

By [BARBARA VENEZIA](#)

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

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The Newport Beach Chamber of Commerce announced Tuesday that long-time president and CEO Richard Luehrs will retire from the position he has held for more than 30 years.

Tim Brown, chairman of the chamber, sent an email to members announcing the retirement.

Newport Beach Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Richard Luehrs and his wife Susan Luehrs pose for a photo. Chamber officials announced Tuesday that Luehrs is retiring from his role with the chamber.

"Richard's tenure at the NBCC is a remarkable story in an era where the average of a chamber commerce President/CEO is five years," Brown wrote in the email.

The announcement goes on to praise Luehrs and his leadership.

"Through enduring and outstanding leadership, the Chamber has evolved into an organization that boasts hundreds of members of businesses large and small as well as legions of volunteers, who for many years now, have played an important role in marketing the City through the Christmas Boat Parade and the Taste of Newport," the email states.

This past year has been a tough one for Luehrs and the chamber. Financial ills, which have plagued the Chamber for the past several years, have been well reported.

In November, due to budget cuts, the chamber opted to not hold the Citizen of the Year Awards. This caused quite a stir, and when Evelyn Hart and the Friends of Oasis wanted to step in and hold the event, the [chamber blocked that effort](#) on the basis that it owned the rights to the event.

November also found Luehrs facing questions about the chamber's viability and future as [Visit Newport Beach President Gary Sherwin unveiled a new plan](#) that incorporated many of the functions now performed by the Chamber.

Sherwin said Tuesday that his new entity, Newport Beach and Company, became official Jan. 1 after approval from the Secretary of State.

Branching out from this organization are various divisions, each with a specific function. Newport Beach and Co. is the main entity and divisions – such as the Newport Beach Foundation, Film Newport Beach, Celebrate Newport Beach, Dine Newport Beach, Enterprise Newport Beach and Visit Newport Beach – overlap functions once performed by the Chamber.

"We basically become the city's marketing agency and the divisions are like individual clients with the chief purpose to support the city of Newport Beach," Sherwin said in November.

Brown writes in the email: "In today's difficult business climate, it has become apparent that the NBCC can no longer serve all of these constituencies. As a result, Richard has decided to retire from his current role as President/CEO so that he can focus fulltime on business advocacy, thus allowing the NBCC to narrow its mission to better serve our member businesses in these challenging economic times."

Oddly enough, in his announcement, Brown also touched on the chamber's political action committee, which has been criticized for its lack of financial accountability. Luehrs had refused to open the financials to the city or anyone else.

"NBCC formed a political action group that took reasonable and respected positions on local initiatives as well as supported candidates running for City Council who would keep the business interests of the community in the forefront of policy making," Brown wrote.

He also stated the political action group has been removed from direct affiliation with the chamber, and leaves the door open to an advocacy role in the future.

"Although Richard's departure is met with the sadness for the closing out of an extraordinary period for the NBCC, we are excited to begin a new path that will enable us to reexamine our role in serving the unique Newport Beach business community in a world that has been dramatically altered by technology and the current state of the economy," Brown wrote.

In the coming days Brown says an interim CEO of the chamber will be announced.

Rumors are former City Council member Steve Rosansky is that person.

I called Rosansky and asked if the rumor was true.

He told me to call Tim Brown.

I told him since the rumor was about him, a simple yes or no would do.

He said "No comment."