

Pete Bardunias

Planting the Seeds for Success

COVER STORY

By Jenna Caputo

Photos by SuperSourceMedia.com

You may have seen Pete Bardunias bopping around from one local Chamber of Southern Saratoga County (CSSC) member to the next. A tireless advocate for local business, Pete is well known for his promotions that have supported many Capital Region establishments on the road to success. He has become the face of business in southern Saratoga County, but there's a lot more to his story.

Growing up in Mahopac, NY, Pete was an active child, busy not only with his academic studies but also with his various hobbies. He had a passion for music, and over the years, learned trombone, keyboards, organ and vocals. A boy scout and amateur scientist, he also loved to fish and was an avid boater, passing the USCG boating safety course at age 10. His love of the water seemed to run in the family, as both of his grandfathers were fishermen. His grandparents had a profound influence on him. "Just being with them was always exciting in my view, even watching Lawrence Welk reruns," he says. "They taught

my brothers and myself the true meaning of family values, plus instilling a strong work ethic. All of my grandparents were products of the Great Depression and learned to be very self-sufficient despite quietly toiling in difficult circumstances for painfully little money. They always seemed to have what they needed and never complained about being in tough situations."

During the blizzard of 1978, a new family with a daughter Pete's age moved in next door. "Being 12 at the time, of course I wasn't very interested, but a few years later it was a very different story!" laughs Pete. "We hung out at the bus stop and eventually became friendly. One thing led to another and I asked her to go steady in March of 1982. She's been my 'steady' ever since!" Eileen was on the drill team in high school while Pete was in the marching band. His love for music extended outside of school as well, even at that young age. He gained an interest in 20th Century popular music partly due to taking organ lessons from the big band composer, George Fragos, who wrote the hit 1941 song, "I Hear a Rhapsody," among others. Pete enjoyed it so much that he even led his own big band

during high school and college, playing parties as well as weddings.

Pete's love of science continued and he decided to pursue his passion in meteorology. Knowing that meteorology is actually a hybrid of multiple scientific specialties and that his ultimate goal was to break into television/radio broadcasting, he chose a more general science approach, graduating from Fordham University with a BS in Physics. However, advancement up the ladder was slow, and since he and Eileen were serious so early on, he decided he needed a more lucrative career.

He spent a little time in the insurance business, then utilized his technical skills in computer tech support, even advising the designers of the sanitation system on Space Station Freedom, which later became the International Space Station. He spent six years at GE Capital in a technical position assisting their insurance operation, then decided to go into business for himself. Working part-time running a direct mail/database services company, part time as Mr. Mom to their son, Jonathan (now 18 and a freshman at Hudson Valley Community College), and part time at the local marina, he was a very busy man but loved being involved in various businesses and making a difference at each one. He became a volunteer board member and leader of the Greater Mahopac-Carmel Chamber of Commerce, eventually closing his own business to become first their Executive Director, then the first full-time President in the chamber's history. He was also a founding board member of the Putnam County Chamber of Commerce before an opportunity arose for a President position at the CSSC. Eileen worked at GE, so a transfer was possible if they decided to go for it.

"I remember looking Clifton Park and Halfmoon up on a map, and smiling when I realized it was a place where we had stopped with our boat on an Erie Canal voyage in 2007. We hadn't initially planned on docking here but had



Pete with the CSSC Ambassadors

a problem with the boat. Had it not been for the hospitality of the folks at the Crescent Boat Club we might never have given this community a second look!" he remembers. It was meant to be, even though at the time, everyone thought he was crazy. The Chamber was hurting financially and two other local chambers were circling around, hoping to take it over. But Pete felt his science background offered him a unique perspective and insight to the various businesses here in the epicenter of New York's Tech Valley. He came to his interviews with a PowerPoint presentation on what he thought they needed to do to get back on track and prosper, including his idea to partner with the local marine industry.

The CSSC now has over 46 nautical members and is the third largest chamber in the Capital Region with over 1,050 members, revenues approaching \$700,000 and a broad base covering communities all across Saratoga County and nearby Glensville. Pete says that in its 51 year history, "The CSSC has been at the forefront of major economic development issues and initiatives, everything from

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adding the first traffic light at Routes 9 & 146 to bringing a hotel to Clifton Park to, in later years, helping land GLOBALFOUNDRIES, supporting area fairs and festivals and leading community development initiatives such as the rehabilitation of Historic Lock 19 in Vischer Ferry or the century-old gazebo in Mechanicville's Tallmadge Park."

Pete tries hard to fulfill his reputation as the most approachable executive in the chamber business. He's also known for his crazy stunts to help promote our area and local businesses, including sticking one of the CSSC's Ambassadors in a washing machine to advertise an appliance store, going around the harness track at Saratoga Casino for a video shoot and getting the CSSC's flag displayed at the South Pole!

While his passion for working for local businesses takes up much of his time, ever the Renaissance Man, Pete still enjoys playing around with his other hobbies. His little known talents include catching lobsters in the Long Island Sound; fixing up old cars, boats and small tractors; gardening and history, especially loving the military and industrial history of America. He's also a very good whistler! "I must drive my staff crazy when I forget myself and get carried away!" he jokes. He still loves the outdoors and when he's not exploring the Capital District, he and Eileen head out on the boat for excursions on upstate lakes and rivers or out snowshoeing in the winter. He enjoys baseball and football and is very strong in his faith. "Eileen and I both had a strong spiritual upbringing, having grown up Catholic and becoming born-again Christians in 1989, which strongly influences our desire to be a faithful, steadfast force for good in our community and among family and friends. My passion is to always do something meaningful, whether it be in discussions with the EPA officials in Washington over the future of the Hudson River, or in casual conversations with residents of one of the river towns at Don and Paul's Coffee Shoppe in Waterford. Everybody matters... always."

Pete keeps busy with his volunteer work on multiple boards and advisory committees outside of the Chamber as well as his blog for the Times Union. The blog has been



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Go Through a Lock For Free!

Thanks to sponsor Hullspeed Coatings, a Saratoga County manufacturer, shuttle boats will run through Lock 2 in Waterford at the Canal Festival on May 19, presented by the CSSC in conjunction with the Village of Waterford. Ride aboard the boat for FREE and experience what it's like to go through a lock on the historic Erie Canal!

a great tool to help him spread information useful to the business community as well as to the general public in our area. He has been able to combine it with his love of history, using it to describe some of the historic anniversaries taking place in our area over the last few years.

Being so involved in the community, Pete urges people to connect with him through the various CSSC social media pages and/or his personal one. He is rightfully proud of the work he has accomplished since he began to call Clifton Park home. It has been a rewarding seven years and he loves interacting with the people in the community in general and in helping businesses to find success. He reminds everyone how important it is to be aware and active within your community regardless of whether you're a business owner yourself or if you just want to support local businesses. He urges everyone to remember that the "CSSC is a vigorous advocate for area business, as well as a leader in preserving and enhancing the identity and history of each community we serve. Anyone looking to expand their business by meeting potential clients, colleagues and service providers should get involved with the chamber. Likewise, services organizations, churches and non profits should consider joining us and working together on community support projects, and even private citizens can always volunteer to help out as well. My sincere message to *Clifton Park Neighbors* readers is to become familiar with and support the area's Chamber of Commerce, whether as a business member or someone who seeks out member businesses in our directory and patronizes them.

"This job is very much a vocation to me, much like a church pastor feels about his congregation. I have sat with business owners who have sunk their entire life's savings into their profession, or who have overcome personal and professional obstacles in order to succeed, and it's of paramount importance to me to do everything I can to help them each and every day. Especially in today's challenging environment for organizations such as ours, we can't do it without your support!"

For more information about the CSSC, visit www.southernsarotoga.org. ■

Do you know a neighbor who has a story to share? Nominate your neighbor to be featured in one of our upcoming issues! Contact us at jcaputo@bestversionmedia.com.