



# Montville Chamber of Commerce Inc.



## 2025 President's Report – Montville Chamber of Commerce

### 1. Opening & Acknowledgement

A warm welcome to all of our members and guests as we gather together to celebrate another year well spent at fabulous Flaxton Gardens. Congratulations everyone, you have kept the dream alive! I am particularly delighted to have Andrew Powell, our local MP, now Minister for the Environment and Tourism as our Guest Speaker and MC at what is my swansong after more than a decade.

Little did I know that 20 years ago, when I joined the newly minted Montville Chamber of Commerce, that it would form such an important part of my life. The MCOC has been my happy place where ideas and endless possibilities live, a fulfilling life bubbling with friends & creative colleagues. Paradise found, what better place to advocate for and do business?

Montville has seen many changes in those 20 years but as we navigate the ever-increasing unknowns, we remain a welcoming, much sort after destination. Throughout this time, our outstanding businesses have paved the way for Montville to shine on through the best and most challenging times. Indeed, many of our businesses are long term community members whose vision contributes to our strong brand. With such a desirable destination, it is no accident that many of us were seduced by the charm of Montville with the lucky ones blessed to live and work here.

When I was first elected as President, Montville had recently experienced challenging times with shop closures, but slowly and surely, the wheel turned and our Main Street flourished. To encourage more arts and crafts to the village, rather than imports, we developed the Montville Artisan Village branding which did in time attract unique businesses.

The collapse of our local hub in the Village Square initiated by the loss of the Medical Centre and then the pharmacy is now on the rebound. Soon the Montville Bakehouse will open in the old Newsagency reenergising the centre. Montville's renewal is well and truly on the way!

Over the past year, we have welcomed more than a dozen new businesses. We have lost some good friends but we are excited to embrace the new faces adding to our vibrancy. The MCOC chapters are lined with dozens of local business owners who stepped up to join Team Montville and ensure our destination continued to lure visitors our way to explore and stay. We have at our doorstep, a place of grace and natural beauty. It is no surprise that post lockdown, we are still welcoming guests seeking a secluded sanctuary far from the madding crowd.

Despite having so many individual personalities, rarely in the past 12 years has there been dissension in our team. The Executive Committee (EC) has become an extended family, for the most part, we have sung from the same page. Our steadfast team represents many of our destination's pillars giving us a great foundation to enable us to understand and support our diverse businesses. Remembering we are all volunteers, I am so grateful to have presided over a succession of supportive ECs these past 12 years. Given the fulfilling role, you can understand why MCOC has been my love child for so long.

Earlier this year we hosted a round table discussion to further energise the revitalisation of Montville. A number of ideas are being discussed and we are now working closely with the Sunshine Coast Council (SCC) Economic Development Team to finalise our plan. With so many hours already devoted to our activation plan, we are fortunate to have almost all of our entire team stay on! Thank you all for your continued support, commitment and cohesion this past year!

Lynn Fallon, our cheer leader, will be taking a gap year to juggle the demands of the extra busy year ahead. Lynn's deep connection with our tourist destination and her advocating for the Dark Sky Proposal has strongly contributed to the MCOC these past 5 years. Thank you Lynn!

At long last, generational change is coming to our Montville Chamber! I am excited to announce that after 12 years at the helm, I welcome Arabella Lubber's nomination as President. For the past 12 months, Arabella, myself and Nicole have worked very closely so I envisage a seamless transition. Arabella (Montville Woods Gallery) has already demonstrated exceptional commitment and boundless energy to the chamber. Arabella has been a driving force encouraging increased membership and an exceptional Treasurer.

## **2. Overview of the Year**

The Chamber's mission and role is to focus on supporting local member businesses and promoting Montville as a premier tourism, wellness, arts and sustainable business destination.

In addition to our strategic planning, this year we have been fortunate to have been given additional support for our Montville Activation Plan from The Sunshine Coast Council (SCC) Economic Development Team. We have identified a number of short and medium-term strategies to harness resilience and help strengthen our business community.

Our meetings and events, including International Women's Day Event at Secrets on the Lake, continue to be well attended. How fortunate we are to have delectable dining venues! Our Coffee and Socials has now evolved to include a Brew and Socials with the first one very well supported.

It has been gratifying to see a growing number of interesting new shops and businesses open along Main Street. Make time to take a stroll to explore the new offerings. As well as the return of a Medical Centre and Pharmacy, we will soon see the opening of a bakery with more dining options on the way. Despite the continuing challenges, we have much to be thankful for!

### 3. Key Achievements

- **Membership Growth & Engagement:** We have welcomed an influx of new members this year. Our membership is now over 80 which is exceptional for a small tourist village. Whilst we have lost some dear friends with businesses closing or moving, there are many new businesses including an increasing number of fresh young faces chasing dreams.
- **Events & Initiatives:** In the past year we have introduced two new events. Last Christmas we organised the Montville Christmas Market Event with visitation exceeding our expectations. Our team, led by Arabella, created a successful new event Artifest which featured microevents scattered throughout Montville over the May long weekend.

Our round table discussion with many high-level stakeholders has seen a collaboration with the SCC emerge as we draft our Montville Activation Plan. This will include a six month promotional campaign which will further boost our destination currently starring in VSC's campaign.

- **Advocacy & Representation:** Our team has recently made two submissions to the SCC Planning Review relating to Telecommunication infrastructure and the proposed Bushfire rezoning. Attending VSC launches and online Teams meetings with the SCC and Business Chamber Queensland has enabled us to advocate for our destination and stay in the loop.

Montville Chamber has highlighted a number of issues including the impact of high real estate on housing for staff, failure of the parking counter, the illegal parking issues near the Hamptons laneway, the closure of the Montville/Palmwoods Road, Western Avenue footpath, road sweeping, amenities maintenance and the recent much needed pressure cleaning.

- **Tourism Promotion:** Montville is showcased in the current VSC Holiday Planner with our investment in a full-page ad. With the addition of our Platinum and Gold Promotional packages, we were able to employ a content creator for several months and boost some ads. Our followers across all platforms have increased with collaborations making a positive impact on our reach. (A special shout out to Marlene Murray, HTSC) This financial year we will be looking at targeting new potential markets & demographics through social media ads.

Montville has also benefitted greatly from being named the Most Welcoming Town in Australia as voted by travellers on Booking.com. We are immensely proud of this accolade! Our top-rated accommodations have been rewarded with statewide and national honours including Narrows Escape having won a Gold gong in an earlier Australian Tourism Awards. As we speak, The Falls Montville is rated the Number 2 hotel in Australia on TripAdvisor with 2 other locals in the top 20!

- **Community Collaboration:** Several of our events involve collaboration with local groups, none more so than our Christmas Market which involved the MVA, The Blackall Range Lions, The Mapleton Choir, The Montville Fire Brigade, St Mary's Hall and the Blackall Range Horseless Carriages. Our International Women's Day event raised funds for Blackall Range Zonta.

#### 4. Business Climate & Challenges

At last we have enjoyed a welcome reprieve from the endless rain. The winter months saw the return of visitors escaping colder climates and SEQ locals wanting a winter experience. Many local businesses have reported better trading and increased occupancy July onwards.

Ex cyclone Alfred caused widespread closures and despite little damage, heavily impacted most businesses. The cost of living pressure has seen a reduction in disposable income with the average transaction lower albeit with strong visitation softening the blow.

Increased costs related to wages, power, insurance, freight, stock and leases has put increased downward pressure on profit margins. Staff shortages have seen unexpected closures or shortened trading hours happen more frequently.

Poor connectivity has continued to be a challenge for processing payments. We continue to advocate for better service and advise businesses to incorporate redundant connectivity.

With the continued movement to online shopping, a number of businesses have seen the opportunity and successfully added online shops. The MCOC has been showcasing available digital capability courses such as Level Up and Digital Solutions to encourage more businesses to upskill to stay competitive. Our Small Business Month workshop included 'Building Resilience into your Business' and incorporated access to online financial management support.

#### 5. Financial Position

Our BOQ balance remains healthy despite a deficit of approximately \$3K which reflects increased costs across website and MYOB costs, social media campaigns and advertising. I believe that the increased costs have been unavoidable and generally money well spent.

This past year Montville Chamber has successfully applied for a number of grants. We are most fortunate to have secured \$8,000/year Economic Development funding from the Sunshine Coast Council which contributes to expenditure on administration, insurance and recurring digital costs. This funding is essential to our organisation being able to deliver stated services to members.

As part of Small Business Week: Recharge, Renew and Rebuild, we successfully applied for a \$2500 grant from the newly minted Department of Customer Services, Open Data and Small and Family Business. This funded a catered workshop and an additional Wellness Workshop.

We have been granted \$3,000 funding through the Sunshine Coast Council Community Events to assist with our Christmas Market Event with musical entertainers and children's activities. In addition, we thank Cr Johnston for personally contributing \$1200 to our Best Decorated Business competition last year and a very generous contribution of \$2000 for our Christmas event this year.

#### 6. Looking Ahead – Strategic Priorities

Our Team has been working closely with the SCC to both tackle challenges and embrace opportunities. We have been very much focused on expanding our horizons with some exciting projects brewing in the background.

- **Attracting and Retaining Businesses:** Within this partnership, we are developing strategies to draw new investment and support existing operators. It is so pleasing to see one of our wish list items, a bakery in the Village Square, is about to come to fruition!
- **Arts, Events & Place Branding:** Our team continued to enhance Montville Artisan Village branding through our Artifest micro events. We continue to sponsor Arts Connect Inc's Sculpture on the

Edge and promote Open Studios to both encourage our local creative artists and strengthen the Sunshine Coast Hinterland's reputation as an arts hub. The upcoming 6 month digital campaign will assist us in further developing our branding and the reach and recognition of our destination.

Montville is a natural home for Wellness. We see this growth area continue to draw new businesses and visitors. The Dark Sky Reserve Proposal has potential to open our night sky to visitors far and wide. Our walks through rainforest and rockpools remain our unsung heroes.

- **Collaboration & Partnerships: Business Support & Skills Development:** This year has seen an enormous number of workshop and mentoring opportunities, many of these online and free of charge. Our collaboration with the SCC, BCQ and the Qld Government Business Concierge, has also enabled members to have access to numerous resources.

The Chamber continues to sponsor the Glasshouse Small Business Awards initiative led by Andrew Powell MP as we seek to encourage and reward excellence. We also supported the SCC's Buy Local Day encouraging locals to support our small businesses.

Our round table discussion saw leaders across business and tourism participate. This event has enabled our organisation to strengthen ties with both regional tourism, local government, and HTSC the local tourism body. We continue to collaborate and host meetings with Maleny Chamber.

- **Sustainability & Innovation:** Our recent event at Spicers Clovelly was headed by GM Jack Fisher who detailed his journey encouraging environmentally responsible practices. A feature of many of our meetings this year has been to present user-friendly ways of embarking upon digital innovation.

## 7. Appreciation & Recognition

Your incoming President Elect, Arabella Lubbers, has been a tireless team member and an exceptional Treasurer. I am eternally grateful that we have such a dedicated leader! Daniel Hoffman, the canny and committed co-owner of the Clockshop, will continue on as Vice President adding his fresh take on business matters and branding. Alan Dryden has managed to juggle keeping The Falls at giddy heights with being a valued key member supporting us for 5 years including accepting the role of Vice President in 2021. Tamara Large has somehow overseen the revisioning of Lovestone Cottages with contributing her laser like insight gained through working closely with VSC and TEQ. Richard Sargeant, creator of Crystal Multiverse can be relied upon for his optimism and great ideas. Terri Koepenick from faraway California has made The Country House at Hunchy home. Terri brings an international perspective and new ideas to our team. David Moore of Emperor's Medicine has already added much to our discussions and he is keenly supporting upcoming initiatives.

I would also like to acknowledge what an enormous assistance Nicole is in her role as our Secretary/Administrator. It would not be possible for us to function without Nicole's multi skilling, both organising and delivering. We have greatly benefitted from this essential support over the past 12 years. Each of our wonderful Admin Officers has been essential to the running of our chamber. Nicole is the best of the best! \*We thank the Sunshine Coast Council for partly funding this position through the Economic Partnerships Grant.

Our Christmas Event would not happen without those members who lend the MCOC team a hand to ensure Montville sparkles. Our Christmas Committee helpers include Tina Cooper, Wolfgang Engel, Tracey and Wayne Malkin, Otto Lechner, Stevo Koepenick, Tanya Torpy and Susan Diplock. Let's not forget Mr and Mrs Santa Claus. (Mel and Craig Taylor)

This year we have continued to benefit greatly from Andrew Fairbairn's advocacy and his valuable input. In addition we were able to liaise with Matt Stoeckel, CEO Visit Sunshine Coast (VSC) who participated in our round table discussion. Our destination is well served by our loyal group of Montville Visitor Centre volunteers ably led by Beth Mahoney (VSC).

Martin Duncan is our Secret Santa gifting us his time to showcase the MCOC on both social media and print media such as My Weekly. Thank you maestro Martin for socials that sing!

The MCOC sincerely thanks Mark Conolly of Victor Bimrose Accountancy for generously conducting our audits for more than 10 years and agreeing to another! We are so fortunate to have been gifted this essential service for so long!

## 8. Closing Remarks

There has been so much to celebrate during my presidency. First and foremost are the awesome business volunteers who set aside time in their busy lives to ensure Montville is bathed in sunshine and starlight. Despite the onset of Covid, Team Montville kept the lights on. While many chambers hibernated, we stayed the course supported by the SCC Economic Development Team.

Of the many and varied initiatives, the stand outs for me are the Range Restaurant Awards, the Village Wedding expo lead by Merlin Coughlan, lobbying the SCC relentlessly and finally seeing the Russell Family Car Park completed, encouraging the return of the Post Office and more recently, our multimedia entry to the Top Tourism Town. I was particularly proud of our Hinterland Healing initiative whereby our members, with Maleny Commerce, showed incredible generosity to the business owners of Gympie and nearby districts who suffered in the 2022 flood. The genuine gratitude and resolute resilience shown was heart-warming.

I am confident that with Arabella's leadership the Montville Chamber commitment to supporting our members and ensuring our destination deservedly sparkles will continue. The team is focused on ensuring Montville's growth as a thriving, sustainable, and desirable destination to those seeking a holiday experience nestled in nature. Or simply to ELEVATE, EXPLORE, ESCAPE!

Opportunities beckon with more to be revealed! An active transport pathway between Flaxton, Kondalilla and Montville is a challenge we are nibbling away at. Heritage trails telling fascinating tales of our buildings has begun the first steps of its journey. An Arts Centre/Gallery set in the scenic surrounds of Russel Family Park awaits the stars to align. As we look ahead, our challenge and our opportunity is to build on that spirit of collaboration, resilience, and innovation.

Montville's inner strength has always been its people — passionate business owners, creative artisans, and a community that welcomes the world with open arms. Montville is blessed to boast an abundance of stellar businesses. Our business community is abuzz with innovations and bold ideas. There are a number of opportunities bubbling away as we head towards 2032. Working together, we can forge our future with creative vision towards a heady new chapter. With so many passionate, engaged members, our much-loved heart of the S C Hinterland is destined to shine on!

What a wonderful honour it has been to lead the chorus with so many lofty voices for so long!

Shiralee Cooper 24/09/2025

