



A Letter from

Heather Valudes

President & CEO of Lancaster Chamber

Dear America,

As Lancaster County joins communities across the nation in celebrating America's 250th birthday, I think about the people who have shaped our history, not only through moments of national significance, but through everyday acts of leadership, service, and civic responsibility.

Our nation's story has always been shaped by local communities. Across generations, progress has depended on people who stepped forward to lead, build businesses, serve their neighbors, and invest in the places they call home. While America's history is vast and complex, it is ultimately a collection of local stories, each contributing to the larger story of our country.

Lancaster County is proud to be part of that story.

Long before Lancaster County became known for its thriving business community, fertile farmland, and vibrant downtowns, it played an important role in the nation's history. Lancaster briefly served as the capital of the United States during the Revolutionary War. Our agricultural roots helped sustain a growing nation and continue to shape our identity today. And throughout the 19th century, Lancaster County was also part of the Underground Railroad, where freedom seekers risked their own safety in pursuit of freedom and opportunity for others.

The legacies of leaders such as Thaddeus Stevens and Lydia Hamilton Smith show us that meaningful progress often requires courage, conviction, and a willingness to challenge the status quo. The recent opening of The Thaddeus Stevens & Lydia Hamilton Smith Center for History and Democracy serves as an important reminder that history is not something we simply preserve; it is something we learn from. The questions that shaped their work around leadership, participation, opportunity, and belonging remain just as relevant today.

Those lessons are especially important as we consider the role civic leadership plays in our communities.

Strong communities are built on trust. They are at their best when people stay informed, engage in respectful dialogue, participate in civic life, and work together to solve challenges. Civic leadership is not reserved for elected officials. It belongs to business owners, educators, nonprofit leaders, volunteers, and residents who choose to contribute to something larger than themselves.

For generations, businesses have been an important part of that civic fabric. They have done more than create jobs and drive economic growth. They have invested in downtowns, supported

schools, sponsored community events, mentored future leaders, served on nonprofit boards, and helped strengthen the places where people live and work. Business success and community success have always been connected, and that remains true today.

Since 1872, the Lancaster Chamber has had the privilege of representing and supporting Lancaster County's business community. Throughout that time, we have witnessed the power of collaboration, civic engagement, and local leadership to move our community forward. We believe informed and engaged communities are essential to both a healthy economy and a healthy democracy.

As America celebrates this milestone anniversary, we also have an opportunity to look ahead. The next chapter of our nation's story will be shaped by the choices we make today. It will be written by people who are willing to engage in their communities, support local institutions, mentor future generations, and participate in the conversations that help define our future.

I encourage each of us to consider how we can contribute to the continued strength of our communities. Whether through volunteering, serving on a board, attending public meetings, supporting local organizations, voting, or simply taking the time to understand the issues facing our neighbors, every act of engagement matters.

I also encourage fellow business and community leaders to take part in this national initiative by writing your own letter to America. Share the story of your community, the values that guide your leadership, and the future you hope to help build. The American story has always been told through local voices, and every community has an important role to play in shaping what comes next.

As we celebrate 250 years of our nation's history, Lancaster County is proud of the role it has played and optimistic about the future we can build together. The challenges ahead will be different from those faced by previous generations, but the values that have sustained our communities for centuries remain unchanged: service, participation, leadership, and a commitment to one another.

Those values have shaped Lancaster County's past. They continue to guide us today. And they will help define the next chapter of America's story.



Heather Valudes
President & CEO
Lancaster Chamber