

Chamber execs defend changes

High Desert businessman expresses concern

By Mike Lamb

Staff Writer

Posted Jun. 27, 2015 at 12:01 AM

Updated Jun 28, 2015 at 4:55 PM

BARSTOW — The announcement Wednesday that the executive director of the Barstow Area Chamber of Commerce was stepping down and taking on a new role with the organization drew concern from at least one High Desert business official.

"This is very concerning to me as a member of multiple companies when you have this many changes to an organization," Joseph W. Brady said in an email sent to some chamber officials and the media.

"Especially the local chamber of commerce, which you expect stability for as a local business owner."

Brady is president of the Bradco Companies, a commercial real estate brokerage with an office in Barstow.

The chamber's announcement said the current executive director, Elena Rivera, will transition to chairperson of the chamber's ambassadors committee. Rivera was appointed to the executive director's position a year ago.

The chamber also announced it was moving from its present Harvey House offices to 229 E. Main Street. The move comes on the heels of the chamber's decision earlier this month not to renew a contract with the City of Barstow. Previous contracts with the city required the chamber to open and close the Harvey House.

"The BACC Ambassadors are a trained and organized group that represent the Barstow Area Chamber of Commerce at multiple community and business events," Wednesday's statement said. "She will be developing plans for growth, marketing projects and dedicate time to grant writing."

But Brady said if the chamber has good reasons to make the change, "they are not selling this the right way."

"Barstow has some great development opportunities in its future," he said in the email. "Businesses and those relocating look for stability in local government and those organizations that support the city's efforts to improve itself. If the chamber was aware of these changes a last week (at the membership breakfast meeting) and failed to tell its membership, that is very poor planning on their part."

President Marie Massey said the change is not only positive for the chamber, but for Rivera as well.

"This is a natural progression for Elena," Massey said. "It's all being done to build a better chamber."

Massey explained that Rivera has experience in writing for grants and working on special projects. She said Rivera found it difficult to pursue those interests while running the day-to-day chamber operations.

Rivera said the change has been in the works for some time. She said the decision was based on comments received from chamber members who were looking for a particular direction by the organization.

"I'm glad they are asking the questions. We are going to give a presentation to the membership to explain the new direction that this chamber is moving toward. Which is to improve the services we provide to our members."

Rivera also said she is glad the chamber leadership recognizes her experience in grant writing. She said her efforts will target several areas.

"We are taking the opportunity now that we are located on Route 66, a historic national landmark," she said. "Also to develop events that would attract businesses, tourism to Barstow and to engage members and potential new members at a higher level. Taking more time to develop partnerships, leading committees to get work done."

Mike Lamb can be reached at 760-475-8337 or mlamb@desertdispatch.com. You can also follow him on Twitter [@mlambdispatch](https://twitter.com/mlambdispatch).