

Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce

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About the Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce

[The Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce](#) is a regional chamber serving 15 towns and municipalities across South Central Connecticut: Bethany, Branford, Cheshire, East Haven, Guilford, Hamden, Madison, Milford, New Haven, North Branford, North Haven, Orange, Wallingford, West Haven, and Woodbridge. Its affiliate, the Quinnipiac Chamber of Commerce, focuses specifically on North Haven and Wallingford. Together, they advocate for the business community across the region.

That advocacy spans across economic development, workforce development, public policy, small business support, and inclusive growth. As Events and Communications Coordinator Mackenzie Vinci puts it, the Chamber's job is "to really be a valuable resource to our members and to the regional business community."

Roughly 1,200 members make up that community, universities, financial institutions, nonprofits, bioscience companies, and manufacturers among them. It is a diverse membership base, and reaching it means running a full calendar of events across the year, anchored by the Chamber's annual business expo and including programs like its golf tournament and its summer member wellness challenge.

One person runs it all. On a staff of 14, Mackenzie manages every Chamber event end-to-end, planning, registration, vendor coordination, on-site execution, and follow-up, while also handling email marketing and social media. Garrett Sheehan,



President and CEO, leads the organization and relies on the same event data to track revenue and registration.

The Challenge: A Chamber Platform That Couldn't Keep Up

For years, the Chamber ran on ChamberMaster, an all-in-one CRM, events, and billing platform built specifically for chambers of commerce. On paper, it covered everything. In practice, it made the most routine tasks harder than they needed to be.

"It was just very old and outdated, and trying to get the information from that specific site was not easy at all. Trying to input it was not easy."

— Mackenzie Vinci, Events and Communications Coordinator

Almost everything around an event happened outside the software. Invitations went out by mail. Reminders and confirmations were sent from Outlook rather than from the platform.

Check-in was the clearest picture of the problem. Attendees arrived, handed over a business card, and waited while a staff member typed their first name, last name, and email into a computer, printed a label, and stuck it to a badge. Two to three minutes per person, multiplied by hundreds of guests, with a line forming at the door of the Chamber's biggest events of the year.

The deeper limitation was structural: event history and member records did not sit together. That made it hard to ask the question Mackenzie now asks of every event: not just who registered, but who is missing.

Why the Chamber Chose Blackthorn

The decision came out of a larger one. When the Chamber moved its member database to [Salesforce](#), the chamber-specific all-in-one platform no longer fit, and the team needed an events solution that would live natively inside the CRM rather than beside it.



"We switched to Blackthorn because we moved to Salesforce. Before that, we used an all-in-one CRM/Events/Billing platform designed specifically for Chambers. Blackthorn allowed us to keep event data tied to our contacts because of its integration with Salesforce."

— Garrett Sheehan, President and CEO

That single capability, event data tied directly to contact records, was the deciding factor. Every registration, every check-in, and every no-show would land on the member record itself, where the Chamber's relationships already lived. No exports, no reconciliation, no second system to maintain.

The final stamp of approval was Garrett's, but the choice was not made in isolation: the marketing, events, and communications teams were all part of the decision. For a chamber already committed to Salesforce, the logic was hard to argue with; the two go hand in hand. The Chamber went live in time to run its first Blackthorn event in December 2022.

"It took a few months to implement and get to the point where we felt comfortable going live. It was just an adjustment learning what to input into the system and then how that would appear to external users."

— Garrett Sheehan, President and CEO

Those few months were spent learning a system, not fighting one. For the most part, the onboarding process was straightforward and, by the team's own account, considerably easier to navigate than ChamberMaster ever had been.

Three Years of Event Data, All in One Place

HOW THE GREATER NEW HAVEN CHAMBER LEVERAGES BLACKTHORN EVENTS

The Big Connect Expo: Three Years, Fifty Percent Growth

[The Big Connect Expo](#) is the Chamber's flagship business expo and its largest event of the year, held every November. A second event runs the same day. Both now sell out.



The growth is the part worth pausing on. Pre-registration has risen by roughly 23% each year — 890 in 2023, 1,098 in 2024, 1,357 in 2025. Over three years on Blackthorn Events, that is more than 50% growth in registrations for a single event.

Big Connect Expo pre-registration: 890 (2023) → 1,098 (2024) → 1,357 (2025) · +52%

Attendance climbed with it, from more than 800 in 2023 to more than 900 in 2024 to more than 1,000 in 2025, better than seven in ten registrants making it through the door, at an event that now sells out before the doors open.

Big Connect Expo attendance: 800+ (2023) → 900+ (2024) → 1,000+ (2025)

"We've consistently seen the number increase in registration throughout the past three years. We've actually gotten to a point of having to do a sellout. It gets sold out every year."

— Mackenzie Vinci, Events and Communications Coordinator

None of those numbers existed in a usable form before Blackthorn. The Chamber can now see the curve and plan the next year against it.

Check-In: From Three Minutes to Thirty Seconds

The Chamber's old check-in process was entirely manual: collect a business card, type the attendee's details into a computer, print a label, apply it to a badge. Two to three minutes per person, longer if the guest had questions.

With the Blackthorn Events mobile check-in app, that same interaction takes 30 seconds to a minute, roughly 75% faster, at a door where hundreds of guests arrive at once.

Check-in time per attendee: 2–3 minutes → 30–60 seconds · ~75% faster

It also gave the Chamber something it had never had before: an actual attendance record. Before the app, staff checked people off by hand, and the data went nowhere. Now every check-in is captured in Salesforce, which means registration-to-attendance is finally a number the team can see rather than estimate.

Fifteen Minutes to a Live Event Page

Building a new event no longer starts from scratch. Mackenzie clones a previous event, adjusts the details, and launches, start to finish, under 15 minutes to stand up



an event registration page. That matters enormously when one person manages a full annual calendar.

Event registration page: built and live in under 15 minutes

The attendee side is just as short: name, company, email address. And because registrations post straight into Salesforce, Mackenzie checks the day's new sign-ups whenever she wants to instead of waiting on a report, a habit that only exists because it takes seconds.

Across the team, the shift from the Chamber's previous platform has cut event administration time by more than half.

Time spent managing events: reduced by more than 50% vs. the Chamber's previous platform

"Blackthorn is very easy to use, very simple. We're able to clone events quickly. Things are very straightforward in a way that doesn't leave you confused. And even from an attendee view, it's simple. If it's not confusing for us, it shouldn't be confusing for attendees."

— Mackenzie Vinci, Events and Communications Coordinator

A Historical Record That Didn't Exist Before

Every event the Chamber has run on Blackthorn since December 2022 is still there—registrations, attendance, and company records— all tied to contacts in Salesforce. That archive has become the team's planning baseline.

Before building any event, Mackenzie pulls last year's numbers and sets a target above them. The Chamber measures event success primarily on two things, sponsorship and attendance, and both are now benchmarked against real history rather than memory.

"I have no data past the Blackthorn events that we have, so that's huge. For every event we do, I use last year's as a benchmark. But it also gives us as a staff an idea of who was in the room — this is who's registered, but who are we missing?"

— Mackenzie Vinci, Events and Communications Coordinator

Every Non-Member Registration Is a Lead

Most Big Connect registrants are already members, so non-member sign-ups are the exception rather than the pipeline. But because registrations flow straight into



Salesforce, the sales team sees each one the moment it lands, and works to convert it before, during, or after the event rather than discovering it weeks later in an export.

In Mackenzie's words, each one is "an opportunity for our sales team to go out and really capture them and have a conversation, just to tell them what the Chamber is about and if they would be interested in membership."

Personal Invitations, Backed by Data

The attendee history also powers the Chamber's most personal outreach. When Mackenzie promotes an upcoming event, she pulls the list of people who attended similar events in prior years and emails them directly, not through a bulk platform, but as an individual invitation from the person who runs the event.

"If somebody has registered for an event the past couple of years, I'll email and invite them to our next event. It helps with that personal communication, because I'm not just sending an email through a platform — it's actually coming directly from me."

— Mackenzie Vinci, Events and Communications Coordinator

Beyond Events: The Summer Wellness Challenge

Not every Chamber program looks like an event. For several summers, the Chamber ran a member wellness challenge — a walking challenge that spanned two to three months — and used Blackthorn Events to manage participation. Nothing about it resembled a standard registration flow, and it worked anyway.

Paying for a Seat

Attendees pay for registration directly through Blackthorn by credit card, with checks available for those who prefer them. Invoicing runs through the Chamber's QuickBooks setup. The practical effect is that a registration and its payment arrive together, attached to the member record, instead of being reconciled against each other afterward.

The Impact: Every Event Builds on the Last

Three years in, the clearest measure of Blackthorn's impact at the Chamber is that the team now has a baseline for everything. Every event builds on the last, and planning starts from what actually happened rather than what someone remembers.



Event administration: 50%+ time reduction · Check-in: ~75% faster · Big Connect Expo: sells out annually

Garrett pulls event revenue and registration numbers directly from Salesforce, which means Chamber leadership can see how an event is performing without waiting on a report from an outside system.

"Our ability to track event attendance within the CRM has been extremely helpful."

— Garrett Sheehan, President and CEO

For a 14-person staff with one person running every event, that time adds up. Hours no longer spent typing names at a check-in table or rebuilding events from scratch go back into the two measures Mackenzie uses to judge whether an event worked: sponsorship and attendance.

Both are moving in the right direction. Attendance has grown every year. And sponsorship has grown with it. Across a calendar this size, numbers vary event to event, but the Chamber now consistently exceeds its sponsorship budgets, selling against three years of hard attendance data rather than recollection.

The Chamber has never put a stopwatch to what the old way cost. Ask what tracking registrations by hand used to take, and the answer is countless hours, the kind of work that never appeared on anyone's job description and quietly consumed the week anyway. Today it is tracked seamlessly, in real time, by the same system that holds the member record.

Growing Together

The Chamber's Blackthorn footprint is about to expand. Working with their Customer Success Manager, Mackenzie brought the Chamber's package up to the current release and opened up a set of capabilities that had been out of reach on the older version.

"This has been a great couple of months in terms of Blackthorn, because I've connected with so many different people that can help us with the software. It helps to meet with Blackthorn team members regularly because they are able to point me in the right direction and be like, hey, this is what you should be doing, this is



what other companies do. So I have a better idea of what we can do to constantly keep improving the platform."

— Mackenzie Vinci, Events and Communications Coordinator

[Smart Scheduler](#) is first on the list. **Automated confirmations, reminders, and follow-ups**, including [SMS](#) to registrants, will replace the manual sends that still take up time around every event.

[Smart Capture](#) is next. The Chamber still collects business cards at on-site registration; Smart Capture **scans them, captures the data, and syncs it** straight into the Salesforce campaign, closing the last manual gap in the check-in process.

[Mobile badge printing](#) returns to the plan for this November's Big Connect Expo, with the Blackthorn team on hand to support the rollout. [Event Navigator](#), with its new **interactive event map and attendee app**, is on the horizon as the Chamber looks at how to guide more than a thousand people through its largest event of the year.

Ask what great ROI looks like from here, and the answer is not a target number. It is more than a number: it's continuing to expand the events program and pushing further into a platform the Chamber already knows it hasn't fully mined.

Realizing ROI

At the Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce, ROI from Blackthorn shows up in capacity, continuity, and confidence, the things a one-person events operation needs most.

Check-in that once took two to three minutes per attendee now takes 30 to 60 seconds. Event administration takes less than half the time it used to. Big Connect Expo registration has grown from 890 to 1,357 in three years, better than 50%, with attendance up from more than 800 to more than 1,000 and sponsorship running ahead of budget. Every event since December 2022 is preserved as a benchmark for the next one. Leadership can also see event performance in the same system where every member relationship already lives.

"The data that Blackthorn has been able to provide us year after year allows for us and our members to have a simple, at-ease check-in and registration process."

— Mackenzie Vinci, Events and Communications Coordinator



Three years of event history, tied to 1,200 member records, in the hands of the one person who runs every Chamber event – that is what the Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce did not have before Blackthorn, and what it builds on now.

Ready to tie every event back to the members who matter most? [Book a call with the Blackthorn team today.](#)