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Power Breakfast

Hood Hargett Breakfast Club

Drives Valuable Business Relationships

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What do Hugh McColl, Frank Abagnale (*Catch Me If You Can* inspiration and international authority on fraud and identity theft), and Merrill Hoge (ESPN NFL analyst) have in common? They've all been keynote speakers for the Hood Hargett Breakfast Club, along with best-selling authors, syndicated columnists, and other well-known and engaging speakers.

Owned by Chuck Hood and run by Jenn Snyder, the Hood Hargett Breakfast Club (HHBC) provides high class events and quality networking for its members, seasoned in the sauce of community. The Club seeks to attract owners and executives—true business decision makers.

“There are enough networking types of events in Charlotte to fill every day on the calendar if you choose,” says Snyder, “and you’ll come away from each one with a stack of business cards. But most of the time, those leads are to entry-level sales or support staff.”

“Hood Hargett, on the other hand, provides a level of entertainment, education and hospitality that attracts owners and executives—the upper level business decision makers—and gives them the opportunity to share the experience with their prospects, clients and partners. Just as importantly, it promotes strong supportive ties among members and with the larger community,” she continues.

Eight times a year, the organization presents top tier speakers like Jerry Richardson and Ari Fleischer at a sumptuously catered and presented breakfast event. The two-hour events also include a showcase with display booths for featured members. Every member receives five seats to each breakfast event. Owners themselves are invited to a sponsor’s reception the night prior where they meet one-on-one with the next day’s keynote speaker.

In addition to the featured events, HHBC also hosts monthly luncheons for business executives and elected officials from across the state, allowing members to address business and government issues affecting them. Informal roundtables throughout the year offer member companies the opportunity to provide a focused educational message about their specific business, directly to other members who may be potential clients or referral sources.

Ken Gill, owner of CPI Security Systems, credits these events with “continually providing my executive team with provoking insight and sound discussion on today’s business topics.” Combined with a strong focus on community and Snyder’s knack for knowing just who needs to meet whom, the effect is a powerful recipe for driving valuable business relationships.



Speaker Presentation



Carmel Country Club Breakfast



Thursday Night Networking Event



Lunch Event at NASCAR Hall of Fame

Sporting Events

It's no accident that many of the events feature sports-related speakers. In its infancy, HHBC focused exclusively on bringing in star athletes and sports personalities. At first, the approach attracted a lot of participation, but Snyder says that there was little attention to whether the personalities were actually good speakers, and the events often provided less value than she wanted for them.

Snyder envisioned an organization that would draw decision makers from all types of businesses and create a sense of community that would deliver significant ROI to members. In 2005, she brought her vision to the organization's title sponsor, Chuck Hood. The result was a relationship that would grow over the years as the Club blossomed.

"He believed in me," Snyder says. "He believed in what we could do."

At her urging, he purchased the club outright and let her revamp the organization. They closed the doors for four months and relaunched in November 2005. By 2006, they knew that they had done it.

"I looked around the room at one of our events," she recounts, "and I knew that we were on the right track. We were attracting the right audience; people were excited about the direction we were going."

Hood tells the story a little differently. He says he looked at the idea and thought it would be a good, inexpensive way to continue to increase brand recognition for his insurance company, Hood Hargett & Associates. Remembering that now, he grimaces: He was right about it increasing brand recognition, but wrong about it being inexpensive.

"Jenn's commitment to quality exceeded the Club's ability to pay for it," he says. "When we started, we didn't have the strong membership foundation that we have now, and Jenn insisted that we bring in a higher quality of speaker than we ever had before, and the speakers all needed to be paid in advance."

He bit the bullet and footed the bill, and he admits that the approach paid off. Hood Hargett's

programs attract the cream of the crop in Charlotte business: The Carolina Panthers, AAA, Carolinas Medical Center, HM Properties, Killingsworth Environmental, Merrill Lynch, Greater Charlotte Biz, Keffer Hyundai. The list of companies gladly ponying up the not insignificant membership fee year after year reads like a *Who's Who in Charlotte*.

Not that there haven't been challenges. The economic downturn in 2009 hit Hood Hargett members just as it did everyone else. Snyder says that was the first and only year that member retention dropped below 95 percent.

"Everyone was re-evaluating where they were spending their money, where they were going to be involved," says Snyder. "In retrospect, I think they found their investment in the Club significantly worth the investment. Since then, we've been more than pleased with our membership levels."

Although the Club now focuses on top-tier speakers and valuable relationships, it has maintained ties to its sporting roots. Members include the Carolina Panthers, Charlotte Bobcats, Charlotte Knights, and Charlotte Checkers, and twice a year the keynote speakers include prominent sports figures with the rest being motivation and business speakers. Plus, the organization has become increasingly involved in the larger community.

Giving Back

As the founder and author of *Don't Change the Channel*, Snyder speaks all over the country about the power of staying in tune with the needs of the community, refusing to look away from suffering, and making the commitment to make a difference.

In 2007, Snyder saw a story on CNN about a little boy whose mother and unborn sister had been murdered. She says, "In that moment, I knew I had to do something for this little boy. I heard the call and there was no turning away. I couldn't just change the channel."

Out of that moment, she organized a movement that raised money for the little boy's college education and got a home donated for his family. She now runs a website at www.dontchangethechannel.com dedicated to giving individuals the motivation, inspiration and tools to find a way to make a ➤

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—Jenn Snyder
Executive Director



Social Networking-(Chuck Hood Center)



difference in someone's life.

Likewise, Hood Hargett Breakfast Club members don't just sit around talking about the importance of community and patting each other on the back. As an organization, they are involved in multiple community service efforts, the most prominent of which is the Liz Murray Scholarship Fund which has raised over \$250,000 in scholarships to date. The scholarship recognizes exceptional high school student athletes for their academic, athletic and community achievements.

Snyder says individual members likewise demonstrate commitment to giving back in a variety of practical ways. For example, when the owner of HHBC member Nexcom, Chris Allison, drove by the Ronald McDonald House as it was being built, he decided then and there that he wanted his organization to be involved with it. When Snyder learned of his interest, she made a point to introduce him to Mona Gibson, executive director of the Ronald McDonald House, who was slated to speak at the Breakfast Club later that year.

During that event, Snyder had the idea to make a change inside the Breakfast Club that would enable members to connect more readily with the nonprofits they want to support. Because the Hood Hargett Breakfast Club is category-exclusive, at that time only one nonprofit organization was permitted membership, the Make-a-Wish Foundation. Snyder decided that in order to enable more members to connect with the charities they believe in, it was time to open the category up to more members. She approached the Make-a-Wish Foundation with her idea first, and says they were as excited as she was.

In addition to Make-a-Wish, Hood Hargett now boasts six non-profit members: The American Red Cross, Ronald McDonald House, Classroom Central, First Tee, and the Humane Society. The Club has several projects planned in concert with each non-profit, plus in June and December they'll host Hood Hargett Breakfast Club Charity Days featuring substantial projects with opportunities for all members to be involved.

A Natural Fit

Snyder says the Hood Hargett Breakfast Club was a natural fit given her close tie to sports. She grew up in northeast Ohio, just minutes from the Pro Football Hall of Fame. She describes herself as a "huge sports junky" who had season tickets to the Cleveland Browns "for as long as I can remember." An athlete herself, when she heard about a job that would combine her sports addiction with her love of sales and events, she jumped at the opportunity.

Likewise, although she's not a native to the South, she says the city was love at first sight: "I immediately fell in love with Charlotte. When



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~Jenn Snyder
Executive Director

I moved here, I knew exactly one person—no family, nothing. And within four years I had this huge list of contacts, and had become the leader of this networking group, in charge of connecting people."

In fact, she loves the city so much that she cheers on the Panthers even more enthusiastically than she does her former hometown Browns. "This is a city full of people wanting to do the right thing; full of entrepreneurs striving to make this place better," she says. "It's a business community that really has each other's back. I'm honored to be a tiny little part of that."

Snyder emphasizes that HHBC members value community and connection, but that it's also important they receive a return for their investment in the organization. "It's so personal

to me when someone puts their faith and trust in me," she explains. "Whether they're a big corporation or a small business, our membership fee is a lot of money."

Snyder strives to ensure that every business owner comes away from each event feeling like they've learned something new to take back to their staff, or gained something that improves their business.

She says membership also helps organizations cement client relationships and build stronger sales. She remembers when HHBC member Daryl Larner of Larner's Office Furniture wanted to do business with US Airways but was having a difficult time breaking through to their top decision makers. Eventually he was able to get them to attend a Breakfast Club event, and shortly after the deal was made.

In fact, nearly every company in the Club does business with at least one other member. The membership retention rate of 95 to 100 percent plus a growth rate of about 20 percent speaks for itself, but members love to add their accolades. "They're always so positive when they talk to us," says Snyder: "Your organization is amazing." "The event was incredible."

Gary LaBrosse, of the Merrill Lynch LaBrosse/Byerley Group, says "Hood Hargett Breakfast Club has been the best networking organization I have ever been involved with. There is great loyalty in using the goods and services of the members. The speaker lineup is outstanding, and my clients have thoroughly enjoyed the opportunities to attend."

Clearly, the Hood Hargett Club has a recipe that really works. And what could be better than starting the day with a power breakfast? **biz**

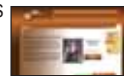
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Principals: David "Chuck" Hood, Owner;
Jenn Snyder, Executive Director
In Business: 9 years

Business: A category-exclusive business development organization that develops and hosts 36 events throughout the year with the goal of providing success-minded business owners with first-class venues to entertain their clients and prospects.



www.hoodhargettbreakfastclub.com

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