

Local Spotlight: Getting to Know **Sandra Slattery**

“Minding the Community’s Businesses” - Going Above and Beyond to Help Make Ashland Special

By **Jordan Pease** - September 2022 Issue of **Locals Guide Magazine**- Ashland, Oregon



Established 133 years ago, the **Ashland Chamber of Commerce** has been a robust backbone of our community serving us in many capacities, doing things that may seem “non-traditional” for an organization of its kind. For the last 37 of those years, **Sandra Slattery** has served as the Executive Director. With her current staff, **Dana Preston**, **Katharine Cato**, and **Dana Welsh**, this team of wonder women provide all kinds of valuable community support and enrichment services, well beyond their mainstay services supporting businesses large and small, and helping drive the tourism industry here. If you enjoy those colorful flower baskets hanging from the lampposts downtown in the springtime for example, or the festive holiday wreaths, the **Festival of Light**, and the **Fourth of July Parade**, these are the kinds of services and events that we can thank Sandra and her team for.

Thank you for sharing about yourself and your work with Ashland Chamber, Sandra- please tell your "how I got to Ashland" story? Growing up at the beach in the Belmont Shore neighborhood of Long Beach, California, I was looking for a different experience than what I had known all my life. I liked the idea of living surrounded by mountains in a small college town with cultural amenities where I could make a difference, so after college, I moved here and never turned back.

Which projects or achievements have you had at Ashland Chamber that you are most pleased about? Wow, there are so many over the years, but I would say all the achievements in program development, economic growth, community events, promotions/marketing, and organizational improvements all go back to the people. What I am most pleased with has been the opportunity to work with such caring and dedicated people who want the best for Ashland and are willing to work for it. This has been true of the staff I have been blessed to have worked with side by side. My current team has many decades worth of working at the Chamber and you couldn’t find a more hard-working or dedicated people. All the Board members, business owners and community members who have devoted their time, talents, and resources to improve our community over the years is incredible. This work is no small task nor is it something that happens overnight. It is years of caring and working together to achieve common goals. It’s aligning our values and dealing with disagreement and conflict in order to accomplish the goal. It is a hopeful strategy that works when you truly respect each other and appreciate differences of opinion.

I’m proud of not only our dedication to continuing our beloved large community events with a special love I have for the **Festival of Light**, but I also enjoy promoting Ashland and consistently looking at what’s best for our businesses. Currently, we have just completed an extensive analysis of the economy resulting in an **Economic Diversification Report** with specific action steps to broaden and expand business opportunities working closely with our community partners. The Chamber, year in and year out, is always working to support our small, independent businesses and positively impact the community by providing business development tools, networking opportunities [e.g., Friday morning **Greeters Meetings**], and a myriad of marketing and promotions.

What's an interesting or amusing experience you've had while living in Ashland you'd like to share with the community? When I first moved to Ashland at 23 years old having grown up in southern California, there were things that surprised me because they were just so out of the norm from my experiences. This story is funny now but wasn't so much then. One day I was walking down by the Plaza when a truck drove by with a huge dead bear in it, sprawled out on the cab with its head looking forward. I was so shocked that I called the police because I couldn't believe it was legal! Of course, they laughed at me and said it was totally legal as it was bear hunting season.

What are the qualities of the Ashland community that you appreciate most? "Qualities" is an interesting word. If we are talking about people, then I appreciate the highly educated citizenry, the number of people who volunteer their time and resources, who care about others, who support small businesses understanding their success is directly related to our quality of life and amenities.

From your perspective as a long-time community leader, what are the challenges you see ahead for us in Ashland? While I know we can all site challenges of the economy and climate, I think the biggest challenge is for people to truly value working together as we tackle these enormous challenges in front of us. This is not "bumper sticker mentality," it takes work. There is so much dissension in our world today, choosing up sides and maligning others, that to me, I think will stop any forward progress on the really important things. We need to get back to appreciating each other's opinions, really listening, and recognizing someone might have a better idea about tackling a problem. Everyone has a different life experience, different challenges, and different opportunities. We need to respect each other's perspectives and think about how they can help us achieve our goals. True success will come when we can do this, but failure will come if we cannot.

What's a thing people would never guess about you? I love the creative process of making things with my hands. It's so rewarding to imagine and design something that is then realized in the final product. I like turning something out of nothing. This is also true as it relates to my love of cooking and baking. I call it playing.



Please tell a story about a life-changing incident, or can you recall a life-changing epiphany? Most of my "life-changing" experiences have actually come from loss. As I have lost people close to me or had friends and family struggling with serious health issues, it has made me value those in my life even more and treasure the time I have here on earth. I am grateful for each day and embrace joy as I recognize sadness and challenges will come and we can't get away from them so don't "sweat the small stuff" as they say. It's a value and an attitude that some days I am better at it than others but, all in all, I am a very happy person, love life and enjoy others.

Please tell about a hero or mentor who's influenced you? People might roll their eyes but really my hero is my husband and life partner, Dennis. We started as friends so many years ago and then fell in love partly because of our mutual respect for each other. I always admired his love for Ashland and his commitment to making it better. As a community leader very early on, he engaged in really difficult topics and issues, and not afraid to put everything on the table so to speak to get to the heart of the problem. I loved the straightforwardness in his manner but also his persistence in moving forward in a positive direction to

accomplish really hard things. It gave me hope when times are tough, or people are tough, to keep your eye on the goal and realize it's about intention mixed with resilience.

What advice do you have for the young people in our community? Get involved! Sometimes people are so busy they forget to ask for your involvement, but we need you. Step up and offer your time and ideas. Young people have a different lens than the rest of us and it is an important perspective to include. They also need to understand that to accomplish great tasks that others have opinions as well and to achieve results, it's important to respect everyone, different backgrounds, different lifestyles and different ages. They are all important if we want to create a more diverse and balanced community.

Please fill-in-the-blank; I'm having the time of my life when I'm [Blank]? Okay, I'm having the time of my life when *I'm anywhere with [my husband] Dennis!*

How are you doing on your bucket list? I kind of recoil with the term because it is always used with "before I die, I wish to...". I get it, but while I love to set goals and put places to visit and things to do on a "hope we can do this someday" list, I also try to live in the moment. There are lots of places I would like to go and experience but if I don't get to, my life won't be any less. If the pandemic taught me anything, it was you can make all the plans in the world to do such and such, but it can change in a moment and suddenly those plans are out the window. So, it's about the *now*, the moment, the people in my life today that gets me excited. If I get to go to some of the places we would like to see or experience, great but, if not, I will have still lived a happy, productive and meaningful life.

Learn more about the Ashland Chamber of Commerce: www.AshlandChamber.com

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