

Gibson Says America's Best Days Are Ahead Ex-Congressman Breakfast Guest Nov. 19

These are tumultuous political times, but former U.S. Rep. Chris Gibson lays out a way forward in his new book, "The Spirit of Philadelphia: A Call to Recover the Founding Principles."

Business leaders attending the Chamber's next networking Breakfast from 7:30 to 9:00 a.m. on Nov. 19 at Diamond Mills Hotel & BLACKBARN Hudson Valley will hear the former congressman in his own words. The sponsor is Ulster County Community Action.

"It will be great to be back among friends," Gibson said. "Even though when you turn on the evening news today there is much to be concerned about, I still believe that our best days are still in front of us. In large part because the real strength of our nation is found in our local communities, in our homes with our family and friends, and in our small businesses, places of worship, ball fields and volunteer and professional organizations, such as the Chamber."

"Strengthening our social fabric will help us weather these difficult political times we are experiencing."

In large part, that was the motivation for "The Spirit of Philadelphia," which Gibson said "really is America's story told through the history of ideas."

Gibson said he wanted to research and ponder the sources of our present struggles with an eye for reforms that may help us get back on track. He said the book is generally located at the intersection of philosophy, history and public policy in a "neighborhood we may call American politics."

The book, according to Gibson, identifies the moment America's national sense of shared purpose was created (when delegates to the Constitutional Convention finally

broke the gridlock which had stymied efforts to reform the Articles of Confederation and ultimately compromised to write the new U.S. Constitution).

"This not only created a new legal document that transformed us from a Confederation to a new nation, it also created a coalescing energy that united us with a sense of solidarity, determination, optimism and reasonableness," Gibson said. "That spirit helped put us on the path to eventually becoming a global superpower. This book is not about going back to some earlier time, however. That is a fiction—you can never go back. It's about going forward with the right principles and ideas. I'm convinced that once we do, we will experience better days."

A resident of Kinderhook in Columbia County, Gibson joined the U.S. Army in 1986 after graduating from Siena College. He rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel, serving in the first Gulf War, Kosovo and Iraq, earning four Bronze Stars and a Purple Heart. He later earned a doctorate in government from Cornell University and taught at West Point and was a national security affairs fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University.

Gibson said he has enjoyed all the "seasons" of his life, including representing Ulster County in Congress from 2011-2017, but these days he enjoys being a writer and analyst. Since leaving Congress, Gibson has written two other books, Rally Point (2017), and Securing the State (2019), and also served as the 12th President of Siena College.

He and his wife, Mary Jo, serve as staff members for the Franciscan Pilgrimage Program. They also lead pilgrimages to Rome and Assisi in the steps of Saint Francis and Saint Clare for veterans, first responders and



Chris Gibson

health care workers, among other groups.

When asked about his political future, Gibson said his season to serve as an elected official "has passed," but he was open to helping a 2028 presidential candidate "I believe in ... should one surface."

"As to the kind of leader I believe we need at this moment, you will know once you finish reading my latest book," he said.

Gibson said he was looking forward to speaking again before the Chamber and had kind words for the organization, recalling its selection as the NYS Chamber of the Year in 2021 by the Business Council of New York State.

"It's always a lively session with the Ulster Chamber," he said. "My overall message is one of gratitude and hope for both the Ulster community and our nation. I hold the Ulster

November Breakfast

November 19

7:30-9:00 am

Diamond Mills Hotel &

BLACKBARN

Hudson Valley

25 S. Partition Street

Saugerties, NY

Sponsor:



Chamber community in the highest esteem."

Chamber Breakfast Meetings are a great way to stay on top of current events and connect with other local business leaders. Reservations are required. Tickets are \$35 in advance and \$40 at the door for Chamber members (\$45 for non-members.) For more information, contact the Chamber at (845) 338-5100 or go online at www.ulsterchamber.org.

Ulster County Community Acrion is November's Breakfast Sponsor

2025 marks 60 years of service by Ulster County Community Action Committee to the County of Ulster. UCCAC was incorporated in 1965. For the first time agencies and community leaders were involved in the planning as were community residents who were to receive the services.

The original mandate established by the founding members still holds true to this day: to provide resources and services which promote people's dignity and self-sufficiency. UCCAC creates and implements programming founded on the philosophy of self-help; "a hand up, not a handout."

Community Action has over 10,000 interactions with people—adults, children, seniors, housed and unhoused. A hand up is provided through our Farm Stands, Mass distributions, rent/utility assistance, energy audits, weatherization services, and Head Start programming—all delivered with respect, consideration and kindness.

Over the years Community Action has been an innovator and an incubator for other programming. Additional Agencies

were created and broke off with UCCAC; Resource Center for Accessible Living (RCAL), RUPCO and Legal Aide Services of the Hudson Valley.

Community Action has been a leader in the development and establishment of services in the community:

In 1971 the Outreach staff began organizing the youth and formed the first Youth Councils.

In Saugerties, the first drug hotline in our area was started by volunteers from UCCAC.

UCCAC organized the first Emergency Food Closets (Pantry). The pantries are still functioning today at each Outreach Center

UCCAC formed the first County-Wide Energy Council consisting of Town Supervisors, Fuel Dealers, the Red Cross and the Department of Social Services.

In 1976, the Weatherization Assistance Program was created under Title IV of the Energy Conservation and Production Act to assist low-income families. This energy saving program continues today.

In 2013, UCCAC partnered with NYSEDA to introduce EmPower to its' list of services available to Ulster County residents.

Services are designed to increase self-sufficiency, to empower those we service to meet human needs adequately, to respond to changing community needs, strengthen families, foster opportunities for education and training, increase employability, initiate opportunity for work, reduce the living costs of the economically disadvantaged so that they have more resources to meet their basic needs, remove obstacles to independence, alleviate poverty and to respond to emergency needs that are often a condition of life in poverty. Briefly to make the world a better and kinder place for all people, and a place where life can be lived with dignity.



A Time For Thankfulness

Ulster Savings Bank Hosts And Sponsors Next Mixer

Chamber members will feel the love on Nov. 20 when Ulster Savings Bank opens the doors to its corporate headquarters at 180 Schwenk Dr. from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. for the next Networking Mixer. Ulster Savings Bank leaders are hosting and sponsoring this pre-Thanksgiving networking event with an attitude of gratitude for the community they serve.

"We are the area's oldest community bank here in Kingston and the Hudson Valley," said Connie Harkin, Vice President of Marketing. "People feel comfortable coming here, mingling with other community members. This Mixer is so close to that special time when we give thanks. We hope that those who visit will be glad they did and walk away feeling thankful that we are such a large and active part of their local community."

Giving back is at the heart of everything Ulster Savings Bank does, whether it's through monetary donations, collection drives or employee volunteering. Through its community donation program and Charitable Foundation, the bank has distributed more than \$15 million since the foundation was formed in 2001, the year marking the bank's 150th anniversary.

It goes beyond even that. In 2024 alone, the bank distributed \$810,581 to community causes and helped 454 local organizations. Additionally, it logged 5,448 hours of employee volunteering at

charitable events that serve vulnerable populations or community-building events. Every year, you'll see them rolling up their sleeves at veterans' luncheons, Kingston Clean Sweep, American Red Cross blood drives, Uptown Kingston Snowflake Festival, the Chamber's annual Black Business Community Celebration, and many other events.

It starts from the top down. A majority of the bank's management team serves on local nonprofit and economic development boards.

All that stems from a deeply rooted history. In April of 1851, the Ulster County Savings Institution was chartered by the state legislature, becoming the first savings bank in Ulster County. Not only is it the oldest bank in the Hudson Valley, but the eighth oldest in New York and the 52nd oldest in the country.

Ulster Savings Bank, with 15 branches in Ulster, Dutchess and Orange counties, is among the 426 mutual savings banks remaining in the nation. It doesn't have stockholders, and its profits are reinvested in the communities it serves.

The full-service bank, which offers loans, insurance, investment services, payroll as well as tax and business solutions, has repeatedly been given a five-star rating by Bauer Financial, according to its website (ulstersavings.com).

At the Mixer, Chamber members will get to learn more about



the bank and its community-minded mission. In the spirit of Thanksgiving, the bank team will lay out a festive spread of "tasty tidbits and beverages," for attendees, Harkin said. Good company, of course, is a given.

"It will be a great night out right before the Thanksgiving holiday with lots of easy parking and accessibility," she said. "Warm hospitality awaits all those who attend."

Harkin added that there will be "special surprises" for three lucky people as well as giveaways for everyone.

Chamber Mixers are a great way to network and promote your business. Be sure to bring plenty of business cards. Mixers are open to Chamber Members 21 years of age and older. There is no charge for Chamber Members to attend, but reservations are required. Call (845) 338-5100 or register online.

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Honoring Our Veterans In November

Chamber Has Two Dedicated Groups

November is National Veterans and Military Families Month in the United States and the Chamber boasts two veterans’ groups making a real difference in Ulster County.

The Kingston Veterans Association (KVA), founded shortly after World War II, is comprised of several local veterans’ organizations, including VFW 1386, American Legion Post 150, Seabees Island x9, Marine Corps League and Viet Nam Veterans of America.

“The intent was to pool the resources and expertise of all of them for the common good of all,” said Bill Forte, chairman of the KVA.

For example, all of the groups help put out 5,000 flags in Kingston cemeteries every year.

Many of those veterans will be on hand for this year’s Veterans Day service at 11:00 a.m. on Nov. 11 at the Kingston American Legion in Kingston. The speaker will be Forte’s brother, Lt. Colonel Anthony Forte, who retired from the Army after 35 years and lives in Fort Bragg, N.C.

Bill Forte, who joined the Army during the Vietnam era but served in Grenada and Desert Storm, said the VFW had 1,500 members when he joined in the late 1970s. That figure is now fewer than 200 as the veterans from more recent wars are establishing families and careers and not joining.

“We need people,” he said. “All of the organizations are suffering and it’s not just the veterans’ groups.”

Forte said the public schools used to invite veterans in to talk about holidays like Memorial Day, Flag Day and Veterans Day, but that is less common today.

Another group making a difference is the Hudson Valley National Center for Veteran Reintegration (HVNCVR). Founder Kevin Keaveny started the group after returning from combat in Afghanistan and it gained non-profit status in 2019.

“I was depressed and tremendously disconnected when I got back home,” Keaveny writes on the group’s website. “I was surrounded by people who loved me and whom I loved, but it didn’t matter. I was trapped in deep loneliness.”

He describes himself as “unapproachable,” but that all changed

one day when he was surfing the Internet and came upon plans for building a boat. He decided to start building one in his backyard.

“I didn’t know it when I started it,” Keaveny explains, “but it was occupational therapy for me.”

It also was the beginning of the Veteran Wooden Boat Workshop, now one of many life-affirming programs conducted by (HVNCVR). As Keaveny continued building, his relationships with his family improved and he also saw an opportunity.

“The kids would come out and hang around with me while I was working, even the dog was warming up to me again,” he said. “I thought if this is helping me and my family, maybe it could help others.”

HVNCVR’s mission statement says the group is “dedicated to the well-being of veterans and community through purpose, dignity, respect, and honor.” Veterans can find a host of programs beyond building kayaks, including the arts, creative writing, yoga, music, a clothing closet, a coffee house, support groups, legal help and wellness activities.

Keaveny said among those receiving help today are homeless and suicidal veterans and those suffering from PTSD, substance abuse, combat guilt, and other physical and emotional disabilities associated with combat. A team of intergenerational veteran volunteers power the group.

“Plus, the many more veterans who only need to reconnect with their ‘tribe,’ experiencing again the camaraderie and support they received from others while on active duty,” Keaveny says on the website.

Keaveny said his life came “full circle” in September 2020 when he kayaked 315 miles of the Hudson River from Albany to Battery Park. He then walked to the 9/11 Memorial and Museum in Lower Manhattan, where he had served after the terrorist attacks as a National Guardsman and received a commendation medal.

The Kingston Veterans Association can be reached at (845) 399-0414 or kingstonvets.org. The Hudson Valley National Center for Veteran Reintegration, 24 Twin Maples Plaza in Saugerties, can be reached at (845) 481-4004 or www.hvncvr.org.



UPCOMING CHAMBER EVENTS

Wednesday November 19 | 7:30 - 9:00 am

Chamber Breakfast Meeting
Chris Gibson, Author and Former Congressman
 Diamond Mills Hotel & BLACKBARN Hudson Valley
 25 S. Partition Street | Saugerties, NY
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 \$45 Non-Members

Sponsor: Ulster County Community Action

Thursday November 20 | 5:00 - 7:00 pm

Networking Mixer @
Ulster Savings Bank
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 There is no cost for Members and Prospective Members.
 Reservations are required.
Sponsor: Ulster Savings Bank

Wednesday December 3 | 5:00 - 7:00 pm

Networking Mixer @
The Cornell Restaurant + Bar
 100 Rondout Landing | Kingston, NY
 There is no cost for Members and Prospective Members.
 Reservations are required.
Sponsor: Normann Staffing

Thursday December 11 | 7:30 - 9:00 am

Chamber Breakfast Meeting
Darrell P. Wheeler, PhD, President SUNY New Paltz
 The Venue Uptown at the Best Western Plus
 503 Washington Avenue | Kingston, NY
 \$35 Members-Advanced Pay • \$40 Members-At The Door
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More Info and Registration UlsterChamber.org
Questions (845) 338-5100

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Chamber Ambassadors, Jim Bracco, Jordan Davis, Beth Hanigan, and Ulster Chamber Marketing and Graphic Director Allison Costanzo.

How Sweet It Is

Mohonk's Gingerbread Competition Marks 10 Years

Mohonk Mountain House in December would be sheer, delicious pleasure for the likes of the fictional Hansel and Gretel.

Behold the scene: Towers of spicy cakes and cookies blanketed in frosting and festooned with lollipops, gumdrops and peppermint sticks—all laid out in the grand parlor of the Victorian castle in New Paltz.

The fairy tale-like event is the Hudson Valley Gingerbread Competition, where upwards of 40 local bakers, artists, hobbyists and everyday people with a creative bent go head-to-head for top prizes.

This year's competition will take place on Dec. 7 with a public viewing from 1 – 3:30 p.m. Guests are invited to

with prizes for category winners, special awards and crowd favorites.

The first-place prize is a two-night stay (for two) at Mohonk, a \$1,000 Mohonk gift card and dinner for two at Chef's Table, including wine pairing. The second-place winner will get a one-night stay at Mohonk for two adults and a \$500 Mohonk gift card. The third-place prize is lunch or dinner at Mohonk with access to the hiking trails for four people.

Beyond the top category prizes, judges will select winners for special skills awards such as Best Innovative Structure and Best Holiday Spirit.

The winning gingerbread houses will be displayed at Mohonk throughout the holiday season.

"In addition to the competition, our guests are encouraged to explore the grounds of the Mountain House and enjoy the beautiful decorations in our Victorian castle," Gullickson said. "We'll have visits from Santa, holiday music, ice-skating sessions and a self-guided Christmas tree tour."

In addition to the official competition on Dec. 7, Mohonk will offer a Gingerbread Pass to come view the top 17 pieces on display throughout the Mountain House. The passes, which are \$15 per person, will be offered on select dates from Dec. 8 through Dec. 19.

All the entry fees collected for the Gingerbread Pass will be donated to the Food Bank of the Hudson Valley, a local nonprofit that works to alleviate hunger in the area. Last

year's event raised \$30,000 for the food bank.

Submissions for the Hudson Valley Gingerbread Competition are open until Friday, Nov. 7 (or until all available spaces are filled). To enter the competition, go to mohonk.com/Hudson-valley-gingerbread-competition details.

Gullickson said the event is an enchanting way to kick off the holiday season.

"The Hudson Valley Gingerbread Competition is a fun, festive tradition that celebrates artistic expression, creativity and the true meaning of the holidays," he said. "Guests can marvel at the imagination and craftsmanship of the gingerbread creations, contribute to a great cause by



supporting the Regional Food Bank, take part in holiday activities, and spend a magical day at Mohonk Mountain House."

Mohonk Mountain House is located at 1000 Mountain Rest Road in New Paltz. For more information or to make reservations go to mohonk.com or call (855) 883-3798.

survey the masterpieces and vote for their favorite to win the Viewers' Choice Award.

"Every year, we see incredible creations from our competitors," said Mohonk President Eric Gullickson, a fifth-generation Smiley family member. "Many begin working on their creations in the summer. Through the years, we've seen recreations of the Mountain House and Mohonk property, treehouses, fairytale cottages, robots, steamships, dinosaurs, scenes from classic children's books, and of course, traditional gingerbread houses—plus so much more. They truly need to be seen to be believed."

Gullickson said the gingerbread houses are judged by an esteemed panel that considers creativity, difficulty, execution and theme.

This year's judges include Mohonk Executive Pastry Chef Audrey Billups; Amber Spiegel, author and world-renowned cookie decorator; Chitra Agrawal, founder and chief executive officer of Brooklyn Delhi; and Josiah Brown, president and CEO of Famous Destination Marketing.

The day concludes with the awards ceremony at 4 p.m.

