

Small Business Advocate of the Year Award

Personal Conviction, Community Dedication Guide Advocate's Steps

Bill Baron believes passionately in applying his personal principles to his work and his advocacy.

Baron, a recipient of the California Chamber of Commerce Small Business Advocate of the Year Award, is a partner in the real estate investment and development firm Brandenburg, Staedler & Moore and sits on the board of the Brandenburg Family Foundation.

Baron says his parents showed him and his brother, through their own actions, how vital helping one's community is. "It's all about helping other people and organizations," Baron says. "Advocacy is just a simple outreach to help all people fulfill their desires. A rising tide raises all ships."

One's efforts, he says, "can't just be for some people. An economy of scale for all to participate needs to exist."

In Baron's estimation, chambers of commerce are ideal organizations for providing those opportunities.

Leadership Directions

Baron is deeply involved in volunteer leadership with the San Jose/Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce, having served two terms on the board of directors and as chairman of the board in 2005. When his terms are up, he intends to serve on chamber committees for as long as possible. "They've got me for life," he says.

Baron joined the chamber because he wanted to help shape the business environment in San Jose.

According to Pat Dando, president/ chief executive officer of the San Jose/Silicon Valley Chamber, Baron "has imbued the organization with renewed energy and commitment. His presence at so many Chamber functions has spurred greater involvement by the majority of other board members."

During his board tenure, Baron has incorporated his personal philosophies into his leadership.

"As I have become more involved in the board, I have recognized the need to broaden the leadership of the chamber so it represents the full spectrum of the Silicon Valley economy," Baron says. He encouraged a greater diversity of business owners to join in order to broaden the board's interests, input and perspective.



Bill Baron

Baron also emphasized the efficacy of smaller groups, implementing and focusing on committees to get things accomplished.

"It's great to say you want to be an advocate, but doing the work is something different," Baron comments. "Board members are not there to sit on their hands; they are there to be effective to the chamber's membership."

Committees allow board members to be more nimble and successful in their advocacy and member outreach because they have more ownership of and personal commitment to committees in which they choose to participate, he says.

Baron's new focus is on identifying people who are interested in running for public office and who "understand that from a sound economy, all else flows," he says. Finding, encouraging and assisting business-friendly candidates — "which does *not* mean anti-labor or anti-communities!" Baron emphasizes — is the legacy for chambers.

"Without people who are prepared to be open-minded about policies affecting business," Baron says, there is disconnect between government and business, and that is where trouble for the business community ensues. It's the business of business to be serious, resolute and determined about getting the message out, he says, be it through advocacy or promot-

ing pro-business candidates.

Future of California Business

According to Baron, the ongoing business-as-usual, make-more-laws-and-regulations nature of state politics is the biggest barrier to the future success of California's economy and to the transformation of its business climate.

"Politicians don't get the big picture," he says. "We have lived too long on wonderful laurels: our weather, great recreational opportunities, good universities, an influx of talent. But we can't rest on those laurels. We have to do more."

In Baron's view, the organizations driving the economy are businesses, not the government. "We have to be diligent in the message that we can't do business as usual in the world of global competition," he insists. "We need to be smart and realize California's future is absolutely interdependent on how it's viewed on an international basis."

Focus on Small Business

According to Dando, Baron is "always at the forefront of business issues that impact all businesses in the area." Baron's desire to ensure the creation of business-friendly policies derives from his concern for small businesses. In his estimation, small business is a bedrock of the community and of chamber membership, and he feels a great sense of urgency and obligation to help those companies succeed.

"It's an ominous task for a small business owner to take on city hall," Baron says. "Local chambers and the state Chamber, their mission is to fight the battles. We have to have strategies that support small business."

He continues: "Those folks who risk their life savings, what they are, who they are, they risk it every day, and they need a partner at the table with name recognition and relationships and credibility to help them fight the battle. Chamber advocacy should play a huge role in sustaining business and encouraging business growth. It's an extension of what I've been used to all my life — giving back and supporting so you end up with a quality of life better than the one you inherited."