



Chamber News January 2024

2024 Chamber Membership Dues

It is time to renew your business' Chamber membership. Membership dues paid by March 31, 2024 will ensure that your business is advertised on the Vinita Chamber of Commerce website beginning in April. Your membership dues can be paid online at [Join the Chamber | Vinita Chamber](#), through a paper renewal form with payment, square payment, or if you need an invoice please contact the Chamber. If you are not currently a member and would like to join, you may also utilize the options listed. The Chamber looks forward to working with all the business in Vinita. You may contact the Chamber via email at vinitachamber@gmail.com.

- Individual \$100
- Business with 1-5 full-time employees: \$210.00
- Business with 6-12 full-time employees: \$275
- Business with 13-20 full-time employees: \$335.00
- Business with 21-30 full-time employees: \$400.00
- Business with 31-50 full-time employees: \$445.00
- Business with 51+ full-time employees: \$500.00
- Church of Civic Organization: \$120.00

Meet The 2024 Vinita Chamber of Commerce Board

Becky Bichard, Secretary

Becky has been a Realtor since 2017 working for Solid Rock Realtors in the Vinita office. Becky and her husband Mike have 2 children and 4 terrific grandchildren. She is very active in their church, First Baptist Vinita and a member of the Christmas in Vinita committee. Prior to moving to Oklahoma in 2016 they lived in Orlando, Florida where she worked as a Judicial Administrative Assistant for over 20 years. Becky loves helping people and looks forward to serving on the Vinita Chamber Board in 2024.



Tami Burks, Treasurer

Tami Burks is the Treasury Management Officer for BancFirst Vinita. She has worked for the bank for 9 years. She started as a teller and has served in many roles. She is originally from the Dallas/Ft. Worth area where she attended school in Mansfield and went to college at University of North Texas in Denton, TX. She met her husband, Justin Burks, in the DFW area and moved to Ketchum, OK where they currently reside with their 2 kids, Trenton & Brynlee. She currently serves on the Ketchum Elementary School Parent Advisory Board. On any given day, you will find Tami running kids to all of their activities including gymnastics, cheer and baseball. She loves to read a book by a campfire, go to TX to visit her family and sing at her church. Tami has been known to light up a karaoke stage. She is excited to be able to give back to her community by serving on the Board for the Vinita Area Chamber of Commerce.



Melinda Culp

Melinda Culp is the Executive Director/Administrator at Saint Francis Hospital Vinita. She is a Registered Nurse and has her MSN in Healthcare Administration. She has worked for Saint Francis Health System for 22 years. She is married to Shane Culp and has two boys: Dean and Cole.



Misty Deffenbaugh, City of Vinita Representative

Misty Deffenbaugh is the Economic and Community Development Coordinator for the City of Vinita. Deffenbaugh is a long-standing advocate for Vinita having served on Vinita Area Chamber of Commerce volunteer committees and the Board since the early 1990s. She is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma Economic Development Institute.

Deffenbaugh has worked as a board member and volunteer for several Vinita and area organizations, primarily revolving around the school activities of her two sons Riley and Brady Bingham.



Ranelle Hannegan

Ranelle Hannegan was born and raised in Craig County. Ranelle is a graduate of Vinita High School and attended NEO A&M College. Ranelle began employment with C&L Supply Inc., Vinita in 1984. Ranelle lived and worked in Tulsa and Springfield Mo., working at Boeing Aircraft and Cox Insurance Health Systems before she and her husband Bobby moved back to Vinita in 2002 to raise their daughter near family. She returned to work at C&L Supply Inc. where she is still employed after 31 years. Ranelle is a widow; her daughter Alexa lives and works for St. Francis Health Systems in Tulsa. Ranelle is actively serving on the Vinita Lions Club board as well as an active attendee of the Vinita Community Church. She enjoys traveling and spending time with family and friends.



Ranelle is honored and looking forward to serving on the Vinita Chamber of Commerce Board. She said Vinita has its challenges however, it is the caring, giving people of Vinita and Craig County that make it a special place to live and work. She is excited to see what the future holds for Vinita and the surrounding area.

Aaron Simms

Aaron is a current local business owner, rancher and retired corporate business leader. He is a member, Vinita Community Church; married to his wife Cindy, two adult children and seven grandchildren. Why am I involved with the Vinita Area Chamber of Commerce? My family has been part of the rich history of Vinita dating back to statehood. I want to do my share in helping our community build an enduring legacy. The VACC, along with local business, churches, civic organizations and government can work together to ensure that legacy is bright and prosperous.



Bruce Sooter, President

Bruce Sooter is a Welch native graduating from Welch High School in 1978; attending NEO A&M College; and graduating from Texas A&M University with a B.B.A. in Finance in 1982 where he also played college basketball. Bruce moved back to Welch in June 2022 after spending over 20 years working as a commercial lender for banks throughout Texas and 14 years in private and public schools teaching math and coaching. He joined the Welch State Bank team in June of 2022 as Vice President Lending and specializes in Agriculture, Commercial, Real Estate, and Consumer lending. He also currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Vinita Lions Club.



Bruce's Family (Sooter and Fields – Cherokee descent) have resided in Northeast Oklahoma and Craig County predating Statehood. The Sooter Family's history and legacy has been dedicated and devoted to others and public service. His Parents Kenneth and Wynona were career (37 years) Educators in Welch; Uncle James E. Sooter was Superintendent of Vinita Public Schools and Mayor of Vinita; Cousin Jimmy coached at Vinita and was the Craig County Sheriff for 16 years; and Jimmy's Wife Linda was formerly the Executive Director of the Vinita Chamber of Commerce. Serving has been an emphasis and focus for the Sooter Family for generations.

Bruce is excited to be back in Craig County after residing in Texas for 43 years and serving on the Vinita Area Chamber of Commerce Board. He states, "The challenges loom large but the future is now for Vinita, Craig County, and all of Northeast Oklahoma to seize the opportunities to place itself on a National and World map with the continued growth efforts of Route 66 and those adjoining

Main Street areas, and the impactful development of America Heartland Theme Park and Three Ponies RV Park. It is going to take a village but the people, businesses, organizations, and civic groups in this area of the State have always had a positive history of banding and working together!”

Chris Highsmith, Member

Chris is a native of Craig County and graduated from Welch High School in 1979. He attended NEO A&M College in Miami and received his degree from the Dallas Institute of Funeral Service in 1987.

Chris was born in Vinita and is the son of the late Dennis “Bud” and Maxine “Shorte” Highsmith. Chris remains very close with his two brothers, Greg, and Kyle, another brother Grant passed away in 2019. Chris married his wife, Vicki (Nidiffer), in 1983 and has three children, Cameron Sneller and husband Sam, Haley Chenoweth and husband Casey, and Hunter Highsmith and wife Frances, as well as two beautiful granddaughters Walela and Indra.



Chris is an outdoorsman who enjoys activities such as hunting, fishing and hiking. He also coached football and basketball teams for over 25 years in the Vinita Little League and several baseball teams up to the high school age level. He enjoyed watching many of those young people grow up and be successful in life.

Chris and Vicki are members of the Alive Church of Vinita. He also serves on the ROCMND youth services board and numerous other community boards in the past.

Having served in the funeral business in our community for over 40 years has been a great privilege for Chris and with the opportunity to have their own funeral home, Chris hopes to continue to serve the area for many years to come. He could not think of a better place to live, work and serve others. He is humbled by God's grace and thankful for being blessed with such great family and friends

Chamber Events and News

Chamber mailing address: PO Box 541, Vinita, Ok 74301

You can catch the latest events and news from the Chamber through the Vinita Area Chamber of Commerce Facebook page.

Tag the chamber on Instagram [vinitachamber](#)

Visit the Chamber webpage at www.vinitachamber.com

