

# Civic-minded chamber chairman breakfasts with biz leaders

By Kane Kaiman  
Islander Reporter

Rick Bisio wants to make it easier for business owners to bring home the bacon.

As chairman of the Manatee Chamber of Commerce board of directors, the 22-year Bradenton Beach resident hosted a breakfast event July 14 at Bradenton Beach's Anna Maria Oyster Bar.

Chamber members and staff gathered at the restaurant to network and discuss business challenges.

It was the fourth breakfast get-together Bisio has staged since he was elected chairman in January.

The events have uncovered a "consistent refrain," Bisio said.

"No matter where we are in the county, the two biggest challenges that the businesses are consistently discussing right now, one is finding employees and the second is housing," he said. "So it's hard to find employees and, if you find an employee, where are they going to live?"

"The reality is the chamber by itself cannot address either one of those. But the one thing we have done is created a committee on the housing task force and we actually convened a meeting about three weeks ago," Bisio said July 12.

The breakfast forums are helping identify problems the chamber can address by facilitating communication between business owners, politicians and other stakeholders.

The latest housing task force meeting brought together "very high-level, empowered individuals" from Sarasota and Manatee counties and began "a series of conversations that will hopefully evolve into moving the ball down the field a little bit" in terms of creating affordable housing for service people, Bisio



Manatee Chamber of Commerce's 2022 board chair is Rick Bisio, a 22-year Bradenton Beach resident. He's attending a July 14 chamber breakfast at Bradenton Beach's Anna Maria Oyster Bar.

said. He sees the meeting as an example of the ways in which the chamber advances its mission of not only bolstering area businesses but the community as well.

"It's really a balance of those two things, which is unusual, because most chambers are really focused just on businesses," Bisio said.

The organization — comprising approximately 2,000 members, about 800 more than the next largest chamber on the state's west coast — is a "bottom-up" outfit that employs almost two dozen task forces and committees to tackle issues affecting businesses and community.

The chamber's problem-solving groups include downtown redevelopment, education and workforce partnership and health care committees and also a small business council.

Bisio — who founded a national franchisee con-

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— Rick Bisio, MCoC chairman

sultancy agency and joined the chamber in 2002 — is passionate about the organization's mission.

"I've been very blessed with my business. It's very successful, it works on a national basis. So the local piece isn't that important to me from a business point of view, but I do believe strongly in giving back to the community," he said.

"I believe that a healthy community is a community where people are involved and engaged and trying to do good, not in an adversarial way, but in a way that's designed to solve problems," Bisio said. "And the chamber allows for that connectivity into the community and it allows me to give back."

The Kansas native, who moved to Bradenton Beach in 2000 from Atlanta with his wife, Anne-Lise, served his community at the city level, chairing the Bradenton Beach Planning and Zoning Board 2002-12.

"It goes back to the same concept," he said. "Why would I be on P&Z? I'm not a builder. Why would I even do that? Well, it opens my mind to a world that I don't know. It's a way to stay engaged and to contribute and to give back and to show appreciation for a pretty blessed life."

Bisio, father of two college-aged children, is a nationally renowned franchise coach who, in 2008, wrote "The Educated Franchisee," a bestselling book on franchising.

He's been an owner and part-owner of franchised businesses and franchises, including a Snap Fitness center in Bradenton, and has plans to open three Ellie Mental Health counseling centers in Manatee and Sarasota counties in the next two years.

Prior to becoming chairman of the chamber's board, Bisio served on the board of directors and executive committee for 15 years.

He's honored to have been elected and sees the role as the pinnacle of his community service career.

"A question I ask myself is, 'After you're done with this, what could you possibly do that's better?'" Bisio said. "So, I've been kind of mulling that over and I haven't come up with any answers yet."

Rick Bisio, left, speaks to a gathering of businesspeople and stakeholders at a July 14 Manatee Chamber of Commerce leadership breakfast, meant to serve as a forum for commercial and community problem-solving. Islander Photos: Courtesy Manatee Chamber



Edward Jones financial adviser John Campora, left, Cheesecake Cutie and Cafe co-owner George Maize and Bekins Moving Solutions director of sales and business development John Renkawitz smile for a photo at a July 14 Anna Maria Island Chamber of Commerce luncheon at Harry's Grill in Anna Maria. Islander Photos: Courtesy AMICC



Mark and Jan Labriola, owners of Harry's Grill, welcome Anna Maria Island Chamber of Commerce guests to their July 14 luncheon. Islander Photo: Toni Lyon

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