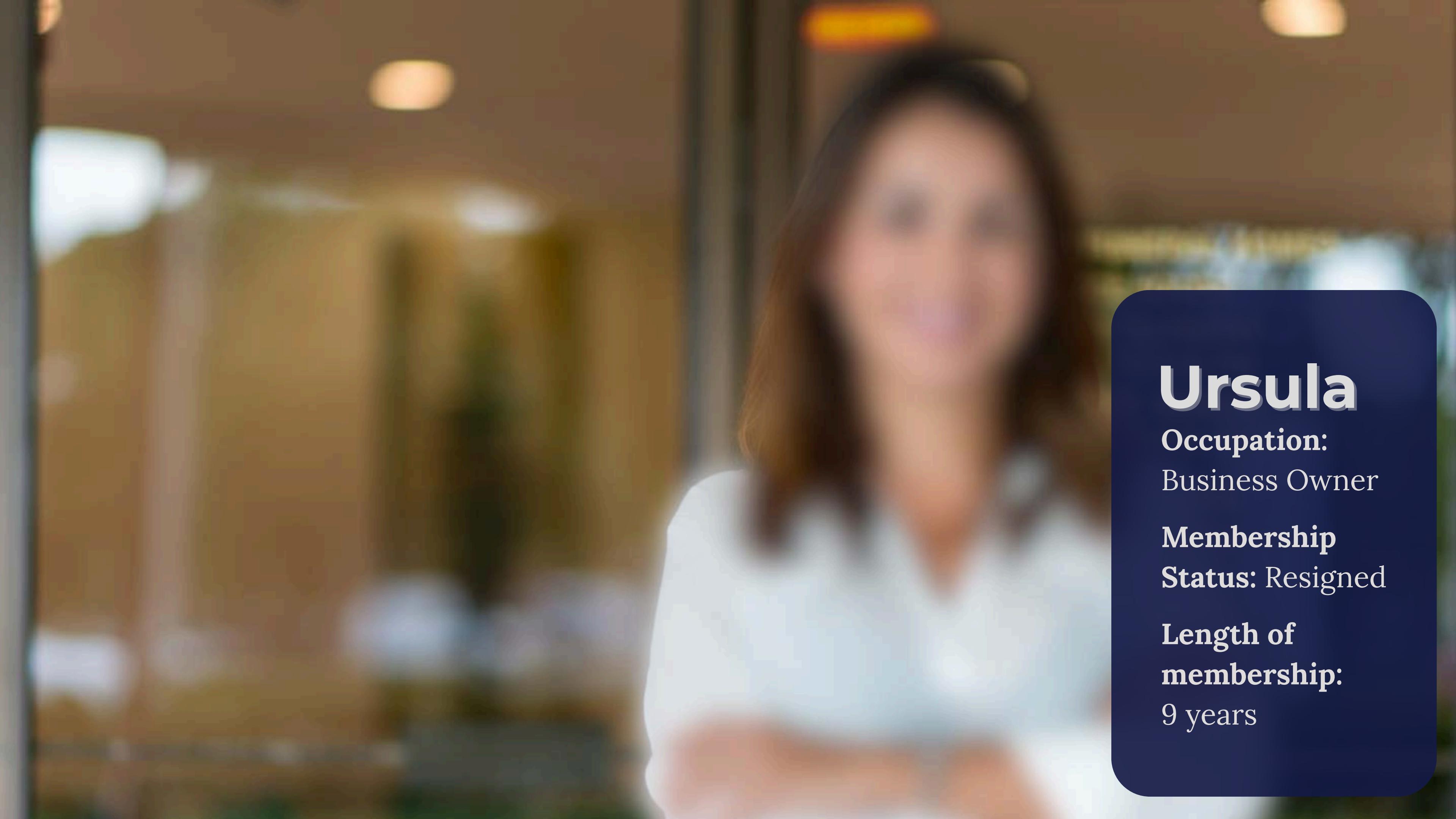
**VS**

**The one your  
members (and  
prospects)  
actually hear**

A blurred background image of a group of people in a modern office or conference room setting. They are seated in rows, facing towards the right side of the frame. The room has large windows and a high ceiling with recessed lighting.

# MY A-HA MOMENT

WHEN A LONG-TIME MEMBER UNEXPECTEDLY  
RESIGNED FROM THE CHAMBER



# **Ursula**

**Occupation:**  
Business Owner

**Membership**  
**Status:** Resigned

**Length of**  
**membership:**  
9 years

## “Reason for Resigning

I have no problem with the Chamber. I'd get emails about all of the events, and they looked great. But one day I realized I never had time to go, so I figured I wasn't getting a return on my investment.

**Ursula**

**Occupation:**  
Business Owner

**Membership**  
**Status:** Resigned

**Length of**  
**membership:**  
9 years



# EVENT NOISE

- If the majority of your content and communication highlights events, your members will reasonably assume that events are what you are all about.
- When your messaging is dominated by event promotion, you're unintentionally ***telling a story of activity, not impact.***



# EVENT NOISE

What is most dominant in your messaging is what they are going to ***hear, remember, and form their perceptions on.***



**SO...WHAT'S A  
CHAMBER TO DO?**



# SO...WHAT'S A CHAMBER TO DO?

## BALANCE

- Balance your messaging
- Tell your WHOLE story
- Change the way you talk (and post) about events

# BALANCE YOUR MESSAGING

Your Storytelling Quality Levers:

**clarity**  
**relevance**

**volume**  
**frequency**

# MESSAGE VOLUME AUDIT

Look back at August - October.

CATEGORY	NEWSLETTER	SOCIAL MEDIA	BLOG	TOTAL	NOTES
Event Promotion					
Advocacy					
Business Support/Services					
Workforce Development					
Economic Development					



Adapt these for your chamber.



# SO...WHAT'S A CHAMBER TO DO?

## BALANCE

- Balance your messaging
- **Tell your WHOLE story**
- Change the way you talk (and post) about events

**TELL YOUR  
WHOLE STORY**



# TELL YOUR WHOLE STORY



Develop an umbrella theme that is  
*clear, concise and relevant* to your audience.



Create and abide by content pillars.

## DEVELOP AN UMBRELLA THEME

It communicates an easy to understand message that is highly relevant to virtually every prospect or member.

It delivers a message of impact versus activity.

Everything you do can fall under it.



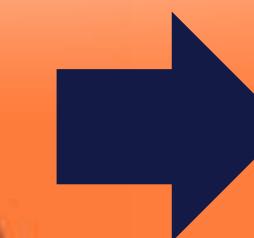
## DEVELOP AN UMBRELLA THEME

It communicates an **easy to understand** message that is **highly relevant to virtually every prospect or member.**

It delivers a message of **impact versus activity.**

Virtually **everything you do** can fall under it.

**We make it easier to do business in [your city here].**



Download the guide at  
[www.chamberspeak.com](http://www.chamberspeak.com)



# CREATE CONTENT PILLARS

# CREATE CONTENT PILLARS

Advocacy & Policy Updates

Networking & Connection

Member Spotlights & Success Stories

Economic Development & Community Growth

Small Business Resources

# CREATE CONTENT PILLARS

**Chamber Membership: 1000**

**Team Size: 4**

**Core Competencies:**

**Connection & Advocacy**

# CREATE CONTENT PILLARS

## ADVOCACY

- Help members understand what it is and how it impacts them
- Share actions and achievements
- Invite participation
- Not take for granted that they know or don't care

## COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP & VISION

- Share what we know when we are able
- Share other organisations' news when it ties into our mission
- Promote and support future community leaders
- Position the Chamber as the community leader that it is

## VALUE-DRIVEN RESOURCES

- Help members understand and access chamber programs and services without being salesy
- Keep members "in-the-know" about community resources available to support them
- Share stories of members who value our programs and services

## CONNECTION & COMMUNITY

- Showcase the welcoming, supportive network that is the Chamber
- Celebrate our volunteers and our team
- Highlight members and their milestones
- Make our members feel like they are part of a very special community

# YOUR FILTERS

- Is it relevant to at least one of my audiences?
- Is it relevant to the work of the chamber?
- Does it align with one of my content pillars?



# SO...WHAT'S A CHAMBER TO DO?

## BALANCE

- Balance your messaging
- Tell your **WHOLE** story
- **Change the way you talk (and post) about events**



**TALK ABOUT EVENTS  
DIFFERENTLY**

# From Activity To Impact

**Activity answers:** What we did.

**Impact answers:** Why it mattered, and what changed because of it.

# MAKE THE SHIFT

**Ask: So, what?**

**The Not-So-Secret Formula**

**Activity → Meaning → Outcome**

**Activity: What happened**

**Meaning: Why it exists**

**Outcome: What it leads to over time**

# MAKE THE SHIFT

Activity → Meaning → Outcome

**ACTIVITY**  
(What's happening)  
Business After Hours

**MEANING**  
(Why it exists)  
To bring our members  
into the same room

**OUTCOME**  
(What it leads to over time)  
So relationships can turn  
into referrals, partnerships  
and growth

This is where you ask, so what?

# MAKE THE SHIFT

**Activity → Meaning → Outcome**

## BEFORE:

Mark your calendar and join us for Business After Hours on January 29 from 5:30–7:00 PM. This is your chance to grow your network and connect with our business community.

## AFTER:

Strong local businesses don't grow in isolation. Business After Hours creates the relationships that lead to referrals, partnerships, and long-term growth. Join us January 29 | 5:30–7:00 PM and be part of the network that supports business beyond the event.

# From Activity To Impact

**Activity answers:** What we did.

**Impact answers:** Why it mattered, and what changed because of it.

# SMALL TWEAKS BIG IMPACT

## Lean Into Images

Replace text based event graphics with member images in your event promotions

Strive for images of people looking at the camera

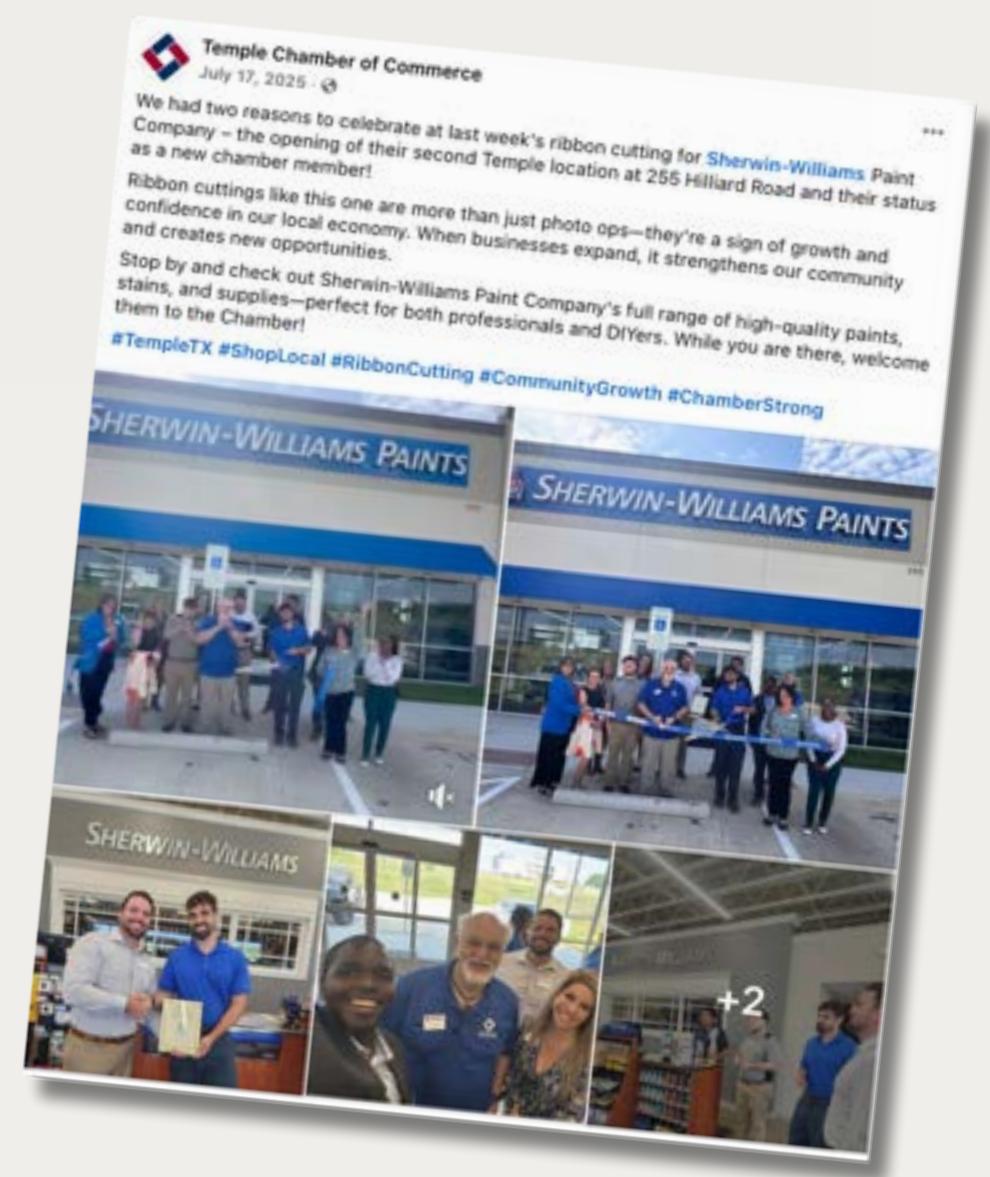
Ask the question: What does this image say about the event?



# SMALL TWEAKS BIG IMPACT

## Sneak Messages Into Unlikely Places

Use opportunities like ribbon cuttings to tell your story.



# SMALL TWEAKS BIG IMPACT

## Control The Headlines

Prioritize the other work you do in your member newsletters.

Lead with it instead of event promotion.



# SMALL TWEAKS BIG IMPACT

## Leverage LinkedIn

It's where your audience is!

Most potential for growth and engagement.

Prioritize non-event content: advocacy, member success stories, workforce initiatives, leadership program, and more.



**BRING ON THE  
QUESTIONS!**