

The ADVOCATE

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Gov. M. Jodi Rell came to Stamford yesterday to wish the Stamford Chamber of Commerce a happy birthday

"It's a milestone. Twenty years is special," Rell told attendees at the chamber's annual meeting, which drew an audience of nearly 450 yesterday to the Stamford Marriott Hotel and Spa.

Accompanied by Lt. Gov. Michael Fedele, a Stamford business owner, Rell used the occasion to announce the establishment of an eight-member economic advisory panel that will consult with the governor's office monthly about trends affecting the state's economy.

The panel is composed of economists and labor experts.

Having the governor give the keynote address for the annual meeting has become a tradition over the past decade, said Jack Condlin, the chamber's president and chief executive officer and one of its founders.

The chamber grew out of the Downtown Council, which organizers launched in the late 1970s. They quickly realized the need to expand beyond assisting local businesses, he said.

"We had to have a vision for the city. We started out with probably 50 to 60 members. We felt that Stamford had lost its business voice," said Condlin, a former chairman of the board. "We've delved into education, work force development, economic development and then jumped into transportation and housing development."

Along the way, the chamber, which has grown to 1,700 members, has become an important contributor to the city, Mayor Dannel Malloy said.

"The chamber is one of those vital organizations that has made this community a more open, accepting place," said Malloy, who was first elected mayor in 1995. "Repeatedly, I turn to the chamber for its advice and counsel."

Mark Beaudry, president of the Beaudry Commercial Real Estate division of the Property Group of Connecticut, joined the chamber in its early years and recalled its growing pains.

"I'm one of those who can say I remember when I attended chamber breakfasts and 11 people showed up," said Beaudry, who was secretary and board chairman in the early 1990s.

He expressed pride in early steps the chamber took to ensure its viability, such as a succession plan for its officers. And it soon became a leader for area businesses, he said.

"We took a step early on that we wanted to be the voice of business at city hall, and it's safe to say we became it," Beaudry said, lauding Condlin for his contributions to making the chamber a major force in the community and state.

During Condlin's tenure as president and CEO, Paul Edelberg led the effort in 2001 to establish the International Trade Council, which assists area companies in doing business overseas.

The council, which is chaired by Edelberg, hosted the Symposium on International Trade and Investment in 2005.

The chamber also played a key role in helping Malloy establish a sister-city relationship with Jiangdu, China.

Also yesterday, the chamber honored Davidoff of Geneva and Sterling Glen of Stamford as companies of the year. It also honored Todd Lindvall, general manager of Courtyard by Marriott in downtown Stamford, and Steve Montello, president of the Property Group, as members of the year.

Michael Ego, associate vice provost of University of Connecticut in Stamford, received the education leadership award. Judy Heft, owner of Judith Heft & Associates, received the president's award, and Edelberg, an attorney with Murtha Cullina, received the chairman's award.

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