



HOUSTON **WEST**

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

SPOTLIGHT ON GERARD CHARLES OF P.F. CHANG'S

"IN TERMS OF MAKING AN INVESTMENT IN MARKETING, JOINING THE CHAMBER HAS BEEN ONE OF THE BEST INVESTMENTS."



GERARD CHARLES

When Gerard Charles joined P.F. Chang's Highland Village in 2011, he insisted that the restaurant become a member of the local Chamber of Commerce. He advocated the benefits of Chamber membership to his Operating Partner and committed to getting involved in Chamber activities to make the investment worthwhile. Additionally, he would also represent P.F. Chang's restaurant in the Westchase district, extending the value of the Chamber to both restaurants.

"I know Chamber experience really works," Charles said based on his previous involvement in a Chamber of Commerce.

What surprised Charles is what happened shortly thereafter. The Houston West Chamber of Commerce (HWCOC) distributed an email, seeking restaurants and small businesses interested in hosting networking events in the Galleria/Uptown Park area. Charles responded quickly to the offer.

After an initial meeting with an HWCOC staff member at P.F. Chang's Highland Village, Charles said he liked the idea

of hosting a regular networking event at his restaurant. "I asked for a follow-up meeting to get the details and committed the restaurant for one year," he said.

At the next meeting, the two collaborated to develop a monthly breakfast for HWCOC members. The opportunity was a bit of a stretch since P.F. Chang's serves lunch and dinner. Still, the thought of bringing in new prospects was enticing. The Chamber's Bagels & Business event was born. Now in its fourth year, Bagels & Business averages about 45 attendees (with a high of 60 people) on the fourth Tuesday of every month. This not only represents a good crowd for the restaurant, but also a strong group of Chamber members interested in working with other business leaders in their community.

"If I had not become a member of the Chamber, I would never have had that opportunity," Charles added. "Because of that, over the last four years, we've had hundreds of people who have come to our restaurant who had never come before."



P.F. CHANG'S®

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To say that Charles is pleased with the new guests the event has attracted is an understatement. "For us, the advertising has been huge!" he said.

While P.F. Chang's Highland Village has been in its current location for 20 years, Charles believes it's still critical to let people know about the restaurant. With the inherent challenges of managing a restaurant, he still finds networking events that work with his busy schedule.

"Attending the events and getting to know the other members is really important to growing your business through the Chamber," Charles said. "And with the

Chamber hosting so many events, it's easy to find events that work with my schedule."

The HWCOC's "After Hours" socials are a prime example of these events. Charles can meet new prospects, who may not only become individual restaurant patrons, but also often represent local businesses with catering needs. The HWCOC has made it easy for Charles to reach out to potential customers by pulling them together at regular events around town.

With so many restaurants in Houston, Charles said it was important not to be "just another restaurant in the area." His attendance at HWCOC events has definitely supported P.F. Chang's brand awareness and business development.

The efforts are paying off with catering sales that have grown tremendously, thanks to the HWCOC. In fact, P.F. Chang's Highland Village is a top performer within the whole company in terms of large order catering, Charles said. The HWCOC has driven more traffic to the restaurant as well.

"As a restaurateur, and really for any business owner, I think the Chamber is essential," he added. "The Chamber offers so much value that everyone should be a member."

3 Tips that Charles Shares with Prospective and New Members:

- 1 Charles understands that business owners are busy so he recommends that owners find a staff member to attend HWCOC events when the owners aren't available themselves. This still allows you to build your brand and get your name out there. It's also helpful for Chamber members to know more than one person at your company.
- 2 Think in less transactional terms and focus on the strategic growth of your business. "The Houston West Chamber is more than just referrals," Charles said. "You have to think about building relationships and that will drive sales." Instead of solely focusing on bringing HWCOC members into the restaurant, Charles proactively sought out ways to take P.F. Chang's food to them. The relationship building was fruitful for P.F. Chang's because Charles got to know his fellow Chamber members, which in turn created a boost in catering with HWCOC members.
- 3 Don't sit on the sidelines. Charles suggested that prospective members join the HWCOC and get involved right away. Find the HWCOC events and committees that work for your business. Charles pointed out that you need to get involved early and often so Chamber members can get to know you and what your business offers.

Reminiscing on the opportunity years ago to collaborate with the Chamber staff to create a unique event, he said: "I really seized that opportunity. The Chamber's willingness to partner with me to help my business grow has been invaluable."

He added: "In terms of making an investment in marketing, joining the Chamber has been one of the best investments."