

2011 Volunteer of the Year

Chris LaMothe



By Charlee Beasor

What does Chris LaMothe think about his selection as a 2011 Indiana Chamber Volunteer of the Year? He's honored, of course, but feels that he isn't worthy of the accolades.

"I'm flattered and I'm humbled by the recognition. But because of my background, I know that there's so many other much more deserving people out there than I am," he says. "So that might be my next mission, to figure out how to promote some of those folks over guys like me."

But in looking over his many accomplishments over the past three decades, it's easy to see just how deserving LaMothe is. He joined the Chamber staff in 1982. After working 10 years in marketing, he became the organization's sixth president, a position he held for another 10 years. Following his departure from the day-to-day operation of the Chamber in 2002 to tackle other career opportunities, he returned as a board member, active committee participant and is the current vice chairman of the Chamber Foundation board of directors.

LaMothe has spent the past year leading the charge behind *Indiana Vision 2025*, the second installment of a Chamber-led long-term economic development plan for the state.

And he's also volunteered on a number of civic boards and organizations. One current effort comes in the form of a recent appointment by Gov. Mitch Daniels to the Commission for Higher Education.

"I feel it's a responsibility to give back. I have been incredibly blessed and very fortunate along the way, and I feel like it's a responsibility to give back and make things better, to add value," he explains.

Sherry Labs has experienced strong growth in the last five years and continues to look for acquisition opportunities.

An eye for business

In 2002, LaMothe became president and COO of Oxford Financial Group, LTD, one of the largest wealth management firms in the country. He then formed Ascendanci Ventures, LLC in 2005 as an investment firm targeting Midwest companies with growth potential. In 2006, he and investing partners Van Smith and the late John W. Fisher saw promise in Daleville-based Sherry Laboratories and purchased the company. LaMothe serves as CEO.

Sherry Laboratories is a five-division, third-party testing laboratory, with 10 labs in four states: Indiana, Oklahoma, Texas and Louisiana. The company continues to grow through acquisitions and expanding its capabilities.

A Ball State University graduate with a degree in marketing and an MBA from Indiana University, LaMothe notes that although he doesn't have a background in the science or testing fields, his involvement with a variety of businesses while at the Chamber gives him the experience he needs to lead Sherry.

"I literally visited hundreds and hundreds of businesses and got to know those businesses. Because we got involved in the legislation and regulatory activities, you have to know businesses pretty well to understand what their needs are in that regard," he recalls.

Sherry has grown to 260 employees, with 150 of those in Indiana, "I have a wonderful group of associates that work at Sherry Laboratories. Smart, motivated, very effective, tremendous folks," he asserts.

Having talented people around him has contributed to his success. When LaMothe took over the Chamber presidency in





LaMothe was a natural choice to chair the creation of the *Indiana Vision 2025* economic development plan.

1992, the organization had several challenges to overcome. By the time he left, it had risen from the 42nd largest state Chamber to fifth largest – but he swears it wasn't him.

"It was all the team – I had such a little role in that. It was bringing really bright, motivated people on staff and letting them rock 'n roll, and they did a remarkable job," he maintains.

LaMothe has seen the impact of the Chamber on the state from both an employee and board member perspective. And as a CEO, he knows the value that Chamber membership brings.

"It's incomprehensible to me how someone could own or be managing and leading a business and not be members of their local chamber and state chamber of commerce. Government is

so pervasive in everything that you do in running a business that not being engaged with a powerful voice for the business community is abdicating to the government control," he declares.

Education is everything

The Chamber is obviously a passion of LaMothe's; another is education.

"I think the need for the citizens of Indiana to embrace education from early education all the way through lifelong learning is really important for us as a state and (for) us as a nation to be really successful," he stresses. "I believe (education) is the great equalizer, the only equalizer. (It's) the one secret ingredient that any person – regardless of their history, background, creed or whatever – in this country can do anything with: a good education."

When LaMothe was leading the Chamber, he brought business and education leaders together with the Higher Education Business Forum. He also helped drive the formation of and served on Indiana's Education Roundtable.

"I think it's critical for Indiana to embrace the vision and the desire of really having a world-class higher education system and then to bring into alignment the entire education continuum that we've got to have in place," he contends.

Leading the charge – 10 years later

That's why LaMothe spearheading the Chamber's *Indiana*

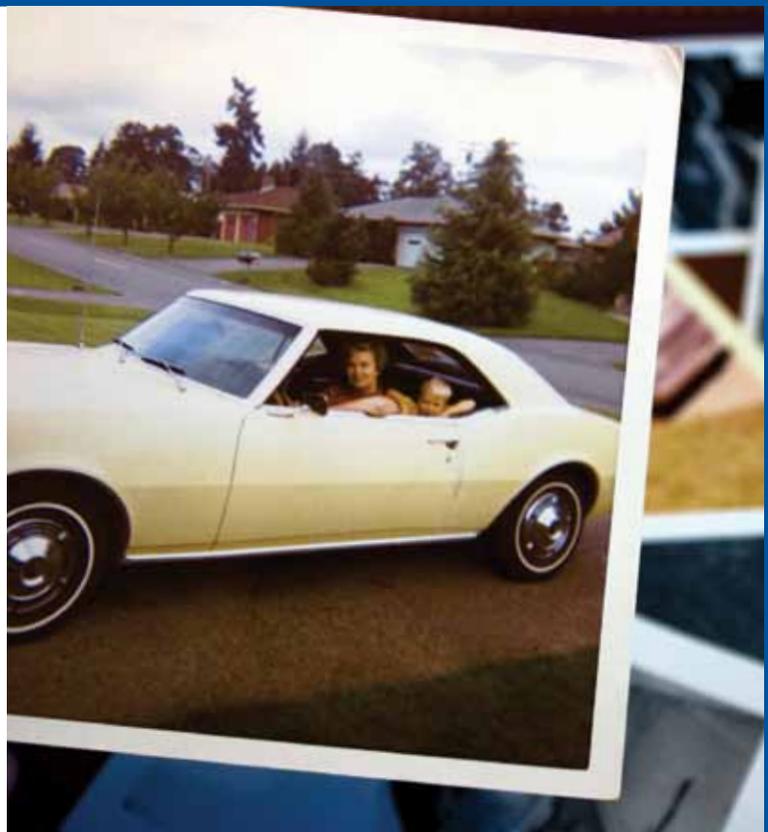
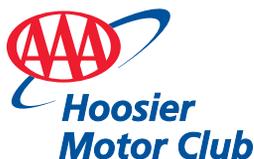
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Vision 2025 task force makes sense – a large portion of that plan is how education (developing and retaining outstanding human capital) will impact the state's future. But, LaMothe was also behind the Chamber's first economic plan – *Economic Vision 2010* – 11 years ago as president.

“It was a shift from being a reactionary organization to one that was very proactive and so we picked some big, bold, hairy, audacious goals and got behind those for *Economic Vision 2010*,” he recalls. “There were some major, fundamental issues that we felt Indiana needed to make significant gains in. One of those was in education. One was government restructuring. While we've made a lot of progress, those continue to be critically important in the long run and will likely be a continuing part of *Indiana Vision 2025*.”

Working alongside LaMothe on that project is Cameron Carter, Chamber vice president of small business and economic development.

“It's been a great experience. He's a big picture, grand scenario thinker. Instead of looking five years down the road, he's looking 15 years down the road and he's good at keeping us focused on that,” Carter attests.

The fact that LaMothe was involved in the initial economic plan while he was president also gives him a unique perspective.

“He got to see how the sausage was made the first time and where the pitfalls were,” Carter says. “He really knows how the dynamics of a volunteer group would come into play. And he knew from the political and policy side of things how certain things may play out politically over time.”