

The Board and staff of the Lawton Fort Sill Chamber of Commerce are very excited to announce a new partnership between our Chamber and the State Chamber of Oklahoma to provide affordable group health coverage to our members through Oklahoma Chamber BlueSM.

Through Oklahoma Chamber Blue, businesses can choose the right health care plan, priced within their budget, with the physicians and health care providers they trust. With eight different plans to choose from, as well as vision and dental coverage, Oklahoma Chamber Blue gives small businesses the buying power of big business to secure affordable coverage for their employees. The plan was announced earlier to a group of small business owners, our partners with the FitKids Coalition, Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust team, and Comanche County Health Department. We want all that are interested to know of this great initiative to help our small businesses to provide affordable health insurance. We are equally proud that coverage is beginning January 1, 2019.

You can be assured the Board of Directors, and the staff of the Lawton Fort Sill Chamber of Commerce and State Chamber stands committed to adding value to our members and to the success of small businesses. For more information on how you can take advantage of this membership benefit, feel free to contact the Chamber office.

As well, thanks to all that made the effort to Shop Small, Shop Local. It's nice to hear the stores were busy. I made my way out and was pleased to find the exact Instant Pot my husband has been admiring on the cooking shows, right here in Lawton at Easton's Ace Hardware. It felt good to find what I needed right here locally, and I had the opportunity to visit with a friend who was there shopping, and visit with the owners. We often forget just how special that extra little touch is for our shopping experience. As my son and I were driving back home, he shared that I reminded him of my mom and how she loved to visit with the retailers in her hometown. As I thought of her, I admit he was right. I am becoming my mother.

My mother had a great love for her hometown, and the businesses she gladly supported. She referred to them as her family. She was fiercely protective of them and she knew they would be there for her if needed. When she moved here with me for her final days, she provided me the phone numbers of the businesses if I needed to call and get things done at her home. When my mother passed and we took her home, the flowers, the support, the attendance at her service was made complete by these small town businesses. Later as I returned to Oklahoma and needed things worked on at her home, once again, I relied on these small businesses. I valued their kindness, support but I will admit, I am not sure I truly understood or appreciated the value of the small businesses until lately.

Researching and discussing small businesses has brought me to a higher level of appreciation. I am embarrassed to say; perhaps I too took the impact of the small business lightly. But the reality, as we have all heard, small businesses are critical to our economy, they are critical to our investment opportunities in our community, and they add incredible value to our personal lives. Thanks Mom, and our local businesses that have taught me this valuable lesson. Therefore, I believe it goes without saying, that we must always be thinking of how we can

support our small businesses. I am proud of our efforts at the Chamber for working diligently to create opportunities for small businesses such as the ability to obtain Oklahoma Chamber Blue healthcare insurance, to promoting the opportunities to invest local by shopping local, it all matters.

Brenda Spencer-Ragland