

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER REPORT

Our Mission

To provide strong, reliable leadership and advocacy on matters relevant to business in greater Ballarat.

Our Vision

To be the number one relevant resource for business.

b2b 'Business to Ballarat'

The biannual media campaign focuses on both business to business spending and encouraging awareness in the general public of the importance to our city of spending locally. A #ShopBallarat campaign ran across traditional and social media in November and December as well as our annual Christmas Competition, participants had to spend \$30 at a participating business between November to December to go in the draw to win one of three \$1000 prize packs, 1525 entries were received. Our #GetYourWinterCoatOn campaign ran across the winter months through traditional and social media marketing, to encourage locals and visitors to get out about to businesses that make "Ballarat Amazing". Thank you to our current b2b Gold sponsors Simplex Insurance Solutions, Sovereign Press, Mercedes-Benz Ballarat, Technology Business Centre Plus IT, Central Victorian Investments, BGT Jobs + Training Ballarat and Ballarat Materials Handling Equipment.

Biznet Breakfast Series

Our Biznet Breakfast series is held throughout the year, on the first Tuesday of each month (excluding January and November). The breakfasts provide networking opportunities, as well as insights from a broad range of guest speakers on a number of different topics.

Over the past year we have heard from:

2023: July- Matthew Jess from Worrells; building a highly engaged workforce. August- Amanda Johnstone from Transhuman; AI for your workplace. September- Peter Ford and Diane Gibney from Peter Ford Catering and the Shared Table; when opportunities come, just say yes. October- Breakfast with the Stars; Ballarat Racing personalities. December- 3BA Christmas Appeal.

2024: February- Launch of Central Highlands Growers and Producers Hub. March- Workplace Mental Health panel. April- Sarah Stapleton from Fiona Elsey Research Centre and Adam McNichol from the Ballarat Marathon on Homegrown Events May- update from the City of Ballarat.

Thank you to our current Biznet sponsors Adroit Insurance & Risk, BJT Legal, Findex, Hip Pocket Workwear & Safety, Ballarat Living, Radio Ballarat and the support of the City of Ballarat.

Business Weekly

Weekly newsletter distributed to 1700+ Ballarat businesspeople. All members have the opportunity to promote their news and events within the various sections of the newsletter, including stories, achievements, community events and initiatives your business is involved with. These also feature on the homepage of the Commerce Ballarat website for the week. We are very proud of the reliable source we have become for the business community and our average 40% open rate over the past 12 months (average industry open rate 21%).

Business Awards 2024

The partnership between Commerce Ballarat and Federation University continues to grow stronger with time, serving as a highlight for our business community. We extend our gratitude to Federation University, especially Professor Duncan Bentley and the dedicated team. The awards provide a unique occasion for businesses to assess and refine their performance. In 2023, participation remained robust, engaging over 1700 business professionals. Excitingly, in 2024, we introduce the inaugural David Haymes Family Business Scholarship, enhancing opportunities for businesses applying for the Bartlett Manufacturing Family Business Award. This scholarship is designed to empower and support family businesses on their journey towards growth, development, sustainability and family harmony. We thank Judges and Mentors who volunteer their time to ensure the integrity of the program and a big thank you to the 2024 sponsors Federation University, Nevett Wilkinson Frawley, Sharing Shed, Central Highlands Water, Stoke Design Co., Hip Pocket Workwear &

Safety (Ballarat), Bartlett Manufacturing, Regional Development Australia Grampians, Mercure Ballarat Hotel and Convention Centre, Ballarat Times News Group, City of Ballarat, Power FM, The WIN Network & Admedia.

B31 August Business Festival

Commerce Ballarat facilitates B31 August Business Festival in August every year with a variety of networking and development opportunities delivered throughout the month. For the first time in 2023, our brochure and website featured a directory of corporate experiences, dining options, meeting spaces, accommodation and tourist attractions to appeal to business people from outside of Ballarat. In 2023 the B31 program delivered a number of events throughout the month of August. We are looking forward to forming an exciting program of events for the coming festival.

Networking Events

A variety of networking events such as Business Day Out and the Young Professionals Network were held in 2023.

The Ballarat Experience

The Ballarat Experience is an initiative of Commerce Ballarat, aimed at driving tourism within Ballarat and supporting our local businesses. 'Money can't buy' experiences are created and then put up as part of a competition to be won. The initiative is marketed externally to Ballarat throughout Victoria via Facebook and Instagram.

Development

Commerce Ballarat subsidises and sources external funding to allow us to offer development opportunities, either free for members or at a nominal charge. This year this has included our Mentoring Program, Industry Chats (for People & Culture, and Hospitality, Tourism, Growers & Producers), Business Assistance Program, business wellbeing services, Industrial Relations Workshop, Visa Information Sessions, Psychosocial Health Regulation info session and more.

Business Day Out

In May 2024 attendees will come from across Regional Victoria to participate in Business Day Out. They were inspired by Nik and Harry Robinson, co-founders of Good Citizens Eyewear, Fiori Giovanni and her captivating story of bravery, courage, and strength as she forged her own path and defied her own destiny, Taylor Nugent, Senior Economist within the Global Markets Research team at the National Australia Bank plus a dynamic 45-minute Think Tank session where your insights into the business environment will be invaluable. 12 Secondary Schools including 300+ staff and students will also have the opportunity to hear Nik and Harry Robinson's story. The day concluded with an exciting new networking session hosted by Itinerant Spirits. Thank you to our 2024 Session Sponsors: CountPro, NAB and nbn Local and Event Sponsors: Simplex Insurance Solutions, Itinerant Spirits, Radio Ballarat, The WIN Network, Ballarat Times News Group, Sovereign Press, Stoke Design Co., The Goods Shed, Ai Group and the support of the City of Ballarat.

Industry & Education Partnership Bus Tour

In April, we hosted our annual Education & Industry Tour in partnership with Highlands LLEN and the Education Department. Principals and career advisors from Ballarat and surrounding areas were invited to tour local industry to gain a greater understanding and connection to the incredibly diverse career paths available for students in our own backyard. Yesterday's participants were fortunate enough to take a tour of Bartlett's Manufacturing & Grampians Health Services with Ballarat's large manufacturing and health presence these school leaders had a chance see inside and grow their understanding on both of fields. We then joined business leaders for a lunch, where the City of Ballarat gave an economic snapshot followed by a panel discussion, focusing on 'What's new in professional services?'. This facilitated by Stuart Benjamin, Chair RDA Grampians, who was joined by Fiona Murphy, Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education, Damien Butler, Butler Chartered Accountants, Ben Franklin Neveit Wilkinson Frawley, Lena Charnley, BJT Legal and Leah Clark, Inception Planning. Thank you to our panelists, our hosts and the participating schools.

Business Mentoring Program

A program for members offering one on one mentoring and group workshops. This program is offers mentoring to new businesses and or those that are looking for growth or change. In 2024 we welcome nine businesses to the program and look forward to following their successes. Thank you to the mentors who volunteer to assist.

Victorian Regional Chamber Alliance

In 2023/24 we continued to facilitate VRCA. Mission - To be recognised as the collective voice for regional Chambers of Commerce and Business Associations. Vision - A prosperous regional Victoria; vibrant, healthy, heard and connected. Currently there are 26 members and this continues to expand. The VRCA has advocated on behalf of regional Victoria on topics including: Support for Regional Business & Tourism, Public Holidays, Small Business Needs, Fund Local Achieve More and the Regional building industry crisis.

Ballarat Tradie Network

The Ballarat Tradie Network was launched in 2024 to provide a support, networking and development space for our construction and trade sector. Our first event was drive-thru breakfast in February, with 100+ attendees. This was followed by a second event in May, Knock Off Drinks and BBQ. These events allowed trades to connect with one another and support services available to them. Thank you to sponsors: National Tiles & Solomon Flooring, Radio Ballarat, Hip Pocket Workwear & Safety, Total Tools Ballarat and Workforce Australia.

Central Highlands Growers & Producers Hub

Commerce Ballarat commenced work on the Central Highlands Growers and Producers Hub in September 2023, which had 18 members at the time. Since then, membership has increased to nearly 100. The aim of the Hub is to create a vibrant and supportive network of businesses dedicated to promoting quality produce from our region. It's about fostering collaboration, sharing knowledge and creating opportunities for local growers, producers, and artisans. Commerce Ballarat planned and executed the inaugural Forage & Feast – a month long series of events that aimed to highlight and showcase the best in local produce from the Central Highlands region.

Business Assistance Program

In 2024 we have introduced the Ballarat Assistance Program, currently running, the program is connecting eligible businesses to desired advice and support in a broad range of areas including: Human Resources, Financial, Business Planning, Content Creation and Marketing. The Business Assistance Program is being funded by the City of Ballarat and delivered by Commerce Ballarat.

Mental Health & Wellbeing Services

This project is to ensure local availability to business development in the Mental health space. Facilitated by Claire Vrieze, assistance on offer includes Mental Health First Aid® Training, Workplace Mental Health & Wellbeing Workshops and additional tailored consultation services.

Advocacy

Commerce Ballarat represents our members and the wider business community on a wide range of issues to all levels of government.

Additional representation on behalf of our members Includes:

- Victorian Regional Chamber Alliance
- Team Ballarat City Business Leaders Meeting
- Ballarat Heritage Advisory Committee
- Central Highlands Water Customer Advisory Panel
- Central Highlands Regional Drought Resilience Plan Working Group
- Technical Advisory Group for State Gov Small Business Wellbeing Project
- Energy Regional Advisory Panel
- Ballarat Liquor Accord
- Workforce Australia Local Jobs Program Taskforce

As always we continue to stretch our limits to care for this business community.

It's no secret that Ballarat businesses are doing it tough. Every organisation, including Commerce Ballarat, is currently taking stock and assessing every aspect, seeing where resources need to be applied and where they can be spared. Without query or question, our first commitment has and always will be the business community of Ballarat and surrounds. We will continue to advocate for and work with our members to help ensure their resilience through this time.

I would like to acknowledge the Board for the generous time they commit and a special thank you to Anne Alexander, Neville Ivey and Ewen Fletcher for always being available when required.

Last but not least my amazing team, whilst occasionally I see disbelief when I suggest some new idea or initiative, it never lasts long, and they immediately throw themselves into the task. I hope they know, but just in case they need reminding, our business community is so lucky to have such committed hard workers on their side. Huge thanks to Zoe, Tatiana, Michaela, Dylan, Ishani, and Sam.

Jodie Gillett
Chief Executive Officer
Commerce Ballarat

b2b Business to Ballarat, always try and buy local.