

MODESTO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

# Progress

VOL. 47 | ISSUE 1 | JANUARY 2026



- ▶ YEAR IN REVIEW
- ▶ EDUCATION
- ▶ LOCAL GOVERNMENT

2025



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The Members' Choice Awards Dinner honors Chamber and community members whose commitment, innovation, and dedication strengthen our local economy and enrich our community.

This Evening of Excellence celebrates those who lead with purpose, contribute to Modesto's growth, and make our city an exceptional place to live, work, and thrive. Join us as we recognize the people and organizations whose impact truly deserves to be celebrated.

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# A Message From The President & CEO

## A YEAR OF PURPOSE, PARTNERSHIP, AND PROGRESS

As we look back on 2025, I am incredibly proud of the collective progress made by the Greater Modesto Chamber of Commerce and the businesses, organizations, and leaders we serve. This year reaffirmed the Chamber's role as a trusted convener, bringing together business, education, workforce, nonprofit, and civic partners to strengthen our local economy and community.

A central theme throughout the year was the continued alignment of education and workforce development. From early learning and K-12 education to higher education, cultural institutions, and out-of-school programs, our members demonstrated that learning happens everywhere. These partnerships ensure our future workforce is prepared, inspired, and connected to opportunity right here in Stanislaus County.

Supporting women-owned businesses and leadership development also remained a priority. Through intentional sector partnerships, networking opportunities, and collaborative programming, we worked to elevate women entrepreneurs, reduce barriers to growth, and create pathways for long-term success.

Advocacy played a defining role in 2025. Through our Government Relations Council, Economic Development Committee, and the launch of our Advocacy Summer Series, we facilitated meaningful

conversations around water, economic vitality, quality of life, and health, issues fundamental to the sustainability of our region. These efforts reflect the Chamber's commitment to thoughtful, solution-driven leadership.

Equally important were the moments of connection and recognition that brought our community together. From signature events and leadership programs to scholarships and awards, we celebrated the individuals and organizations investing in our shared future.

These moments remind us that progress is built on relationships, service, and collaboration.

As we move forward, we do so with gratitude for our members, board of directors, sponsors, partners, and staff whose engagement and leadership continue to move Modesto forward. The momentum of 2025 sets a strong foundation for the work ahead, and I look forward to what we will accomplish - together.

With warm regards,

Trish Christensen

President & CEO

Greater Modesto Chamber of Commerce

## STAY CONNECTED WITH CHAMBER UPDATES



# MEMBERSHIP GUIDE

**Make the Most of Your Membership - Your Guide to Connection, Growth & Impact through C.A.R.E.S**

Mission: The Modesto Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to serving the greater Modesto region's business and community prosperity through advocacy, collaboration, access to leaders, economic development, connectivity, and business education.

To bring our mission to life, we embrace the guiding principles represented by the acronym **C.A.R.E.S: Community, Advocacy, Relationships, Education and Service**, which serve as a daily reminder of our commitment to purposeful impact.

## COMMUNITY

Be part of something bigger.

We are a vibrant network of local leaders, business owners, and changemakers who shape the future of Modesto together. Through legacy events and local partnerships, you can connect with the heartbeat of our community and make a real difference.

### Events:

- Ag Aware - Celebrating and supporting youth in agriculture
- Harvest Luncheon - Supporting MJC Ag scholarships
- Central Valley Real Estate Summit

## ADVOCACY

We represent your business interests.

Whether it's addressing local regulations or promoting economic growth, we advocate for a thriving business environment on your behalf.

### Advocacy in Action:

- Economic Development Committee
- Government Relations Council
- Meet Your Elected Officials
- Stanislaus Economic Summit
- Summer Advocacy Series :
  - Water - Wealth - Contentment - Health

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

- Attend a Chamber Mixer or Networking Event
- Join a Committee or Program
- Volunteer or Sponsor a Community Event
- Offer a Workshop or Host a program meeting
- Stay informed through our E-Blasts and Member Portal

## RELATIONSHIPS

Grow your network. Grow your business.

We specialize in meaningful connections. Meet future clients, collaborators, and supporters across industries and causes.

### Programs & Networking Opportunities:

- Ribbon Cuttings & Grand Openings
- Women in Business Network
- Rising Professionals Network
- Welcome and Ambassador Teams
- Annual Awards & Anniversaries Soiree  
Member Mix & Mingles

## EDUCATION

Stay sharp. Stay relevant.

Through Business University and peer-led workshops, members can continually sharpen skills, share expertise, and learn from industry leaders.

### Professional Development:

- Business University
- Leadership Modesto
- Sector Strategy Workshops
- Keynote Mentorship Discussions

## SERVICE

Promote your business. Access exclusive tools.

Take advantage of powerful promotional platforms and essential business services that help you stay visible and connected.

### Member Perks & Tools:

- Weekly Chamber E-Blast & Progress Magazine Features
- Website Directory with Customizable Profiles
- Member-to-Member Discounts
- Job Postings & Event Promotions
- Federal/State Compliance Posters
- Export Document Services
- Online Member Information Center
- Business Contact Lists

## MISSION STATEMENT

The Modesto Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to serving the greater Modesto Area, regional businesses and community prosperity through advocacy, collaboration, access to leaders, economic development, connectivity and business education.

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

### Chairperson

Patricia Gillum - Patricia A. Gillum, CPA

### Chair Elect

Open

### Immediate Past Chairman:

Kirstie Boyett Zacharias - Community Leader

### Vice Chairman, Internal Operations, Treasurer

Dejeune Shelton - Modesto Junior College  
Community Education

### Vice Chairman, External Operations

John Villines - Modesto Gospel Mission

### Vice Chairman, Membership Growth and Retention

Bill Robinson - Principal Financial

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Garrett Ardis - Huff Construction Company Inc.

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Aphriekah DuHaneY-West - Kaiser Permanente

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Jennifer Gomes - Citizens Business Bank

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Professionals

Kari Santos - IJ Larsen Pumps

Christine Schweininger - Valley Builders Exchange

Kelly Tallant-Martin - Vintage Faire Mall/Macerich

Company

Laura Ward - Ward Promotional Marketing Solutions

### President & CEO

Trish Christensen, ACE

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**\*Note:** The UC Merced article on page 21 originally appeared in the December 2025 issue of *Progress*. The article in that issue contained irrelevant content from a separate article and is reprinted here as originally intended by the author.

**DISCLAIMER:** The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Modesto Chamber of Commerce.

### PROGRESS MAGAZINE

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# CHAMBER CALENDAR

## JANUARY

**13** **American Family Care Urgent Care Ribbon Cutting**  
**Time:** 12:00 PM - 2:00 PM  
**Location:** 2001 McHenry Ave, Suite L Modesto CA

**16** **Modesto Chamber of Commerce  
Government Relations Council Meeting**  
**Time:** 11:30 PM - 1:00 PM  
**Location:** 1114 J St. Modesto, CA, 95354

**21** **Renew You Bodybutter Green Ribbon Cutting**  
**Time:** 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM  
**Location:** Chamber Conference Room

**29** **Member's Choice Awards Banquet and Board  
Installation**  
**Time:** 5:30pm - 8:30pm  
**Location:** DOUBLE TREE BALLROOM  
1150 9th St, Modesto, CA 95354

## FEBRUARY

**3** **Rising Professionals Business Brew**  
**Time:** 8:00 am - 9:00 am

**4** **Economic Development Committee**  
**Location:** 1114 j Street Modesto, conference room

**5** **Safe Haven Care Central Valley  
Ribbon Cutting Ceremony & Grand Opening**  
**Time:** 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM  
**Location:** 2116 Splendor Way, Modesto CA 95357

**19** **Women in Business: Coffee and Conversations**  
**Time:** 8:00 PM - 9:00 AM  
**Location:** TBD

**20** **Government Relations Council**  
**Time:** 11:30 am - 1:00 pm  
**Location:** 1114 j Street Modesto, conference room

**26** **Quill Ribbon Cutting and Mix & Mingle**  
**Time:** 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM  
**Location:** TBD

\*See website for more details.

Find Zoom Registry links and more at [www.modchamber.org](http://www.modchamber.org)

Please note that calendar events and details are subject to change.



# Building Together: Our 2025 Year in Review

By Felicia Lopez

As we look back on 2025, the Modesto Chamber of Commerce celebrates a year of meaningful progress, strengthened partnerships, and impactful programming. Through new initiatives and longstanding traditions, we continued our mission to foster economic vitality, build connections, and support the broader Modesto community.

## Rising Professionals: Developing Tomorrow's Leaders

In 2025, Rising Professionals expanded its impact by offering engaging networking opportunities, peer learning, and leadership development experiences. The group continued to attract new members and remained a vital resource for professionals seeking growth at every stage of their careers.



## Women in Business: Strengthening Connections & Community

The Women in Business program provided a supportive platform for women entrepreneurs and professionals through networking, workshops, and collaborative projects. In 2025, the program advanced its **sector strategy work**, connecting women in specific industries to build mentorship networks, professional development opportunities, and collaborative initiatives. This approach has strengthened industry-specific engagement and fostered stronger community support for women professionals across Modesto.

## Rise & Shine with CEOs

Launched in 2025, **Rise & Shine with CEOs** became one of our most impactful leadership initiatives. Participants connected directly with top executives for candid conversations, mentorship experiences, and real-world strategies that supported professional growth across both Rising Professionals and Women in Business.

## Government Relations Council: Effective Advocacy

The Government Relations Council continued to serve as an essential bridge between the business community and policymakers. Members stayed informed on key issues and engaged directly with elected officials, ensuring that business voices remain central in policy discussions.

## Economic Development Committee: Advancing Regional Prosperity

In 2025, the Economic Development Committee focused on identifying opportunities to attract investment, strengthen business retention, and support workforce pathways. These efforts contributed to long-term economic stability and reinforced Modesto's role as a resilient regional hub.

## 2025 Signature Events: Strengthening Connections and Community

### Annual Awards & Anniversaries

Our Awards & Anniversaries celebration honored outstanding

businesses and community leaders shaping Modesto's continued success. The event highlighted innovation, dedication, and the milestones that strengthen our region's economic landscape.



### Meet Your Elected Officials - Members Only

This year's Meet Your Elected Officials event offered Chamber members exclusive access to local policymakers. It created valuable dialogue around issues impacting business and strengthened relationships essential to effective advocacy.

### Economic Summit

The Economic Summit returned for its second year, featuring **renowned economist Dr. Elliott Eisenberg**, providing expert insight on local, state, and national economic trends. Attendees gained valuable perspectives and actionable strategies needed to navigate the coming year with confidence.



### Harvest Luncheon

The Harvest Luncheon celebrated Modesto's agricultural heritage while raising funds for MJC agricultural scholarships. The event honored the legacy of agriculture and reinforced our commitment to supporting the next generation of ag leaders.



### Ag Aware

Ag Aware brought together agricultural and business leaders to support FFA scholarships for future industry professionals. The event emphasized the critical role agriculture plays in our region and inspired continued investment in our future workforce.



### Touch-A-Truck

Touch-A-Truck welcomed over **4,000 attendees**, offering a fun and interactive way for families to explore the vehicles and industries that keep our community moving. This highly successful event continues to be one of our most engaging community experiences.



### Central Valley Business Expo

Hosted by BBSI, with the Modesto Chamber proudly partnering to bring the region's businesses together. The event also featured our first-ever Women in Business Sector Meeting, drawing strong participation and enthusiasm around sector-focused networking.



### Inspire Youth, Inspire Dreams 8th Grade Expo

More than **3,000 local students** attended this year's expo, engaging directly with employers, colleges, and industry professionals. The event helped students explore career pathways and inspired the next generation of Modesto's workforce.

#### Join Us in 2026

As we look ahead to 2026, the Modesto Chamber of Commerce is excited to build on the achievements of 2025 and launch **more robust programs with added value** for our members and the broader community.

We are thrilled to debut our newest signature event, the **Members' Choice Awards Banquet & Board Installation**, on **January 29, 2026**. This event will celebrate business excellence while welcoming our newly installed board of directors.



Business U will expand in 2026 with enhanced workshops and targeted learning series to support business owners, managers, and entrepreneurs.

The **Women in Business Sector Strategy** will continue to grow, offering sector-specific engagement, mentorship, and collaboration opportunities for women across industries.

**Rise & Shine with CEOs** will return with new leaders, insights, and expanded mentorship opportunities.

Our committees, including Government Relations and Economic Development, will advance their work to support advocacy, business growth, and regional competitiveness.

We also have an **exciting new initiative launching in 2026** that will bring valuable resources, support, and enhanced opportunities for our members and the greater Modesto community, providing significant added value.

**Join us in 2026 as we build on the momentum of 2025 and work together to shape a vibrant and prosperous future for Modesto's business community.**

# 2025: Delivering Balance

By Bob Kimball

For years, the City of Modesto has chased a single, ambitious goal: become a city where economic opportunity and quality of life grow together. In 2025, that vision stopped feeling like a slogan and started looking like reality.

## A Safer, More Livable City

Residents noticed. In an October 2025 City of Modesto Community Survey, 84% of residents rated the city's quality of life as "good" or "excellent" and called Modesto a good place to raise a family.

The biggest worry of the past decade—homelessness—finally moved in the right direction. After years of steady increases, the 2025 Point-in-Time Count showed a modest but meaningful decline in unsheltered homelessness. New programs delivered results: Camp2Home rapidly re-housed dozens of individuals, Dignity Village and Jenny's Place added permanent supportive beds, and HopeWorks (the new program established after Downtown Streets Team closed) will continue turning paychecks into pathways off the streets.

Crime followed the same downward trajectory. Nearly every major category demonstrated a decline:

- Aggravated assault: -14.6%
- Robbery: -26.1%
- Auto theft: -44.6%
- Rape: -30.9%
- Commercial burglary: -36.3%

Most strikingly, Modesto recorded zero homicides in 2025, the first murder-free year in modern memory, down from seven in 2024.

## Roads, Parks, and Places to Play

Anyone who drives in Modesto knows roads are always a topic of conversation. Measure L funds sealed and/or resurfaced more than 200 lane miles, while major corridors got long-overdue makeovers: the 9th Street corridor, the Empire project at Highway 132/Yosemite Blvd., Scenic Drive, and Coffee Road. Phase 1 of the North County Corridor broke ground, promising future relief for commuters.

Parks saw similar investment. Measure H dollars renovated playgrounds at six neighborhood parks, construction began on the transformative Cesar E. Chavez and Martin Luther King Jr. Park renovation, and the Virginia Corridor Trail continued its steady march north past Sylvan for more than five miles of greenway.

Sports fans have reason to cheer too. The new Modesto Roadsters baseball team will take the field at John Thurman Field in 2026, while the possibility of a United Soccer League franchise and a multi-sport downtown arena continues to be explored.

## An Economy That Works for Everyone

While quality-of-life metrics rose, the economy refused to be left behind.

The city's new "Grow in California's Heartland" business attraction campaign landed wins: Corrugated Supplies Company, Aggreplex (advanced glass manufacturing), and Sage Plastics all chose Modesto for major new facilities. On the retail side, residents welcomed two new Vallarta Supermarkets, Chipotle, and the popular Japanese variety chain DAISO.

Healthcare, already a cornerstone industry in our community, grew even stronger with multi-year expansion commitments from both Kaiser Permanente and Sutter Health. The Healthforce Partners workforce development initiative is under way to fill critical behavioral health positions in our community.

Entrepreneurs and small businesses—core factors in Modesto's economic growth—got new tools to thrive. The City partnered with Stanislaus 2030 who launched Nurture, a free tuition licensed childcare certification program that helps providers open and/or expand while creating jobs. The City funded SizeUp, a business-intelligence platform giving hundreds of owners the kind of data once available only to big corporations. Lastly, Digital NEST continued bridging the digital divide with career training for underserved teens and young adults.

## Looking Ahead

Modesto ended a year with measurable progress on almost every front its residents care about most.

Safe streets, smoother roads, new jobs, and playground laughter: simple things, perhaps, but the exact ingredients of the balanced, thriving city Modesto has promised to become.

We're looking forward to continuing to build our best Modesto in 2026!

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# Strengthening Women-Owned Businesses and Improving Small Business Licensing in Stanislaus County

By Felicia Lopez

The Modesto Chamber of Commerce is advancing meaningful, workforce-driven solutions that support women-owned businesses and improve the small business experience in Stanislaus County. Through strategic partnerships and our role as a trusted convening authority, the Chamber is helping remove barriers, elevate business voices, and strengthen the local economy.

## Building a Stronger Future for Women-Owned Businesses

Women-owned businesses are a vital part of Stanislaus County's economic fabric, yet many continue to face challenges related to workforce access, business resources, and connection to decision-makers. In partnership with the Workforce Development of Stanislaus County, the Modesto Chamber of Commerce is leading a focused sector initiative designed to address these challenges and create lasting support structures.

As the convening authority, the Chamber is bringing together women business owners alongside partners from workforce development, education, and economic development to build a trusted, collaborative network. Working with organizations such as SCORE, Nurture (with Stanislaus 2030), and other community partners. The initiative will engage 50 or more established women-owned businesses.

Two sector convenings, planned for Fall 2025 and Spring 2026, will focus on practical workforce needs, identifying growth barriers, and strengthening connections to mentorship, training, and business support. Between convenings, the Chamber will coordinate capacity-building workshops and launch a mini mentorship program to support hiring, retention, and sustainable growth.

This work will also surface policy and systems-level challenges, such as access to affordable childcare or flexible upskilling opportunities, that impact women entrepreneurs. Each convening will conclude with an actionable summary report, helping inform realistic, locally driven solutions and ensuring women-owned businesses have a lasting voice in shaping the systems that affect their success.

## Improving Small Business Permitting and Licensing

In addition to sector-focused business support, the Modesto Chamber is serving as a convening authority for small businesses and municipal partners to improve permitting and licensing processes throughout Stanislaus County.

Under the guidance of the Director of Workforce Development of Stanislaus County, the Stanislaus County Workforce Development Board, and through the Stanislaus 2030 Workforce Development Partnership, the Chamber is gathering real-world input from small businesses and permitting officials. This work documents lived experiences, identifies inefficiencies, and validates promising practices introduced by the County.

The goal is to streamline permitting and licensing, reduce delays and confusion, and create a more accessible, business-friendly environment, particularly for small and emerging businesses. By improving these systems, the Chamber is helping entrepreneurs focus more on growth and job creation, strengthening the overall community and local workforce.



# Our Inaugural Summer Advocacy Series

By Stephen Shaw, Business Support Coordinator

This summer marked the launch of our first-ever Summer Advocacy Series! The Government Relations Council and Economic Development Committee partnered to create a four-part program inspired by Modesto's motto: Water, Wealth, Contentment, and Health.



**Water:** We kicked off the series with Dorene D'Adamo, Vice Chair of the California State Water Resources Control Board. Her presentation offered a deep dive into California's water challenges, sustainability strategies, and the future of water access in the Central Valley. A big thank you to The State Theatre for hosting this important conversation.



**Wealth:** Next, we welcomed a panel of elected officials: Juan Alanis, California State Assemblyman (District 22); Mani Grewal, Stanislaus County Supervisor (District 4); and Nick Bavaro, Modesto City Councilmember (District 4), Vice Mayor. Their discussion focused on economic development, job growth, and the evolving financial landscape of our region. We appreciate Petersen Event Center for providing the venue.



**Contentment:** Our third session featured a dynamic panel of education leaders: Dr. Britt Rios-Ellis, President of California State University Stanislaus; Dr. Brian Sanders, President of Modesto Junior College; and Scott Kuykendall, Superintendent of the Stanislaus County Office of Education. They explored education, opportunity, and building a thriving, content community. Special thanks to Modesto Junior College for hosting us at the Mary Stuart Rogers Theater on their West Campus.



**Health:** We concluded the series with a panel of healthcare executives: Tracy Roman, CEO of Memorial Medical Center (Sutter Health); Andrea Cotter, COO of Kaiser Permanente Central Valley; and Jay Krishnaswamy, CEO of Doctors Medical Center. This discussion centered on innovation, access, and the future of health in Stanislaus County. We are grateful to Doctors Medical Center for hosting at their Conference Center.



This inaugural series received an enthusiastic response from the local business community, and we look forward to continuing this tradition for years to come. We hope to see you at the next one!



# North Valley THRIVE and the Launch of North Valley BizConnect

By Felicia Lopez

The Modesto Chamber of Commerce is playing a key role in advancing regional economic growth through its participation in the North Valley THRIVE (NVT) Catalyst Projects Framework, supported by the Catalyst Fund, part of California Jobs First, a statewide initiative focused on community-informed economic investment.

## Regional Investment in Driving Local Opportunity

As one of 21 Catalyst Fund awardees serving Stanislaus, San Joaquin, and Merced counties, the Chamber is leading work that promotes inclusive entrepreneurship and regional connectivity through the North Valley Small Business Connection Marketplace, now known as North Valley BizConnect.

This tri-county digital infrastructure project strengthens the small business ecosystem by connecting entrepreneurs, particularly micro, home-based, and historically marginalized businesses, to new markets, resources, and regional networks.

## North Valley BizConnect: A Tri-County Marketplace for Businesses

Evolving from the Shop Greater Modesto pilot, North Valley BizConnect is now live and in a soft-launch phase. Businesses are actively being onboarded, with founding partners helping shape the platform ahead of a broader public rollout.

The Chamber is proud to partner with organizations such as SCORE, Nurture (with Stanislaus 2030), which has joined as a Founding

Partner, providing its members with complimentary access to this free, online business-to-business marketplace.

## Through North Valley BizConnect, businesses can:

- Be discoverable across Stanislaus, San Joaquin, and Merced counties
- Share products, services, events, and opportunities
- Connect with customers and peer businesses beyond their immediate networks

An integrated AI tool helps businesses complete and enhance their profiles, can be used in English and Spanish, lowering barriers to participation and ensuring even the smallest businesses can engage effectively.

## Strengthening the North Valley Economy

By investing in shared digital infrastructure and regional collaboration, North Valley BizConnect expands opportunity, increases visibility for local businesses, and supports long-term economic resilience across the North Valley.

Through the North Valley THRIVE framework, the Modesto Chamber of Commerce is helping transform regional investment into tangible outcomes—creating a more connected, inclusive, and prosperous economy for businesses and communities alike.



## CHAMPIONS OF THE CHAMBER SOIREE

CELEBRATING LONGEVITY, LOYALTY AND LEADERSHIP MODESTO CLASSMATES & ALUMNI



Save the Date  
Thursday, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
5:30 PM - 8:30 PM



927 10th St, Modesto, CA 95354

# 2025 Ribbon Cutting Highlights: Celebrating Community & Growth

By **Michell Mercado-Aguirre**

**T**his year, the Modesto Chamber of Commerce proudly hosted thirty-eight ribbon cuttings, celebrating new members, grand openings, anniversary milestones, and business relocations throughout our community. Each event represents more than a ceremonial moment—it symbolizes growth, vision, and the entrepreneurial spirit driving Modesto forward. We are always deeply honored to be part of these celebrations and to welcome new businesses into our vibrant community.

## Why Ribbon Cuttings Matter

A ribbon cutting is an exciting opportunity for businesses to shine. Whether you're launching a new venture or celebrating a major milestone, these events allow you to:

- Introduce your business to the community
- Share your story and mission
- Highlight your products or services
- Build long-lasting connections
- Generate buzz through photos, media, and word of mouth

Ribbon cuttings aren't just for new businesses—they're for any milestone worth celebrating.

## Tips for Making the Most of Ribbon Cuttings

Ribbon cuttings are also powerful networking opportunities. Whether you're hosting or attending, here's how to make meaningful connections:

1. **Bring business cards and be ready to introduce yourself.** A warm, simple introduction can spark a great connection.
2. **Ask the business owner about their journey.** Showing genuine interest helps build meaningful relationships.
3. **Support the new business.** Make a purchase, leave a review, or share photos of the event online.
4. **Offer your expertise or resources.** You never know when a quick conversation could turn into a collaboration.
5. **Stay after the ribbon is cut.** The best conversations often happen once the ribbon is cut.

## Stay Connected

Want to be the first to know about upcoming ribbon cuttings? Join the Chamber's official Ribbon Cutting Invite List by emailing Membership Coordinator, Michell Mercado at [mmercado@modchamber.org](mailto:mmercado@modchamber.org).

You can also check the Chamber Calendar at [modchamber.org](http://modchamber.org) or follow us on social media for the latest announcements and celebrations.





RELATIONSHIPS

# Congratulations

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## JANUARY ANNIVERSARIES

Congratulations to your first year with the Modesto Chamber of Commerce!

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# AMBASSADOR HIGHLIGHT

## Ambassador & Welcome Team

By **Michell Mercado Aguirre**

In 2025, Rising Professionals expanded its impact by offering engaging networking opportunities, peer learning, and leadership development experiences. The group continued to attract new

### Year in Review

This year, the Modesto Chamber of Commerce's Ambassador and Welcome Teams played a vital role in strengthening our connection to members and the broader community. These dedicated volunteers serve as an extension of Chamber staff—representing the Modesto Chamber with professionalism, enthusiasm, and care—while also showcasing their own businesses and areas of expertise.

### Welcome Team

The Welcome Team serves as the Chamber's meters, greeters, & cheerleaders. Their presence helps create a warm, inclusive atmosphere at Chamber mixers and community events, ensuring members and guests feel connected and valued.

Throughout the year, Welcome Team members volunteered at numerous events, including Chamber mixers, community outreach efforts such as Salvation Army Kids Day and kettle bell ringing, and tabling opportunities. They also attended ribbon cuttings, welcoming both new and long-standing members while celebrating important milestones. Their energy and friendliness help foster a true sense of community at every event.

### Ambassador Team

The Ambassador Team is the Chamber's outreach and relationship-building arm. Ambassadors regularly connect with members through phone calls and in-person visits to check in on their membership experience and help them maximize the value of their Chamber benefits.

Serving as liaisons and peer mentors, Ambassadors listen to member feedback, identify concerns or needs, and communicate those insights to Chamber staff. By bridging the gap between members and the Chamber, they help strengthen relationships and ensure members feel supported and heard.

### Looking Ahead

Both the Welcome and Ambassador Teams offer meaningful opportunities for members to get involved, build relationships, and expand their networks while making a positive impact on the Chamber and the community.

The Modesto Chamber is actively seeking new Welcome Team members and Ambassadors for the upcoming year. Members interested in joining either team may contact Membership Coordinator Michell Mercado at [mmercado@modchamber.org](mailto:mmercado@modchamber.org).

In addition, the Chamber will host quarterly Member Orientations, giving members the opportunity to learn more about the Chamber and meet members of the Welcome and Ambassador Teams.

Thank you to our volunteers for the time, passion, and leadership you bring to the Modesto Chamber of Commerce. Your commitment truly makes a difference.



### Testimonials

*"Being a Modesto Chamber member and participating with the Welcome Team at Chamber events has resulted in numerous business connections as well as new clients. We are also supporters of many community organizations. Because of our very positive experience, we encourage other local businesses to learn more about the value of Chamber membership."*

**Victor Randolph**  
**Welcome Team**  
**KRVR The River**

*"Being part of the Chamber of Commerce as both a business owner and a member of the Welcome Committee have been incredibly rewarding. The Chamber has provided connection, support, and meaningful relationships that have helped me grow personally and professionally. It has reminded me that business is not meant to be done alone."*

*Serving on the Welcome Committee has been especially fulfilling. Being able to warmly greet new members and help them feel valued from day one is truly an honor. The Chamber fosters a strong sense of community, collaboration, and leadership, and I am grateful to be part of an organization that genuinely cares about its members and the local business community."*

**Kathryn "Kat" Ramos**  
**Welcome Team**  
**The Sis in Sisbro Innovation**



"Being a part of the Modesto Chamber has been an incredible experience for me and the Be Anything Museum (BAM) Museum. Through the Chamber, we've been able to connect with the community, build relationships with other local businesses, and share our passion for arts and culture. This year, we celebrated our one-year anniversary with the Chamber, which was a wonderful milestone for our team.

One of the ways we've been able to give back is by sharing BAM Museum's Business Resource Center through Chamber events. By offering workshops, mentorship, networking opportunities, and access to business tools, we've been able to support fellow entrepreneurs and help them grow alongside us.

Additionally, through our 2nd Annual Collectible Toy Show fundraiser, we were proud to give \$1,000 to the Boys and Girls Club from a portion of the proceeds. The Chamber has been a fantastic partner in helping us expand our presence in the community and make a positive impact."

— Lourdes Uranday, BAM Museum

"Being an Ambassador for the Chamber is all about connecting with local business owners and helping them make the most of their membership. A few months ago, I reached out to a business that wasn't actively participating in Chamber events. I shared opportunities like Progress magazine and email marketing to boost visibility in the community. By offering guidance and industry-specific ideas, I was able to help her take full advantage of her membership—and the next month, her business was featured in an email blast.

Recently, another business owner asked me about my role as an Ambassador, and we discussed the many ways the Chamber supports members through networking and marketing opportunities.

I love being an Ambassador because it allows me to build connections, support fellow business owners, and help our community thrive—while sharing my own experience along the way."

**Lorraine Bernales**  
**Ambassador Team**  
**Gold Star Referrals**

We've all heard the saying, "Rome wasn't built overnight." The same has been true for Rojas Photography. While we're still building our business and creating our footprint, much of the work we've done would have been impossible without our wonderful community. The Modesto Chamber of Commerce has played an invaluable role in our growth, and we say that with genuine gratitude.

When Niomi and I launched Rojas Photography, we knew that success in a competitive market meant more than just excellent service. It meant being part of something bigger than ourselves, being woven into the fabric of Modesto's business community. The Chamber has provided exactly that foundation.

We've benefited tremendously from a business growth perspective. The connections, the visibility, the opportunities to meet potential clients who value what we do have been incredible. But perhaps more importantly, we've grown

professionally through the members we've met at Chamber events. We've learned from experienced business owners, gained insights from different industries, and built relationships that extend far beyond a single transaction. That kind of professional development is invaluable.

I understand the importance of community and networking, and the Modesto Chamber has countless events that cater to the business mindset. Whether it's mixers or Economic Development meetings, there's always an opportunity to connect, learn, and contribute back. For a small business like ours, being part of that ecosystem has made all the difference.

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ROJAS PHOTOGRAPHY

# A Year of Impact, Innovation, and Community

Written by Kathryn Kim Ramos, Sisbro Innovation Website and Digital Marketing Consultant

This past year at Sisbro Innovations has been defined by one theme: helping small businesses and community organizations step confidently into the digital and AI-powered future, without losing their heart, their story, or their values.

As a digital marketing and AI consultancy, we deepened our work with local entrepreneurs, non-profits, and faith communities to make technology feel more like a teammate than a threat. We continued to serve our core clients with strategy, content, and done-for-you digital marketing, but this year we also leaned heavily into education and empowerment.

A major highlight has been our continual work with the SBDC Norcal. Through workshops, one-on-one consulting, and collaborative programs, we've helped small business owners understand how to build a strong online presence, attract the right customers, and use AI responsibly to support their everyday operations. These partnerships have allowed us to reach entrepreneurs who might not otherwise have access to this kind of support.

We also had the joy of partnering with local chambers, offering classes that bridge faith, business, and innovation. Our workshops have included topics such as:

- Digital Marketing Foundations for Small Businesses and Ministries
- Social Media Strategy and Content Planning
- Email Marketing and List Building
- Branding and Storytelling in a Digital World
- Intro to AI for Small Business Owners
- Using AI Tools for Content Creation, Productivity, and Customer Care

These classes are designed to be practical, hands-on, and hope-filled, giving people tangible tools they can start using the same day.

This year, Sisbro Innovations also began launching new AI products and tools tailored to small business owners. From AI-assisted content systems and chat-based resources to simple automation workflows, our focus has been helping owners work smarter, not harder. We want busy entrepreneurs to save time, reduce overwhelm, and show up more consistently online without feeling like they must become "tech experts."

None of this would have been possible without the Modesto Chamber and the

relationships we've built through it. Chamber events, programs, and networking opportunities have provided both visibility and community. Many of our most meaningful collaborations and client relationships began with a handshake or a conversation at a Chamber gathering.

Our Gold Star Referral club connections have been especially special. The members feel less like a networking group and more like family, people who genuinely believe in what we do, refer business our way, and, just as importantly, trust us with their own. Their support, encouragement, and willingness to invest in our services has fueled our growth and reminded us why relationship-driven business matters.

As we look back on this year, we're grateful for the partnerships, the trust, and the open doors the Modesto Chamber and its members have created. At Sisbro Innovations, we remain committed to serving with excellence, integrity, and creativity, helping our community harness digital marketing and AI in ways that build stronger businesses and a stronger future for us all.

Kathryn "Kat" Ramos one of the founders of Sisbro Innovations, a digital marketing and AI consulting agency is dedicated to helping small businesses, ministries, and local organizations show up with confidence online. She partners with community groups to make modern marketing and AI tools practical, approachable, affordable, and people-centered.

Sisbro Innovations specializes in services that help small businesses work smarter, including:

- Affordable website design and development
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# UC Merced: Celebrating 20 Years of Opportunity, Excellence, and Regional Pride

By Francesca Dinglasan

**\*Note:** This article originally appeared in the December 2025 issue of *Progress*. The article in that issue contained irrelevant content from a separate article and is reprinted here as originally intended by the author.

Two decades ago, a brand-new University of California campus -- the first in the state's Central Valley -- opened its doors to its inaugural class of undergraduates with the ambitious goal of becoming the region's leading educational and research engine.

In just 20 years, UC Merced has risen swiftly through national rankings, now recognized by U.S. News and World Report as a Top 25 public institution and consistently placing among the top three universities for advancing social mobility. Within California, UC Merced ranks 10th overall among all universities and 7th among public schools.

Driving UC Merced's success is its ongoing commitment to the region it calls home. This fall, nearly 40% of the incoming 2025 class is from the Central Valley, marking a significant increase from prior years and reflecting the campus's deepening connection to the communities it was built to serve.

Students benefit from the strengths of a UC education, including opportunities to participate in impactful research, interdisciplinary academic programs, and a successful record of graduation rates, greater postgraduate earnings, and broader career pathways compared to many alternatives, including attendance at other four-year California colleges. Findings show that UC graduates consistently attain higher median salaries than

their peers from other California institutions, with average annual earnings approaching \$110,000 a decade after completing their degrees.

UC Merced's leadership also continues to directly reflect its community. Modesto native and GALLO Chief Marketing Officer Stephanie Gallo recently joined the Board of Trustees, highlighting the institution's priority to engage leaders with deep regional knowledge and commitment.

Additionally, this year marks a milestone for UC Merced Athletics, as the Bobcats have officially joined NCAA Division II competition. The transition brings more home games and expands regional rivalries, including a recent women's soccer matchup against Stanislaus State. The thrilling game went down to the wire, with the Stan State Warriors ultimately claiming the Cowbell Cup. UC Merced's momentum in Division II promises even more chances for the community to unite and cheer on the Bobcats.

As UC Merced looks ahead to its next 20 years and beyond, it remains grateful for its community partners, whose support ensures the university will continue empowering local students, uplifting the region, and building a brighter, more equitable future.

To learn more about UC Merced, contact Regional Director of Development Brad de la Cruz at [brad.delacruz@ucmerced.edu](mailto:brad.delacruz@ucmerced.edu).



# Leadership Modesto 2025 – 2026 Education Day

By Francesca Dinglasan

Education Day for Leadership Modesto (LeMo) offered an immersive look into the diverse and dynamic educational ecosystem serving students across Stanislaus County. We were fortunate to share the experience with students from the Leadership Academy, a program modeled similarly to Leadership Modesto that prepares high school juniors and seniors to develop leadership skills and serve their community.

Plans for the day were organized by the Education Day Committee consisting of Judy Boring, Kristin Mostowski, and Ricky Bispo. All of whom are staff of the Stanislaus County Office of Education (SCOE). Making it fitting that our day began at the SCOE offices. While there, Leadership Academy students were encouraged to take the opportunity to pick the brains of the LeMo members who worked in the fields they hoped to one day join themselves.

The first presentation of the day was delivered by Scott Kuykendall, the Stanislaus County Superintendent of Schools. He provided an overview of the educational ecosystem in Stanislaus County, which includes 25 school districts serving 107,205 students. He also explained the wide range of supports that SCOE provides to each district. These services include alternative education programs for adults and for students who have been expelled from their local districts, as well as interviewing, hiring, and placing substitute teachers, and even running payroll for many of the districts. This explanation led to a lighthearted moment when the Superintendent shared a story about a bank teller who told him, “Oh, so you are the one whose name I see on everyone’s paychecks.”

After the Superintendent’s presentation, we boarded the bus and headed to our first stop of the day, California State University Stanislaus. Upon arrival, we were greeted by a student worker who guided us on a tour of the campus. For some in our group, it was their first time visiting. For those of us who are Stanislaus State alumni, it was an opportunity to reminisce and share stories from our time there as students.

At the end of the tour, we were welcomed into the new Student Center for a leadership presentation by University President Britt Rios Ellis. She encouraged us to lead with ganas and with our values rather than with our egos. In her words, “Leaders who make it about themselves do not leave a good legacy.”

To close, she shared with the students the recipe for success from Salvador Hernandez, the father of astronaut Jose Hernandez.

1. Decide what you want to be when you grow up and what you want to be known for.
2. Realize how far you are from that goal.
3. Devise a roadmap to your destination.



4. Prepare for the challenge with the education needed to achieve the goal.
5. Develop a good work ethic.

From Stanislaus State, we traveled to the John F. Kennedy and Margaret L. Annear Schools, which serve students ages 5 through 22 who have significant medical needs, mobility challenges, behavioral challenges, and other complex learning requirements. We then continued to the Career Inspiration Center, where students take part in hands on learning in technology, health, agriculture, and manufacturing. At each site, we had the opportunity to interact with the tools, the students, and the professionals who bring these outstanding programs to life.

The day ended back at the SCOE offices with a presentation on the Superintendent’s Stanislaus Rewind and Inspired initiative. This effort was created to address the harm caused by excessive screen time and the use of social media before age sixteen. It is a multifaceted approach designed to support students, parents, and teachers throughout Stanislaus County

Overall, it was clear that Education Day offered far more than a series of presentations and tours. It provided a profound look into the passion, innovation, and dedication that fuel education across Stanislaus County. From early learners to young adults preparing for their futures, each stop highlighted the collective effort required to support every student’s journey. For both Leadership Modesto and Leadership Academy participants, the experience served as a reminder that strong communities begin with strong schools, and strong schools are built by committed educators, engaged families, and informed leaders.

# A Year of Growth, Gratitude, and Community Impact

By Kayshaun Brooks, Founder & CEO of Renew You Body Butters

**A**s I reflect on this past year, I am filled with gratitude for the growth, collaboration, and community that have shaped my business and my purpose driven work. This year has been a powerful reminder that when small businesses are supported, entire communities benefit.

One of the most meaningful milestones was being nominated for Small Business of the Year by the Modesto Chamber of Commerce, alongside being honored as Welcome Team Member of the Year. These recognitions affirmed not only my business journey, but also my commitment to showing up, connecting, and serving within the local ecosystem.

I also became a 2x bestselling author and celebrated winning Best of Modesto for the second year in a row both markers of continued trust and support from the community. Through Stanislaus Equity Partners, an opportunity I learned about through the Chamber, I won 1st place in their pitch competition and graduated from their program, strengthening my skills as an entrepreneur and changemaker. I also received a grant from Love Stanislaus County, further supporting community-focused initiatives.

Community wellness remained at the heart of my work. I hosted my first large-scale free community event, The Healing Arts: A Community Day of Health, bringing together over 30 local businesses and sponsors, including the Modesto Chamber

of Commerce. I also launched my second free community event, The Healing Lane: From Pain to Peace supporting individuals managing chronic pain. These gatherings reinforced the power of collaboration and collective care.

This year marked my first conference experience as a keynote speaker, co-hosted by Joanna Esparza and Savannah Williams connections made through the Chamber. Additional collaborations included product placement at the McHenry Museum, partnerships with West Modesto Community Collaborative, Macaroni Kid, Without Permission, and opportunities to exhibit and sponsor regional and statewide events, from the California Circular Bioeconomy Summit to the Silicon Valley African Film Festival.

Through Chamber-connected opportunities, I became a California Green Certified Business, took the Green Beauty Community Pledge, earned a small business development certification through Fresno College and the SBDC, and continued expanding my reach through workshops, wellness fairs, and speaking engagements.

This year was not just about achievements it was about alignment. I am deeply thankful to the Modesto Chamber of Commerce for being a consistent connector, advocate, and champion of small businesses.



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