

# Easton Chamber of Commerce Grows Organically

---



If you want something done, ask a busy person to do it, the expression goes. If you want something extraordinary done, ask three busy women to do it; they won't let anything stand in their way.

No one had to ask Adrienne Burke, Patti Popp and Lori Cochran-Dougall to start a Chamber of Commerce in Easton. The idea took root and grew organically, as each woman contemporaneously sought to spread the word that Easton is a wonderful place to visit and call home.

The new chamber made its debut on Memorial Day. Burke asked Phil Doremus, town zoning enforcement officer and longtime Greiser's customer, how they could get into the parade. Doremus said they would need a vehicle and a sign.

The three women marched in the parade with Cochran's pickup truck, Uncle Jesse, as their float and a Chamber of Commerce sign perched on top. Burke had picked up the sign at an antiques shop in Saratoga, N.Y.

Popp, founding farmgal of Sport Hill Farm, said she had been thinking about how to promote Easton for some time. She was concerned about all the negativity in town and in the news, and wanted to counteract it with positivity, to show all that Easton has to

offer.

“Adrienne took over Greiser’s, and it’s so beautiful,” Popp said. “It was an existing business, but change is good, change is refreshing in moderation, I feel. This place opened a lot of opportunities. Between this store, the farms and the Easton Village Store, I wanted to find a way to bring people to Easton instead of discouraging them, to let people know that Easton is a gem of a town.”

Although the new Greiser’s has an updated feel and clientele, Dick Greiser, the longtime owner, still works there too, selling antiques and gas. The oldtimer “gang at Greiser’s” continues to gather there for conversation and camaraderie, and is welcomed and appreciated.

Cochran-Dougall said the true essence of what she loves about Easton is how the old and the new come together, how Burke worked with Greiser to turn the old deli and store into something new and wonderful, that benefits both parties.

Popp spoke with Burke about her ideas for promoting Easton, and Burke suggested they form a Chamber of Commerce. Popp did some research and discovered it was something they could do on their own, that it didn’t require town approval. As soon as Cochran-Dougall heard Burke and Popp talking about forming a chamber of commerce, she immediately embraced the idea.

Cochran-Dougall moved to Easton 10 years ago and has spent much of her life focused on local-food advocacy. She is the executive director of the Westport Farmers Market and has been looking at the foundations of Easton and how to embellish on that, from the farms to the Agricultural Commission.

Her latest accomplishment was getting the official state designation of Easton as the Christmas tree capital of Connecticut, which makes it more likely to get grants, she said. Even though Popp doesn’t sell Christmas trees, she keeps her farm store open through

December and plans to participate in the festivities of making Easton a winter wonderland, along with the Christmas tree capital designation.

“Why do I want a chamber of commerce? Because we have such a unique town,” Cochran-Dougall said. “In sales, you want things that are unique and authentic. You don’t want to look like everything else.”

“For me, it was something I thought of while I was working on the business plan for the store,” Burke said. “There are so many hoops you have to jump through with the town and other things.”

Simultaneously, Shelley Stewart was starting Priscilla’s Place, a daycare center at Jesse Lee Church. “We were comparing notes,” Burke said. “People who were approving her permit through the town and the church were calling me and asking what I had gone through.”

Burke said she and Stewart thought there ought to be a chamber of commerce where people could share information. That weekend Burke was in an antique store in Saratoga and saw the chamber of commerce sign.

“I texted a picture of it to Shelley, and she said, ‘Well, that’s a sign,’” Burke said. “Then Patti and I started talking about starting a chamber, and I gave the sign to her for her birthday and said, ‘You do it. I don’t have time to do it.’”

Popp was getting busy with the farming season and opening her store. But it all came together, and they rapidly got the chamber off the ground over Memorial Day weekend with Cochran’s assistance. To date, 68 business people have joined the Facebook group they started, as interest and enthusiasm continues to grow.