

Former mayor Adkisson shares stories of Owensboro in new book

By Katie Pickens
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Former Owensboro mayor Dave Adkisson recently released a book geared toward Chamber of Commerce leaders, and he thought it would have a narrow audience. Instead, the book — which shares a number of stories from Adkisson's time in Owensboro — has performed better than expected.

Adkisson released *Horseshoes vs. Chess: A Practical Guide for Chamber of Commerce Leaders* on Amazon in January. On Wednesday during a virtual meeting with Owensboro's Rotary Club, he spoke about the journey of writing it and the reception since its launch.

Horseshoes vs. Chess was the culmination of seven years of work and writing — all of which stemmed from more than 30 years of experience in national, state and local chambers of commerce.

"I would write a little on the weekends and forget about it," Adkisson said. "After seven years, I thought, 'I'd better do this.'"

The book involved an editorial board of 20 different Chamber of Commerce CEOs across the country — including Owensboro native Carlos Phillips, who serves as the Chamber CEO in Greenville, South Carolina.

It was published with the help of a California man who had expertise in launching books via Amazon.

"He said, 'I want to see your book achieve best-seller status,'" Adkisson said. "I told him, 'Nah, it's a niche market.' I knew I would have a narrow audience. It's a practical guide to Chamber of Commerce leaders."

The book, however, has done better than Adkisson expected. Chamber CEOs all over the country have purchased multiple copies of the book.

Though Adkisson said he didn't write the book "to get speaking gigs," it resonated with enough people that he has spoken at several conferences and events.

The Chamber CEO of Cleveland told Adkisson the book would be the only thing he'd leave behind for his successor once he cleaned out his office.

Horseshoes vs. Chess — which Adkisson described as “a book about lessons I wish I had known” — include lessons learned from his time with the Owensboro Chamber, where he served as president and CEO for 15 years.

One of those, he said, was the need to develop a strategic plan for one's city.

“Chambers are going to have to evolve into a new business model,” Adkisson said, adding that the days of paying dues were over.

Instead, Chambers should focus on “cause-based fundraising” efforts. That way, people would invest their money and time toward the things they care about.

“Someone might write a check for \$10,000 if they really believe in it,” he said. “The Kentucky Chamber received more revenue from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation than it did through dues.”

Adkisson reflected on local fundraising efforts in Owensboro that proved fruitful, including the \$10 million fundraising project for the RiverPark Center, calling that a “huge” amount of private money.

Owensboro, he said, had also achieved success by using its Chamber of Commerce as a vehicle for community development. When Adkisson was CEO, someone told him Owensboro should get more involved with the bluegrass music scene.

With little knowledge of bluegrass music and concerts, Adkisson set up a meeting with a group of people who had the know-how, and that eventually led to the annual ROMP Festival and the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame and Museum coming to fruition.

But there were still plenty of things — not just in Owensboro, he said, but everywhere — that needed to evolve and change in order to stay successful. Chief among them, he said, was economic development and business was becoming more focused on diversity and putting people of color in leadership positions.