

End of Session Recap BY MARK DIMAIO

THE CHAMBER'S ANNUAL End-of-Session Legislative Brunch was held on June 7 at Dover Downs. The brunch marked the last official event for retiring Chamber President, Rich Heffron.

Attendees heard from Kurt Foreman, President & CEO of the Delaware Prosperity Partnership. Kurt discussed Delaware's current economic situation as being "a glass half full." Delaware has experienced moderate employment growth, with the construction sector leading the way and other employment sectors showing modest growth. Housing starts are the strongest they've been in several years and Delaware's housing affordability is more positive than the US market overall. Mr. Foreman shared the Delaware Prosperity Partnership's four main areas of focus:

- Business Development (Recruitment of new companies)
- Existing Business Engagement
- Innovation Agenda – building on past successes in Delaware
- Talent Support – DPP will begin an initiative in late 2018/early 2019

James DeChene, the Chamber's Sr. Vice President of Government Affairs, spoke about the "Tale of Two Budgets." Last year Delaware faced a \$400 million-dollar budget shortfall followed by a nearly \$400 million-dollar budget surplus this year. The fundamental question here is how we can make the budget process easier, and more efficient and accurate. Boom and bust cycles may be natural, but helping to smooth the highs

and lows will help put Delaware on more stable, certain financial footing. The Chamber strongly supports a bipartisan plan put forward by the Governor and State Treasurer to create a true "rainy day" fund to be used in lean budget times and added to in good economic times. This proposed plan requires a constitutional amendment, and requires passing changes to our tax structure and limits on spending. The constitutional amendment needs to be passed this year, as it takes two consecutive legislative sessions to become a part of Delaware Constitution.

Attendees also heard from Senate Pro Tempore David McBride and Speaker of the House Pete Schwartzkopf. Senator McBride highlighted the state's budget and the fact that it would be completed well before the end of June. However, he wasn't sure that the Senate would pass the minimum wage bill this year. He gave credit to the State Chamber for its role in the passage of the Coastal Zone Modernization Act last session. Representative Schwartzkopf spoke on the passage of legislation to bring \$580 million dollars of private investment to the Port of Wilmington. He also pointed to the state budget's restoration of the senior drug program, funding for special education and salary increases for teachers.

This year's Small Business Guardian awards were presented to Senator Brian Pettyjohn and Representative Harvey Kenton.



DELAWARE STATE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE END-OF-SESSION LEGISLATIVE BRUNCH

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