

CIANJ's Legacy: Connecting Business, Community & the Generations

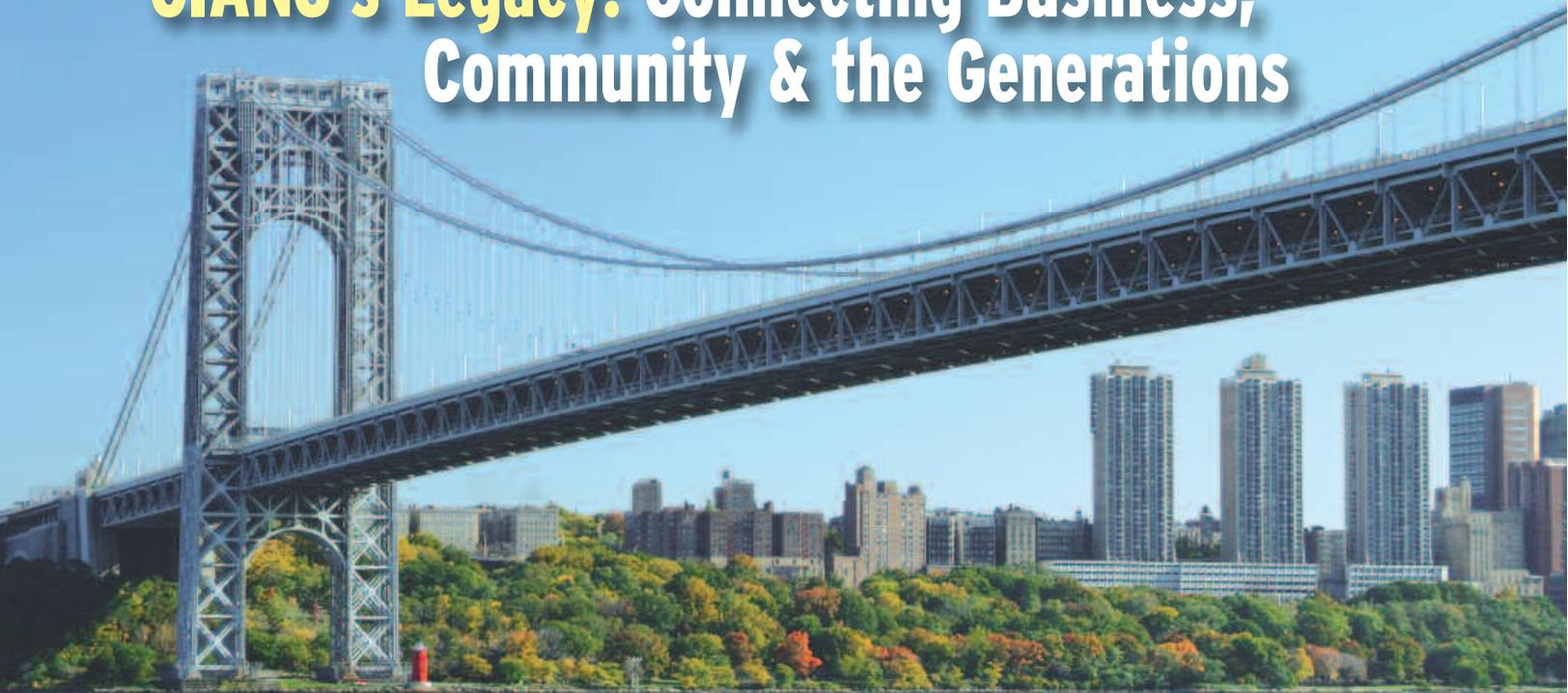


Photo: Guy Brown, G H Brown Communications

The Bergen County Chamber of Commerce (which later became CIANJ) "gave powerful support to the movement which led to the building of the George Washington Bridge..."

—The Bergen Evening Record, Oct. 3, 1952

BY DAVID JOHNSTON
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

HACKENSACK, NEW JERSEY'S BUSINESS BOOM in the late 1920s was a sharp contrast to the surrounding farmland that made up so much of Bergen County at that time. The history of the Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey is rooted in the expansion of companies in and around the city.

In 1927, the Bergen County Chamber of Commerce was formed to help businesses succeed and thrive in the county—not just in Hackensack, but in the towns and villages that surrounded it, too. The history of the Bergen County Chamber of Commerce, which would become CIANJ in the early 1980s, is alive and well in some of its founding members who are still active in the organization to this day—including PSE&G, Verizon, Alexander Summer LLC and Reinauer Realty.

By the mid to late 1970s and early 1980s, New Jersey's business community was expanding in rural and urban municipalities, and the need for an organization with greater reach led the leadership of the Bergen County Chamber of Commerce to transform the group into a statewide business advocacy organization. This would become what is today the Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey (CIANJ).

For many members, such as Fausta Phelan, CIANJ is more than just a business group.

"I was introduced to CIANJ through your Women's Leadership Program," says Phelan. "I was a guest and new to doing business in the New Jersey area. What I expected was a bunch of women networking and getting to know each other. What I got was something so powerful that it literally starting me on a life-changing path.

"I am a single mother who has always worked two to three jobs to make ends meet and provide a decent life for my daughter," explains Phelan, who at the time of the event was a national account executive for Communication Research Consultants, Inc. "During this event and for the first time in my life, I felt empowered not only by the panel but by some women in the audience. I have made changes in my life and I am very excited about what lies ahead."

A future of promise is built on a proud past, and for CIANJ, history is part of the strength of membership. For example, Billy Diana was barely out of college and had just joined The NIA Group, an insurance and financial services company in Paramus, when a coworker suggested that the young salesman attend CIANJ meetings to meet potential clients and learn more about New Jersey's business world. A couple of decades later, Diana says joining the Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey was one of the best moves he ever made, both professionally and personally.

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"I was kind thrown into the Commerce and Industry Association when I joined NAI at the age of 22," says Diana. "Right off the bat, I was able to meet a lot of different people and arrange to sit down with them for a follow-up meeting."

According to Larry Feld, director of marketing for Hunter Group CPA LLC, "becoming involved in CIANJ remains both a personally and professionally rewarding experience. Since the membership includes New Jersey's most influential businesses, our management

team has had an opportunity to meet and develop meaningful business relationships with top executives, owners and political power brokers we perhaps would not have otherwise been privileged to know.

"In addition," says Feld, "CIANJ provides a unique platform to promote the ideals of free enterprise. It is a place to be seen, to be heard, and to be recognized. It is also a resource to learn, grow and keep on top of the important issues impacting New Jersey's business community. We consider ourselves fortunate to have found CIANJ, and are proud to be active participants in this vibrant community of business leaders," he continues.

"As a mid-sized CPA firm that specializes in helping privately-held companies, Hunter Group has found the Commerce and Industry Association of New

Jersey and its flagship publication *COMMERCE* magazine to be profoundly effective at reaching—and influencing—our target audience," explains Feld.

Membership in the Commerce and Industry Association can also be especially rewarding for startups and mid-sized companies hoping to move up to the next level, according to Betty Manetta, owner of Argent Associates in Edison and chairwoman of CIANJ's Hispanic Business Council. The Association's networking events can be an invaluable springboard for the owners of relatively new companies (ones three-to-five years old) that are seeking to take their business to the next level, she explains.

Manetta speaks from experience: she founded Argent Associates, a supply-chain logistics, security and IT company, in 1998 and has found CIANJ to be a helpful entrée to the business community that otherwise would have been beyond her reach.

CIANJ's meetings gave Manetta an opportunity to learn more about how to effectively manage Argent Associates and, perhaps more importantly, provided a

venue to meet other business people who proved to be valuable mentors, partners or clients. "The Commerce and Industry Association, with its breadth and scope of thousands of major corporations, helped us to break into some areas where, typically, small companies and Hispanic companies can't get access," says Manetta. "It's about access. Getting to the right people is always a challenge. You get to meet people you wouldn't be able to meet otherwise."

CIANJ's luncheons, specialty groups and networking events all provide opportunities for owners of small and mid-sized businesses to meet (and learn from) executives at large companies who they otherwise would be unlikely to encounter. In this way, she said, the Commerce and Industry Association helps growing companies by playing a role local Chambers of Commerce seldom fill, Manetta says.

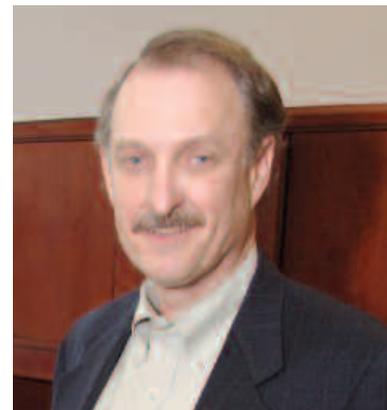
Local chambers tend to be dominated by truly small, local, mom-and-pop companies, Manetta explains, and while the local chambers help their members and the communities they serve, they seldom provide the opportunity to make the leap from a small, local company to a larger regional or national player. CIANJ, on the other hand, includes people from large companies such as PSE&G, Wachovia Bank and Sharp Electronics, which gives the owners of small businesses a unique opportunity to offer their services to the large corporations.

The Hispanic Business Council isn't the only CIANJ industry council that has thrived. During the past 20 years, CIANJ's Environmental Business Council (EBC) has grown from a small, almost ad-hoc gathering of contractors and consultants into one of the state's most important, best-organized advocates for sound environmental policies and practices.

"Of all the various associations in the state, this is the one that really welcomed the environmental professionals, whether they happen to be in-house counsel, contractors, consultants, laboratories, lawyers or other service providers," says CIANJ Board Member Edd Hogan, a partner with Norris McLaughlin & Marcus in Bridgewater. "It's really become the focus for the industry because the environmental service companies such as contractors, consultants and laboratories need to meet and share ideas."



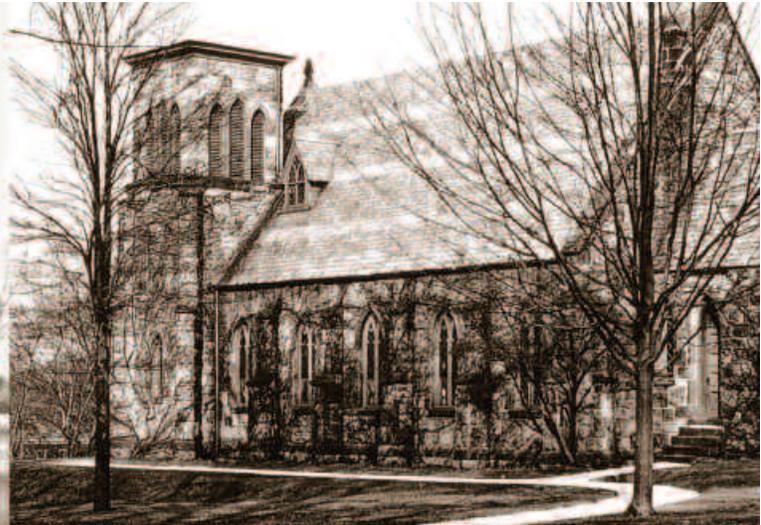
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In the early years, the Bergen County Chamber of Commerce took out-of-state company executives on bus tours of the area, and won over many businesses that today call New Jersey their headquarters.



Hogan, who received a master's degree in environmental science before becoming an attorney, was chairman of the Environmental Business Council for 12 years ending in 2002 and was moderator of the bimonthly EBC Roundtable meetings until January 2007.

The Environmental Business Council has become one of CIANJ's largest groups, with about 130 people from diverse industries attending its bimonthly roundtable meetings. (This is up dramatically from the informal lunches with about a dozen people when the council was formed.) Formal presentations at the meetings address topics such as proposed laws, new regulations, developments in remediation technology and project case studies.

"We cover a lot of material in 90 minutes," says Hogan. "The very nature of environmental law and regulations has been a very rapidly evolving field, so activity with business associations is almost essential to understanding the evolution of what's occurring at the very time that you're practicing. The laws and regulations will continue to evolve very quickly."

The Environmental Business Council has come to have two key roles in the development of new laws and regulations. First, the EBC acts as a watchdog safeguarding businesses' interests. The group's members, with the assistance of CIANJ's staff and consultants, monitor the

statehouse and regulatory agencies to ensure that environmental proposals are not implemented without adequate scrutiny. When proposals that will have a significant impact on the business community are identified, CIANJ and its members move into action.

Regulators and legislators have come to know and trust the Environmental Business Council's members, Hogan explains. "The EBC's members are dealing on a day-to-day basis with the staff-level folks at the state agencies and are able to identify problems that may not make it to the attention of the political leaders at the agency or to the elected officials," he says. "Then we use formal meetings or things like informal lunches to give them feedback. It provides a forum for the sharing of information with the elected officials and full-time civil servants."

The Environmental Business Council has also become a prime resource for networking and finding assistance with difficult challenges, says Hogan, who is in touch with EBC members on nearly a daily basis. Council members are active in diverse niches of the environmental-protection industry and frequently call each other for advice. "It flows in every direction. At least for the environmental-business side, it is the place to be."

The Commerce and Industry Association also educates tomorrow's business leaders through programs in

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area high schools and summer seminars for teenagers. Speaking to high school students who have dreams of opening their own businesses as part of the Foundation for Free Enterprise's Learn About Business (LAB) program has been one of the most rewarding things for Robert Marcalus, the founder and chairman of Marcal Paper Mills Inc. Marcalus is one of many top-level executives who have given lectures and run workshops as part of the Foundation's annual summer program at Ramapo College.

During the three days of classes (there is one series for girls, another for boys), the students entering 11th and 12th grades are given a crash course on the basics of business and the impact of pressures such as taxes and environmental regulations. The curriculum includes speeches, workshops and evening breakout sessions where the small groups of students meet with the speakers and guest executives.



CIANJ members have been active in supporting "free enterprise" since the early days, in this example with a billboard for passing train commuters and drivers in Hackensack.

As the Foundation's name implies, one underlying theme of the program is the importance of free enterprise and entrepreneurship and the speakers' belief that government should avoid meddling in business owners' affairs.

"The Foundation for Free Enterprise is the CIANJ's educational arm and does everything possible to introduce high school students to free market concepts," explains Marcalus, who was a speaker at the program a half-dozen times ending in 2006.

Marcalus, who helped create the program while he was a trustee with the Foundation, doesn't sugar coat what it means to start a business when he speaks to the high schoolers. Instead, Marcalus says he candidly describes the pros, cons and sleepless nights that come with business ownership.

"I try to talk to them about the opportunities and the risks of being an entrepreneur, and you can't be an entrepreneur without taking risks," says Marcalus, a longtime

CIANJ member. "You're putting your money at risk, putting your family's money at risk. And it is not always successful the first time. You have to be willing to try again or to change your plan. I give the reasons to be concerned and tell them they have to have a careful business plan."

The Foundation for Free Enterprise, which was founded in 1975, also sponsors an essay contest and has a program where speakers visit high schools during the school year to address business and social studies classes and run workshops that study how businesses are operated.

"Most high schools don't have any classes on business and how the free market works, which is amazing," says Marcalus. "We're trying to fill the void. It's been very rewarding. It's great to meet the students and see their enthusiasm."

Ed Efchak, chairman-elect of the Foundation for Free Enterprise and vice president for marketing with the North Jersey Media Group in Hackensack, adds: "We sometimes focus on the nature of business and how business works, but it's larger than that. It's about what free enterprise stands for, what it means in terms of the foundation of the country and what it means in terms of its relationship with the government and political environment we work in."

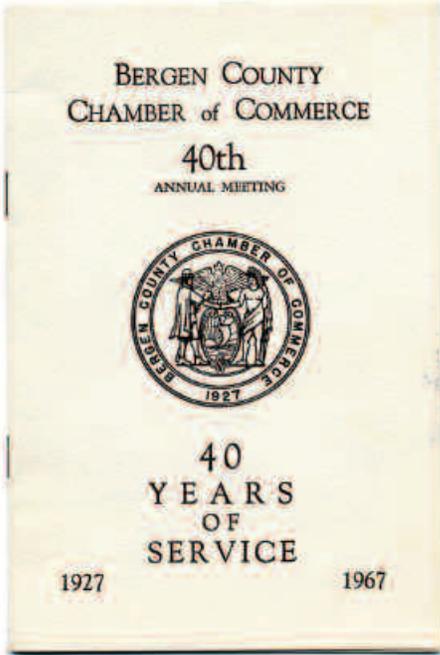
Franklin Reinauer, who was among the founders of the Foundation for Free Enterprise, wishes the concept behind the foundation had been taken up by business groups in other states. "It's been a disappointment to me...that it hasn't been replicated in other states because it's a simple situation and could easily be replicated elsewhere. We run a very successful program in New Jersey."

Many friendships and long-lasting relationships have been formed at CIANJ meetings, and its members have helped each other and their companies during times of crisis.

Alexander von Summer III recalls how CIANJ officers quickly reached out to him and his family after his father unexpectedly died 10 years ago. Von Summer, who was only 27 years old at the time, suddenly found himself taking over the day-to-day operations of his family's real estate management company. Von Summer's father (a past CIANJ Chairman) and company (a founding CIANJ member firm) had long been active CIANJ members. Even though von Summer himself hadn't been a member (he was a financial analyst in Connecticut before his father died), CIANJ officers quickly reached out to von Summer to express their condolences and offer their members' support.

"The organization reached out to me as they are wont to do. They are always looking out for the best interest of their members," says von Summer who, along with his sister Kristen represents the third generation managing Alexander Summer LLC, in Paramus. "We were impressed at how quickly they rallied to do something nice for us. The organization showed good intentions and support in reaching out to me personally."

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Von Summer soon was offered a position on CIANJ's Board, resuming a role his father and grandfather had played before him. "The company had always been a part of the organization and vice versa," explains von Summer.

During the next few years, CIANJ meetings provided what von Summer called a "crash course" on New Jersey's economy and the challenges companies face. Von Summer quickly learned about trends in industries he was not familiar with and was able to meet top executives at a wide variety of companies—including some

of his own company's tenants who he met for the first time at CIANJ events.

"There was moral support, but it was also a good way to get to know some of the people my family had

known and some of the tenants, as well as some of my friendly competitors."

In tangible and intangible ways, CIANJ makes a contribution to the success of businesses, to individual business professionals and to the next generation who will run companies in the future.

"CIANJ is a strong and effective advocate for business interests throughout New Jersey, says Richard McLaughlin, Counsel with J. Fletcher Creamer & Son, Inc. "CIANJ focuses solely on business-related issues. It is able to begin its participation at the discussion stage of an issue and continue through legislative committee sessions and hearings and eventually to enactment of legislation.

"CIANJ is respected for its advocacy based on solid reasoning and thorough research," explains McLaughlin. "Its information gathering capability provides early notice to its members of pro- and anti-business policies in time for effective response. There is strength in numbers and knowledge is power. CIANJ combines both to service the business community.

"CIANJ matters to New Jersey because New Jersey needs its businesses for the jobs they provide and the taxes they pay," explains McLaughlin. "Those businesses have no better advocate than CIANJ." ■