



A Birthday Letter to America

Dear America,

Two hundred and fifty years ago, a group of ordinary people made an extraordinary wager: that free men and women, governing themselves and building through their own enterprise, could create something greater than any crown had ever handed down. It was audacious. It was unproven. And it has been carried forward by every generation since through work, sacrifice, and the stubborn belief that tomorrow can be better than today.

That same spirit built Southwest Florida.

A little over a century ago, this corner of the country was frontier. Where Naples now stands, there were fishing villages, farmland, and wilderness that most maps left blank. It took visionaries and workers willing to bet on the impossible to change that. The Tamiami Trail was pushed through the Everglades and completed in 1928, connecting a remote coast to the rest of the nation and opening Collier County to commerce, opportunity, and growth. The Chamber's own address sits on that road today. It is a daily reminder that prosperity here was never inherited. It was built.

Every generation since has added its own ingenuity. Farmers in Immokalee who help feed the nation through the winter. Entrepreneurs and small businesses who turned a seasonal town into one of America's most dynamic economies. Families who came from every state and many nations to build a life on this coast. And when the storms came and took so much, our neighbors did what Americans have always done. They cleared the debris, rebuilt what was lost, and came back stronger.

The Greater Naples Chamber has been part of that story since 1947. For nearly eighty years, our purpose has never wavered: to strengthen the businesses that create jobs, to advocate for the policies that let them thrive, and to bring people together across every difference to solve the problems no one can solve alone. That last role matters more today than ever. In a time when so much pulls Americans apart, chambers of commerce remain one of the few places where employers, educators, elected officials, and neighbors still sit at the same table and choose progress over division.

Our challenges, after all, are not partisan. A family that cannot afford to live where they work does not care who gets credit for fixing it. A business that cannot find skilled workers is not looking for an argument. It is looking for a solution. That is the work we do, and we do it in service of a simple, deeply American idea: that opportunity should be broad, that growth should be shared, and that a rising economy should lift the whole community, not just a fortunate few.

As we mark this milestone, we also renew our commitment to the values that made all of it possible. Freedom. Free enterprise. The dignity of work. The conviction that where you start should never determine how far you can go. These are not relics to be admired behind glass. They are a trust to be defended and passed on stronger than we found it.

To whoever opens this letter in the years to come: we hope you find a Collier County more prosperous, more connected, and more united than the one we know today. We hope the businesses we are building now become the institutions that shaped your community, and that the young leaders we are investing in today become the ones who carried it forward. Most of all, we hope you inherited the same belief that carried us here, that the future is not something we wait for, but something we build together.

That has always been the American promise. For 250 years, we have answered its call. And here, on the Gulf Coast of Florida, we will keep answering it by convening, advocating, building, and leading, for the next 250 years and beyond.

Happy 250th Birthday, America. The best is still ahead of us, and it is ours to build.

With gratitude and confidence in what comes next,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kristina Park', with a large, stylized 'P' at the end.

Kristina Park
President & CEO
Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce