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## Silver Spring chamber head felt call to do something new

### State's approach to business remains a challenge

by [Kevin James Shay](#) Staff writer



Dan Gross/The Gazette

Jane Redicker, president of the Greater Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce, who recently was named the Maryland Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives Chamber Executive of the Year.

Growing up on a farm in rural Indiana, Jane E. Redicker observed how many girls in her high school during the 1970s were steered into administrative or teaching careers.

“I felt a call to do something different,” said Redicker, president and CEO of the Greater Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce. She recently was named the Maryland Chamber of Commerce Executive of the Year by the Maryland Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives.

She wrote for her high school newspaper and chose journalism to study in college. A federal government internship program took her to the Washington, D.C., area working at U.S. Marine Corps headquarters for the summers after her junior and senior years.

Rather than return to Indiana after the end of the internship, Redicker decided to look for a job in the area. She landed an editor position with a community newspaper in Montgomery Village, then branched into writing for nonprofits and a public relations firm. At Fleishman Hillard, she became a vice president and met her husband, Steven Drake.

In the fall of 1994, she moved to Beijing with her husband, who had been sent there to open the first Fleishman Hillard office in China. Drake had joined the American Chamber of Commerce in China, or AmCham China, a nonprofit organization that represents U.S. companies and

individuals doing business there. He received a fax from the chamber seeking candidates for its first executive director, and Redicker soon got the job.

“It was a tremendous opportunity,” she said. “Being there was almost like a four-year honeymoon for us. It was a fabulous adventure. ... Living in another country like that really broadens your perspective on the world.”

## **From China to Silver Spring**

Soon after arriving back in Montgomery County in 1998, Redicker and Drake’s daughter was born. She stayed home taking care of her for a few years while doing some consulting work. In 2005, she read a story in the Gaithersburg Gazette about the Silver Spring chamber’s president leaving.

“Their office was really close to where I live in Colesville,” Redicker said. “It would be a great commute for me.”

During her eight years and counting leading the chamber, Redicker has transformed the organization into “one of our state’s most influential, go-to business organizations,” said Julie Statland, past chamber chair and a principal with Silver Spring insurance and financial services firm Statland & Katz Ltd.

“Jane is one of those exceptional business and community leaders who make a difference,” added Kathleen Snyder, president and CEO of the Maryland Chamber of Commerce.

Redicker has worked to bring in more sponsorship revenue, launched an improved website and bolstered government advocacy efforts at the chamber. The organization was founded in 1996 and has about 400 member organizations from not just Silver Spring but Bethesda, Gaithersburg, Rockville, Washington and other areas.

One of the biggest challenges remains dealing with Maryland’s somewhat precarious image of not always being welcoming to businesses, she said.

“The economy is improving, but we still need to advocate strongly with elected officials to help them understand the impact of some of their policy decisions on local businesses,” Redicker said.

Along with other area chamber leaders, a big issue she has worked on in recent years is the Montgomery County energy tax, which was raised significantly in 2010, an increase that originally was planned to sunset in 2012, which did not occur.

“With my fellow chamber executives, we’ve been able to persuade the County Council to reduce the energy tax these past two years,” Redicker said.

A proposed stormwater pollution fee hike, commonly referred to as a “rain tax,” is another matter of great concern to local businesses, she said.

“We are still figuring out how much of an impact that will have,” Redicker said.

With the vast majority of businesses small, leaders of those companies don't have time or the staff to lobby on such matters, she noted. That's where chambers of commerce come in.

“Even during the recession, chambers of commerce were receiving a lot of support,” Redicker said. “Business leaders especially recognize during the down times that they have to get back to basics, which is doing business through networking and maintaining solid connections. Chambers of commerce provide those opportunities. ... People want to work with businesses they know and trust, and that level of trust is often gained through chamber activities.”