

Agency for Change Podcast: Karen Gibler, President, Sarpy County Chamber of Commerce

Connect with Karen and Sarpy County Chamber of Commerce at:

- Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/SarpyChamber/>
- LinkedIn – <https://www.linkedin.com/company/sarpy-county-chamber-of-commerce/>
- Website – <https://www.sarpychamber.org/>

Karen Gibler:

Strive not to be a success, but rather to be a value.

Announcer:

Welcome to Agency for Change, a podcast from KidGlov that brings you the stories of change makers who are actively working to improve our communities. In every episode, we'll meet with people who are making a lasting impact in the places we call home.

Lisa Bowen:

Hi everyone. This is Lisa Bowen, vice president, managing Director at KidGlov. Welcome to another episode of the Agency for Change podcast. Here at KidGlov collaboration is a key aspect to the work we do. We know that the biggest actions require great partnership. It's this collaborative spirit that has inspired business owners across the country to join together to move their businesses and their communities forward. Of course, I'm talking about the nearly 3000 Chamber of Commerce groups around the country that help businesses and professionals grow, connect, and prosper. Today's guest is Karen Gibler, president of the Sarpy Chamber, a group serving the Nebraska communities of Bellevue, Gretna, La Vista, Offutt, Papillion, Springfield, and more. Karen, as you know, KidGlov Omaha started with a small office in downtown Papillion, and being a member of the Sarpy Chamber really helped us grow our business and expand our footprint. I'm eager to talk with you today and share the great impact you're making in your community with others who might be able to benefit just like we have.

Karen Gibler:

Well, thank you Lisa. It's such a pleasure to be here with you today and honestly, we got to grow with you as well.

Lisa Bowen:

Yes. You guys are growing too.

Karen Gibler:

Yeah, as you guys grew you, we grew so much that we had to redo our branding and look at that. So our relationship really became a beautiful partnership. So I thank you for that and excited to see your growth in the metropolitan area.

Lisa Bowen:

Yes, it's so great seeing your branding all over Sarpy County. It's such a fun brand. So Karen, can we start with you taking just a minute to tell us more about the Sarpy Chamber and the work you do? What's your elevator pitch? I know you have one.

Karen Gibler:

Well, it might be a little rusty on actual elevator pitch. I can just talk for hours on the Sarpy Chamber.

Lisa Bowen:

Yeah.

Karen Gibler:

Bottom line is, is the Sarpy Chamber is your unwavering advocate. We want you to grow. When you grow, we grow. Our heart is in your business. We want to listen to your needs and we want to develop all of our programming on the needs that your business and our community need.

Lisa Bowen:

So why do you think it's important for businesses to have an organization like the Sarpy Chamber on their side?

Karen Gibler:

Well, there's some pretty interesting statistics given 98% of businesses are considered small businesses in the US. This means small businesses are a true powerhouse of the economy of our country. But interestingly enough, small businesses have a limited financial pocket and they need organizations such as a Chamber of Commerce to help overcome some of those extensive costs. Some of the things that being part of a chamber, just being a member, not even participating, 44% of your consumers will find that your business is more favorable, 51% an increase in consumer awareness, 57% in local reputation and 63% that a consumer will likely have future patronage within your business. Those are some pretty powerful numbers of just being associated in a membership with the Chamber of Commerce. Now, you and I have both know Lisa, there are so much more involved in how you can benefit from a Chamber of Commerce, but that alone, just in being part of a Chamber of Commerce, that's pretty staggering numbers.

Lisa Bowen:

Wonderful. Well, you know I love Sarpy County. It's where I live and spend most of my time. But what do you think makes Sarpy County a great place to do business? There's so many great thriving businesses in the area today.

Karen Gibler:

Well, honestly, it's the people. The people want to do business with each other. They want to see each other succeed. We still have that small town feel, even though Sarpy County is the third-largest population in the state. We are the smallest landmass and we have been the fastest growing county for 15 to 20 years now, and we're only 40% developed. So we are continuing to really grow and still maintain that small town feel of relationships and wanting to do business with each other.

Lisa Bowen:

Perfect. I have a true or false question for you here today, Karen. Does a business have to be located in Sarpy County to be a member of your chamber?

Karen Gibler:

False. You do not. An interesting Lisa, 45% of the Sarpy Chamber members are not located in Sarpy County. They're doing so much business and getting so much out of the services here, which that number really exploded in the last couple years. So it's a great question because a lot of people think you have to.

Lisa Bowen:

I know. I knew the answer to that, but I know that there's perception. I know the perception is that you do have to be in Sarpy County and I want people to know that that's not true. Everyone can benefit from your services.

Karen Gibler:

Thank you.

Lisa Bowen:

So there's several Chambers of Commerce in the area. What sets the Sarpy Chamber apart from others?

Karen Gibler:

Well, one thing that I like to kind of really explain is kind of like Chambers of Commerce as a whole. So you have the US Chamber and you have state Chambers of Commerce. Now, they solely focus on legislation, whether it's federal legislation or state legislation. Then you get to your big metropolitan community, Chambers of Commerce and they're really regional economic development drivers. And then underneath, and I'll get where we are, but then below us are your city chambers and they do a lot of community events. They're doing parades. They're really focusing on their city and the things that are happening in their city. The Sarpy Chamber fits right next to maybe a little under the Metropolitan

Chamber. We are working on very similar things, but our big focus is really on kind of that missing bucket of small business.

We really, really have high awareness of the needs of the small business. Truly our reputation has been through the success of the impact that we've had on the smaller businesses, and that can be 50 or less. I will tell you a lot of our support are major, major size businesses, but they also know that that 98% of small businesses is going to help keep them successful as well so.

Lisa Bowen:

So true. So you mentioned your tagline earlier, Karen, your unwavering advocate. How does the Chamber advocate for members? I know there's so many ways, but what are a few of the ways that you really want people to understand what you do to support your members?

Karen Gibler:

Well, just to kind of keep this part like bullet points is really community awareness. Making sure that they're made aware in their community and getting them involved, businesses involved in their community, our government affairs relations, we will support or not support legislation that could impact our business community or the education in our community. And then the other thing that's really important is education within businesses to help them be successful, whether it's employee development or business development. And that really kind of ties into the economic prosperity and then economic development and helping fill in some of these strip malls or some of these pieces of land that are a little bit smaller than the big data centers.

Lisa Bowen:

Awesome. I love that. And one of the things that you do that you didn't mention that I think is really important, especially for us smaller businesses, is you connect members to other members when there's business opportunities, which is I think a really important piece of what you do and why those relationships with your members are so critical.

Karen Gibler:

Well, and I'll add to that because we're in the work all the time and we forget the impact, so I appreciate you saying that, is we really focus on getting to know our membership base. So when people do need somebody to do rebranding or if somebody needs a plumber, they can just call us and we have a list of great resources and people that they can utilize. That's really what we're trying to do, is help support the people that needs stuff and then support the people that have the stuff, if that makes sense. Or services.

Lisa Bowen:

Absolutely. Karen, you mentioned, I know before you guys do a ton of events in the community. I think more than a 100, maybe 200 events annually, lots of activity going on. Can you tell us a little bit more about the events and if you have some favorites you want to highlight?

Karen Gibler:

Last year, I believe we did 225 events. We do fundraisers that help keep costs low, like our business efforts and cuffing contacts. Those things are free because of these fundraisers help keep those costs low. We do informational events like state of the county, economic outlook. We have several of our groups do fundraisers that help support our nonprofits. We do a lot of educational classes, but my two favorites are our ribbon cuttings. When we see somebody say, I want to be an entrepreneur and I'm taking that leap of faith and I'm going to do this, it is so exciting. They're excited, they're scared, but ribbon cutting is really that opportunity for our ambassadors and our Chamber staff and the elected officials just to come in and say, Hey, we're here to support you. And it is super empowering.

Lisa Bowen:

I've attended many of those and I couldn't agree more. So awesome. So beyond the events, one of the other things I think is special about the Chamber is there's quite a few groups that you can join as a member to help whether educate or connect with other individuals. I know some that I'm familiar with are you have ambassadors, you have a nonprofit collaboration, government affairs. Are there any others you want to talk about, any of those or any others that I didn't mention?

Karen Gibler:

Well, we do have, I want to say nine weekly networking groups. We call them TIYPS, to improve your professional services. We have a bias group, which is a beef up your sales, which targets on people that want to enhance their sales skill. We have a WOMENs group, which is an acronym for We Optimize, Mentor, Elevate and Network. It's business professional women topics. We have our modern professionals and we also have an executive dialogue group where that group is for small businesses that may not have the resources of a board of director. There's a CPA, an accountant, commercial banker. Everything's very secretive in that group. And they can share challenges or successes or ask questions to help them grow their business with these experts in the field. And so that's a very powerful group as well.

Lisa Bowen:

Awesome. So let's talk about some projects you're working on at the Chamber. Is there anything you're particularly excited about? I know you said you're growing and things are happening.

Karen Gibler:

Well, our big announcement this year was that we opened a satellite office in all five cities. And so we've partnered with several of the businesses in the community that have given us a conference room or an office within their building. And so if you're in Gretna, Brianne's in Gretna and has her own office, she's going to have her own TIYPS group out there. She's going to have her own executive dialogue group out there. In Bellevue, we have an office at Hillcrest. In Springfield, we have an office. And so it puts us front and center in front of those members, easily accessible. And so you'll continue to see those hours grow. You'll continue to see each one of those cities continue to grow as well. This year we've had an accelerated relationship with Offutt Air Force Base and STRATCOM. We're really developing in some workforce development with the transitioning military.

How can we support the families, how can we support them legislatively? And so we're really now working with many different entities and both of those organizations to make sure that we're supporting them at the Sarpy County level as the Omaha Chamber has been really supporting them as well. And we're now working with the Omaha Chamber in that support and offering different resources that help our military families and the base themselves. So that's exciting. And of course, we're always talking about workforce, workforce, workforce, workforce. So I've been working with some of the colleagues across the state that's kind of spearheaded by the state Chamber on what we can do and also with Grow Sarpy, which is the economic branch of Sarpy County, to see where we can kind of enhance getting some more employees. So those are some, couple of the things that we're working on.

Lisa Bowen:

Just a little. Just a little work on your plate.

Karen Gibler:

Just a little. Yeah.

Lisa Bowen:

I did not know about the satellite offices. That is really cool.

Karen Gibler:

Thank you.

Lisa Bowen:

I learned something new today.

Karen Gibler:

Good.

Lisa Bowen:

So Karen, let's talk a little bit about you and your background. What brought you to the Sarpy Chamber and have you always been passionate about advocating for local businesses or did that come with this job?

Karen Gibler:

No, actually my father was a small business owner. He was a land surveyor just outside of Portland, Oregon. And I really saw the challenges that him and my mother went through growing a small business. His community involvement, he was in three different rotary groups over his career, he ran for planning commission. My father was very involved in community. My mom was very involved in church. And so that was part of ingrained in me. Coming at the Sarpy Chamber, I actually kind of started off as part-time

to help my friend that was running the Chamber. And then the position came up and I wasn't really looking to go to full-time. I had several board members that were really trying to encourage me to consider going back to full-time. And you know what? I can't imagine my life any other way now. I absolutely love being here. I love the people. It is part of giving back to my community, not just a job for me.

Lisa Bowen:

Awesome. I personally can't imagine the Sarpy Chamber without you, Karen. So you've made a big impact.

Karen Gibler:

Thank you.

Lisa Bowen:

So I love motivational quotes. Do you have any particular quotes that inspire you in your daily work?

Karen Gibler:

When it comes to work, I guess it depends on the day, but I think one of my kind of standard thoughts is strive not to be a success, but rather to be a value. And I come to work every day not thinking about anything other than how can we be a value to the businesses in the community? And if I keep that in check every day, we're doing the right thing.

Lisa Bowen:

Great. I love it. So for our listeners who would like to learn more about the Sarpy Chamber, become a member, how can they find you?

Karen Gibler:

Sarpychamber.org, (402) 339-3050. Anybody you call and drop a note in our website, we will have somebody reach out to you in less than 24 hours. We just really want to sit and talk and find out where we can advocate for all businesses.

Lisa Bowen:

Great. So as we wrap up our time here today, what's the most important thing you want our listeners to remember about the work you're doing at the Chamber?

Karen Gibler:

Well, I don't know that it's so much about the work that we're doing. We want to do is we want to talk to all the businesses and we need to find out what we can do for them. We really, every day we focus on what do you need, what can we offer? If we don't have it, how can we develop it? What are the topics?

Who are the professionals you want to hear from? We want to do the homework for you, and we want to serve it on a beautiful silver platter for you and make it easy for you to be successful. So we just want to talk, talk to you, learn, find out what's going on in your industry. We're going to be there for you.

Lisa Bowen:

Wonderful. Well, as a Sarpy Chamber member, I thank you for everything you do, Karen, and all of the things you said are true from the opportunities for involvement to those relationships built within the Chamber. And we've really benefited a lot here at KidGlov, and I appreciate that effort and thank you for all you do and also for taking the time to talk with us today.

Karen Gibler:

Well, Lisa, I appreciate you and all the good work you've done in our community and KidGlov, it's been amazing. And so thank you and I look forward to seeing you at the grocery store.

Lisa Bowen:

Yes, thank you.

Announcer:

We hope you enjoyed today's Agency for Change podcast. To hear all our interviews with those who are making a positive change in our communities, or to nominate a change maker you'd love to hear from, visit kidglov.com at K-I-D-G-L-O-V.com to get in touch. As always, if you like what you've heard today, be sure to rate, review, subscribe, and share. Thanks for listening and we'll see you next time.