



New GMA/FirstPoint chairman sees bright future for Piedmont Triad

It would be hard to find a person more upbeat than Clarence McDonald.

Like so many other GMA members, McDonald spent much of the last year working from home. When he visits his office in the Wells Fargo tower in downtown Greensboro, he's frequently the only person rattling around on the fifth floor.

But you'd never know from his demeanor that these are trying times.

McDonald leads the commercial banking teams for Wells Fargo in the Piedmont Triad and western North Carolina, a role that keeps him in touch with how the pandemic affects businesses, large and small.

Despite the hardships, he sees a bright future for this section of North Carolina that hugs the I-85/40 corridor between the Research Triangle and Charlotte.

All of which makes him well suited to be GMA/FirstPoint chairman for 2022.

"The need for a GMA during times like this," he says, "is double what it is



Clarence McDonald, GMA/FirstPoint chairman for 2022, is Wells Fargo's top commercial banking executive for the Piedmont Triad and western North Carolina.

during normal times."

Early on in the pandemic, McDonald says, GMA's leadership was in the forefront of adopting new technologies to serve its members.

"I was just so impressed by the staff, the board members, and everybody involved, at how much thought went into decisions to bring value to members and preserve the great con-

nections" afforded by GMA, McDonald says.

McDonald, a South Carolina native who started his banking career with Wachovia in 1995, has seen the Piedmont Triad grow and evolve over the last quarter-century.

He especially appreciates the quality of life the Piedmont Triad affords, an appreciation that intensified when his banking career

sent him to Texas for three years.

The recent announcement that Toyota will invest at least \$1 billion in the Greensboro-Randolph Megasite and initially employ at least 1,759 people in a battery manufacturing facility indicates to McDonald that big changes are in store for the region.

There's also the prospect that Denver-based Boom Supersonic may locate an

aircraft manufacturing plant at Piedmont Triad International Airport. That would be another huge boost to the economy.

"We might be poised for some pretty dramatic growth," McDonald says, and that would benefit all businesses.

McDonald, who earned his undergraduate degree from Furman University and a master's degree from Vanderbilt, became more involved with GMA when he returned from Texas in 2009.

During his time on the board of directors, he's witnessed how the GMA/FirstPoint Foundation Fund has strategically invested in the community "to support the right causes. That's important all the time," McDonald says, but even more so "in the middle of a pandemic."

The months and years ahead are a critical time, McDonald says. His goal for the board "is to do all we can to support GMA and

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Always networking

J.J. Joubbran of Joubbran Commercial Properties and Gene Dolan of Culinary Visions Catering paused their conversation for a photograph at GMA's December After Work Networking event, held at Elm & Bain event center. Live events were possible during the holiday season in late 2021, and GMA plans to resume live events when health authorities say it's safe to do so.

Differentiate, dominate and deliver to hone your competitive advantage

BY MEREDITH ELLIOTT POWELL

Let's face it – business as we know it has changed.

If the last two years have taught us nothing else, it is that things can change in a moment's notice – our lives, our businesses, our health, our customers.

And what you really need to be asking yourself is, are you ready, are you prepared? Because you know more change is coming.

So right now you have a choice to make. You can continue to do business the way you have always done it, and you can hope – even pray – that when the next big shift comes, it won't impact your business too much, won't bring too much disruption.

And you know what? Maybe you will get lucky.

Or you could choose to use the time that you have now to open



Powell

your mind to new ideas, new ways of doing business that will position you and your business to start to control the shifts in the marketplace rather than having those shifts control you.

With that in mind, I'm offering three innovative strategies you need to implement. Employ these strategies to redefine business growth, to differentiate, dominate, deliver.

Differentiate

According to the research firm-Gallup Inc., customers are 85 percent of the way through the buying cycle before they ever interact with a sales person. This means the buying cycle has not only changed, but that it actually begins without you.

No wonder it is so frustrating to try and get the customer's attention; you are entering the game at half-time.

If you want to get above the white noise and differentiate yourself in the marketplace, then you need to get into the sales game

where it begins – using marketing, promotion, and positioning your content and value-add messaging so that it is situated where your prospects are looking.

Dominate

It is a myth that, in an uncertain marketplace, people are not spending money.

Customers and prospects are spending but only for the products and services they need and

believe have value.

If you want to dominate the marketplace, if you want customers to choose you over the competition, then you need to be relevant in today's marketplace.

This means you must understand the current problems customers are facing, and position your product or service to solve that problem.

What you sold last year may be the same product, but the problems it solves for the customer may have changed.

Deliver

The sale happens in the follow-up – always.

What are the chances that you are going to interact with a customer at the exact moment he or she is ready to buy? Slim to none, right?

If you want to close the deal, increase referrals, and sell more to existing customers, then you need a well-structured, value-add, sales follow-up system.

Listen, I get it. Doing business today is tough. More happens outside of your business than in it to affect your ability to be successful.

But if you understand the shift, and how those shifts are impacting the buying cycle, your customers, and your overall business growth strategy, then you will have everything you need to turn uncertainty into competitive advantage.

Meredith Elliott Powell is an author, sales strategist and leadership expert. She has been a featured speaker in GMA's Workplace Workshop series.



Sign of membership

All GMA member companies have been mailed a 2022 membership placard. Be sure to display it prominently in a place where clients and visitors will see it. Your membership placard lets everyone know that your business is affiliated with an organization that has played a vital role in this community for more than 115 years.



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The Guilford Merchants Association is a nonprofit organization founded in 1906. The Association is a business membership organization focused on supporting member companies with educational programming, lead generation activities, marketing opportunities, and overall enrichment while serving as a catalyst for community growth and prosperity.

Chairman

Continued from page 1

the members through the short-term challenges of Covid and, long-term, to help everybody take full advantage of the economic opportunities we have in our community.”

Above all, McDonald sees a bright future for the Piedmont Triad.

“I'm optimistic for the companies located here, and I'm optimistic for the individuals that live here,” he says. “I'm just very optimistic about this part of North Carolina.”

Advertise in Trends, target decision-makers

GMA Trends is an excellent way to place your message before decision-makers throughout the Piedmont Triad. Six times a year, Trends is mailed to all GMA member companies. The newspaper also is distributed as a supplement to The Business Journal, reaching thousands of additional business-focused readers.

To advertise, call 336-378-6350.

Precise Creative enters its second decade with plans to grow

Ten years in business is an important milestone for any company.

Nikki Corbett, founder and president of Precise Creative, a full-service marketing company based in Greensboro, wanted to mark the 10-year anniversary of her business by taking some significant actions that set the stage for the next decade of success.

A few months ago, Precise Creative joined GMA. And at some point in the next few months, Corbett plans to move the company into offices in downtown Greensboro.

“I want to have a more visual presence in downtown Greensboro,” she says. The center city, she says, is home to many companies that fit the profile of Precise Creative’s primary target market: small and medium-size businesses.

“We want to help the small businesses based in the Triad area,” she explains. “We want to give these smaller business owners some tools and a leg up to be more competitive online.

“Our philosophy is that marketing isn’t just for big companies with big budgets,” she says.

Corbett – whose communication degree from Roger Williams College in Rhode Island wraps together journalism, creative writing, and marketing – initially launched her business in response to all the bad



Nikki Corbett, founder and president of Precise Creative, plans to locate offices in downtown Greensboro in the coming months.

NEW MEMBER PROFILE

grammar, typos, and poor writing that she experienced online.

The websites where she found the problems frequently represented small businesses, where the entrepreneurs were attempting to market themselves plus run the company.

With experience as a newspaper reporter and in the editorial department of a Triad publishing house,

she figured she was well equipped to proofread and tweak website copy. And she was right.

“Proofing is how we got started,” she says, “but it’s evolved over the past 10 years.”

Corbett coordinates a team of subcontractor specialists and “trusted industry partners” to offer a full range of marketing services, from logo and website design to anything involving the written word, including mission statements, press releases, and scripts for audio and video messaging.

“We’re really strong in terms of website content,” she says, including “e-books and newsletters, blog articles and things like that.” Social media management also is part of the mix.

Corbett has plans to hire staff for her new downtown presence while maintaining ties to the subcontractors who have helped make Precise Creative a success.

GMA membership is part of her plan to raise her company’s profile among Triad companies of all sizes.

“I want business owners to know who we are, what we’re about, and what we do,” she says.

She expects some will want to do business with Precise Creative, while others may become business partners in serving clients.

“GMA is part of my greater outreach program,” she says. “It’s really about building relationships and getting to know more of my community.”

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Precise Creative
PreciseCreative.Marketing
 336-681-3167

‘GMA is part of my greater outreach program. It’s really about building relationships!’
 – Nikki Corbett

Sue Falcone of Remarkable! A Speakers Bureau.



GMA volunteer Wendy Loftis of Keller Williams.



Tori Baker of Truist, Mark Podolle of Wireless Ventures.



Michelle Bolick, GMA; Alison Schwartz, All Pets Considered; John Thomas, IDEACOM.



Elm & Bain

December 7, 2021



Name: Trey Erb
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 Clemson U., B.S., Marketing
 U. of Georgia, Master's
 in Family & Financial
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Business: Plybon &
 Associates,
 Inc.
Role: Financial
 Advisor/
 Planner



On Risers:

Sometimes it's nice to be able to talk with other people who are early in their career and going through some of the same challenges that you are. It's been a really good opportunity to meet people who are in a similar stage in their career, and try to learn what other people are doing.

On GMA:

I've enjoyed it, being from out of town. I think the first in-person networking event I was able to go to was in August 2021.

Personal:

I am a huge college football fan. I volunteered to coach a flag football team of eighth-graders, and that was a lot of fun. Pre-Covid, my wife and I loved to travel.

Responsibilities:

I got my certified financial planner certificate in 2020. As a company, we do a lot of financial and insurance planning. Probably the core of our business is managing retirement plans. Because of those conversations with the businesses, we'll work with folks on the individual side as well.

GMA tweaks programming in response to member feedback

Last fall, GMA staff met with members to gather feedback on activities, events, and programming. With this information, staff reconfigured offerings into six categories: Professional Development, Connections, Member Engagement, Member Services, Community Service, and Community Support.

In response to member demand, GMA is launching Meet & Eat. A fun, casual lunch gathering, Meet & Eat falls under Connections and will be free for all members.

During 2021, GMA hosted similar events by bringing a caterer or food truck, tables, and tents to our parking lot. Over 100 members enjoyed these meals, plus socializing with fellow members. We will continue to provide the after work and noontime networking events we're known for, as these prove to be one of the most productive ways to network within the local business community.

Professional Development remains an important programming focus. You and your employees can hone your technical, operational, and soft skills through GMA's Teach Me Tuesday series. In order to meet the needs of as many members as possible, programs may be online, in-person, or a combination hybrid.

GMA works with local experts to help members stay abreast of business trends and keep their skills sharp, all at no additional cost. While Workplace Workshops have remained popular online, we look forward to hosting in-person events in 2022. Workshops pro-

vide an opportunity to get away from your usual workspace for a much-needed motivation boost.

Member Engagement includes RISERS Young Professionals programming, volunteer opportunities, member social outings, and other occasions to connect, get involved, and have fun. Member Engagement also includes the famous Annual Dinner; stay tuned for a special announcement regarding this year's event.

Member Services are GMA's non-event benefits. Professional Advice Hour, a new program, offers members a free hour of one-on-one services from an HR professional to answer pressing questions related to hiring, retention, or even COVID management.

Peer-to-peer support groups, also new, will launch in the spring. The popular Free Day Fridays will continue, offering a free item or service such as headshots, lunch, or shredding to GMA members.

The Community Service and Community Support categories encompass the many ways GMA staff and members give back to the community. Whether through financial, manpower, or promotional support, GMA reinvests back into our community significant resources, supporting community-wide events, charitable causes, economic development organizations, and first responders. It has always been a source of pride for GMA members, board, and staff to contribute to our community's well being and the quality of life for all.

The GMA staff is available for you as we navigate 2022 together.



WHY DRIVE WHEN YOU CAN FLY FROM PTI?

Change drives the IT business, but GMA membership has been constant for this firm

When it's time for Total Computer Solutions (TCS) to pay its annual GMA membership dues, the buck stops at Chris Barker's desk.

"I make the choice to write the check," says Barker, the company's chief operating officer for 14 years. It's a choice he doesn't have to deliberate over.

"This is a small community," he explains. "Being in GMA allows us to cross paths with many of our clients and many of our prospects."

Membership enables TCS to keep tabs on what's happening in the Piedmont Triad business world, Barker says.

Interacting with other GMA members provides a general overview of business trends, he says, "which helps us identify if we need to adjust the way we're selling or delivering a prod-

LOYAL MEMBER

uct."

Making adjustments in the constantly evolving world of information technology is a fact of life. IT undergoes a transformation about every three years, Barker says. New hardware and software solutions make existing technology appear less than; all of a sudden, it's too slow, or too inflexible, or less secure.

With each new technology cycle comes a wholesale turnover, because nobody, and no business, wants to be left behind.

Barker figures that TCS has seen 11 or 12 of those major transformations since the company's founding 32 years ago.

UNC Greensboro graduate Barry Utesch started



Chris Barker is chief operating officer for Total Computer Solutions.

the company and remains the sole owner. TCS joined GMA in 1996.

There's a difference between recognizing the arrival of a new technology trend and being an early adopter on the cutting edge, sometimes known as the bleeding edge. Jumping into the newest wave of what's happening now can sometimes be painful and expensive.

"We are not a leading

edge company," Barker says, "but we are a quick follower. We let other companies work out the bugs and then we come in once the first wave of problems is resolved. And there are always bugs and problems with new products and services."

TCS, with a staff of 16 technicians, focuses on supporting the IT needs of companies providing professional services, including

'All you're looking for is one new relationship, and you never know where that's going to end up.'

— Chris Barker

legal, financial, construction, and manufacturing companies.

The diversity adds a certain level of economic safety, he says. Focusing too much on one industry can be great when times are good, but dangerous when that industry goes into decline.

"We all know the history of the textile industry here in Greensboro," Barker says. "We learned a lesson during that time."

Barker regularly sends TCS employees to GMA networking events and training programs. All provide opportunities to learn and grow.

"All you're looking for is one new relationship," he says, "and you never know where that's going to end up."

Total Computer Solutions
Tcsusa.com
336-632-0860



GMA/FirstPoint leadership

The 2021 GMA/FirstPoint board of directors was photographed at a holiday dinner.

Seated, from left: Mary McElroy, Atlantic Coast Conference; Darlene Leonard, Smith Leonard PLLC; Tara Burgio-Wheelihan, ATI Decorative Laminates; Dr. Beryl McEwen, N.C. A&T State University.

Standing, from left: Clarence McDonald, Wells Fargo; Richard Beard, Schulman & Beard; Mark Prince, GMA/FirstPoint; John Thomas, IDeACOM; Ford Bowers, Truist; Steve Swetoha, Greensboro Swarm; Richard Vanore, Koury Corporation; Scott Johnson, Greensboro Coliseum; Chris Dudley, High Point University; Donald Moore, Greensboro Grasshoppers; Nathan Duggins, Tuggle Duggins.



Lauren Chase is 'the relationship guru' at Home Instead, which provides senior care services.

Membership helps newcomer to quickly establish business ties, find success in the Triad market

Lauren Chase's GMA journey began less than two years ago, yet she's already experienced the benefits that many GMA members discover: new friends as well as new career and business opportunities.

Chase is a care consultant and business development specialist with Home Instead, which provides senior care services for aging adults, assisting with the activities of daily living wherever they reside.

"I'm really the relationship guru" for the company, she says.

Demand for in-home assistance for seniors is trending upwards as waves of Baby Boomers enter their golden years. Greensboro's Home Instead agency, part of a national franchise operation, currently employs more than 100 caregivers, Chase says.

"And we actually need about dou-

**PARTICIPATION
= SUCCESS**

ble that to keep up with demand," she adds.

Chase was working with another senior care company and was attending a trade group business luncheon when she met Wayne Ford, a financial advisor and active GMA member. He encouraged her to look into joining GMA. As it turns out, her employer previously had belonged to GMA and renewed its membership thanks to her inquiry.

Chase had an opportunity to attend a handful of live, in-person GMA events during the warmer months last year. She was impressed by the speaker at a Workplace Workshop as well as the overall at-

mosphere. "It was a really friendly group," she recalls. She also enjoyed attending GMA's annual outing to a Greensboro Grasshoppers game.

The welcoming environment at GMA events has helped Chase quickly feel a part of the community; she and her family moved here from Vermont just 18 months ago to be closer to her mother, who lives in Southern Pines.

Quickly integrating into the community has helped Chase fulfill her business development responsibilities and boost her career. Getting to know the competition created opportunities that led to her current post with Home Instead.

"All networking is good networking," she says.

Home Instead
homeinstead.com
336-617-9790

Need HR advice? It's on the house for GMA members

GMA's Professional Advice Hour is a benefit of membership that connects members to the professional services they need.

GMA will provide one hour of human resources consultation for any member in 2022 who needs access to an HR professional.

This hour of service will be confidential between the member and the service provider. The session and will be private, col-



laborative, and without further obligation.

"With all of the workforce challenges that businesses are facing today, we hope offering access to an HR professional will help provide some guidance to members that need assistance in this area," said Michelle Bolick, GMA vice president.

To sign up online, go to www.mygma.org and fill out the form, or give us a call at 336-378-6350.

STAFF SHARE

Was there ever a time when you were the recipient of a random act of kindness?

Answers from GMA staffers.

"Once I was at a Starbucks drive-through, and as soon as I pulled up to the window, the cashier told me my order was paid for. I was shocked. It was so cool to be part of the 'Pay it Forward' chain reaction. Of course, I did the same. It definitely left a smile on my face for the rest of the day."

Monzi Jimenez



"After a recent snow and ice storm, I was pleasantly surprised to see that my neighbor Brian had cleared my driveway. He also scraped at least two other neighbor's driveways. It's so nice to have neighbors that look out for each other."

Sharon Smith



"I once locked my keys and phone in my car while pumping gas. I was by myself and out of town. The man at the next pump happened to be a locksmith. He ended up opening my car for me and refused to accept any payment."

Holly Smith





Gary Clark, Jr. in concert at the Tanger Center on October 27, 2021. The theater auditorium seats more than 3,000 persons. Photo by Joey Kirkman



Photo by Joan Marcus

Tanger Center hosted 24 performances of 'Wicked' in October.

Tanger Center: The hits keep coming

Though the pandemic delayed its opening by nearly 18 months, Greensboro's Tanger Center for the Performing Arts looks to be a resounding success by any measure.

A concert by Greensboro native Rhiannon Giddens was the inaugural event on September 2, 2021 at the \$94 million downtown showcase.

Since then, more than 182,500 patrons have come to the Tanger Center to experience concerts by artists ranging from Sting to Patti LaBelle to Josh Groban and Boyz II Men. Theater fans turned out for touring Broadway productions of "Beautiful," "Dear Evan Hansen," and "Wicked." The latter production staged 24 shows at the Tanger Center, selling more than 66,000 tickets. Local economic impact for "Wicked" was more than \$11 million, according to

The Broadway League.

Successes like that, says Greensboro Coliseum Managing Director Matt Brown, "lead to future successes. This was exemplified by our ability to book the blockbuster 'Hamilton' for three weeks in April."

Brown and the staff of the Greensboro Coliseum manage the Tanger Center for the city. The theater complex, a public-private project, was funded with nearly \$42 million in private donations. Revenue generated by ticket fees, parking, and hotel/motel tax revenues make up the city's contribution.

The Tanger Center features an auditorium with 3,023 seats, ranking it as one of the largest theaters between Atlanta and Washington, D.C.

More than 17,400 subscriptions to the theater's inaugural Broadway

season were sold. That, Brown said, "was an unprecedented accomplishment in our industry."

In January, Rhiannon Giddens returned to Greensboro from her home in Ireland for two performances of "Porgy and Bess," with the Greensboro Opera Company. More than 5,300 patrons attended the two sold-out shows by the classically trained, Grammy Award-winning Giddens.

The Tanger Center's delayed opening, though painful, did bring benefits, Brown said. Technicians from Meyer Sound traveled to Greensboro from Los Angeles to fine-tune the theater's state-of-the-art system. Construction punch-list items were completed, and the loading dock was enclosed, a benefit for road crews in inclement weather.



Photo by Luke Jamroz

Rhiannon Giddens & Friends, 9-2-21.



Photo by Luke Jamroz

Sting performed with the Greensboro Symphony for two shows in November.



Photo by Luke Jamroz

The Steven Tanger Center for the Performing Arts, downtown Greensboro.

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