



Ljubomir Stambuk, President and CEO, World Affairs Council of Charlotte MELISSA KEY

Helping bring the world to Charlotte

Leadership Award: L.J. Stambuk

The World Affairs Council of Charlotte has helped improve the region's international education and business opportunities for 34 years. The nonprofit organization has changed and evolved just as Charlotte has grown and become a more sophisticated and cosmopolitan city.

“The WACC offers a multi-faceted round-up of special programs and events that provide leadership for global thinking,” says [L.J. Stambuk](#), president and CEO of WACC. “We believe that a broad perspective is necessary for effective competition in the today's economy. To be effective traders and exporters and attract foreign direct investment to Charlotte, you need to know more about the world around you.”

Stambuk brought his experience in the C-suite of global companies to elevate the performance of WACC. He spent 20 years in senior leadership with such companies as Applied Semiconductor, Ahold USA and Centrocop before joining the World Affairs

Council as executive director in 2006. And like in the corporate world, he climbed to president in 2009 and was named CEO in 2011.

Some of WACC's most prominent programs include its Speaker Series. Each year, the organization recruits internationally renowned government leaders, authors and policy makers to discuss diverse topics related to global economic crisis, energy policy and climate change, current events, international affairs and other issues.

WACC also regularly hosts current and former ambassadors and high-ranking government officials to discuss the diplomatic relationship between the United States and countries around the world through the Ambassadors Circle Series. And the Council's CEO Series hosts chief executives from organizations headquartered in the greater Charlotte area and beyond who share information about their respective companies from a global perspective, the role they play in economies worldwide and their views on financial markets around the world.

For a local perspective on the economy, the Business Breakfast Series provides insight from business experts and key decision-makers from the Charlotte area who offer their perspectives on the impact of global events on the economy.

How does the WACC impact Charlotte's international trade?

In multiple ways. Last year we had about 3,800 people participate in our programming. We have programs where we bring in CEOs of global companies, including the CEO of Porsche this February, for in-depth discussions about what their company does, and how we can support their efforts to create a presence in the area. We also host ambassadors and presidents from foreign companies. Out of the 95 councils that exist around the U.S., we are known to be the most successful in attracting foreign dignitaries. During ambassador visits, we organize meetings with companies like [Duke Energy](#), [Bank of America](#), and local politicians and economic development experts. These efforts help promote trade and improve relations between the Charlotte region and other countries. We also send a signal to the people who moved here from other counties that we care. This city is a good place for people to relocate and start their companies.

Do you have any other programs that help promote international trade?

We promote learning at least one foreign language, which I believe makes us far more effective and efficient in trade. I used to work for large Dutch food retailer called Ahold. When I was traveling in Holland, I was amazed how everyone spoke at least one foreign language. Holland is about the size of New Hampshire with little natural resources. But it has a very high quality of life and is one of the top foreign direct investors in the U.S. I spoke to this young Dutch man who explained that Holland uses trade as a competitive advantage. He said to be a good trader, you need to learn the language of your customer. This gives you insight into their culture and thought process.

What challenges does Charlotte face when it comes to international trade?

Charlotte has truly become a dynamic player and positioned itself as a global, mid-sized city. But most people abroad still only know about cities like New York, L.A. and Boston – places they see in movies and on TV. We have to let more people know what we have to offer, like our airport, educational institutions, workforce and quality of life. Most people in Charlotte work hand in hand to promote the region. But our biggest challenge remains getting our story out there. We have to be more intentional in sharing what we have with the world. Every Charlottean who travels abroad can be a brand ambassador.

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