

# “Founding” Chamber Members’ Support Remains Strong

By Matt Beardmore

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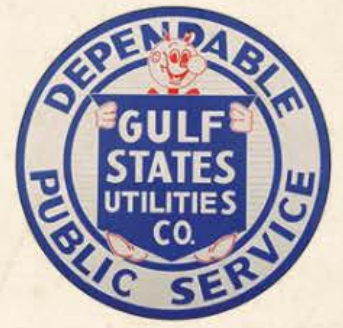


Originally known as the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, the Conroe/Lake Conroe Chamber of Commerce has undergone a number of changes and experienced a tremendous amount of growth since it was founded in 1934. From naming Charline Muller its first woman Chairman of the Board 40 years ago, to officially becoming the Greater Conroe/Lake Conroe Area Chamber of Commerce in 1997 with the merger of the Conroe and Lake Conroe Chambers of Commerce to earning the highest possible designation with the United States Chamber of Commerce in 2020, a 5-Star Accreditation.

Throughout all this change and growth, what has remained consistent, along with the Chamber’s mission of “strengthening the economic environment and quality of life in Montgomery County,” has been three members that remain active with the chamber today under new names: Gulf States Utilities Company (now Entergy Texas, Inc.), The Lufkin-Conroe Telephone Exchange (now Consolidated Communications, Inc.), and The Conroe Courier (now Houston Chronicle Media – The Conroe Courier). These charter members are proud to have grown along with the chamber and value the strong partnerships that membership has allowed them to build within the business community and community as a whole.

## Entergy Texas, Inc.

Formed in 1994 when its parent company, New Orleans-based Entergy Corporation, merged with Gulf States Utilities, Entergy Texas services more than 500,000 customers in 27 counties. Entergy Corporation “delivers electricity to 3 million utility customers in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas.”



“Our service territory is important to us,” said Stuart Barrett, Vice President of Customer Service at Entergy Texas. “The Chamber gives us an avenue by which we integrate with the local community, whether it’s a business or resident that needs electrical service.”

“When a storm hits or when you go into a natural disaster, having these relationships matter because the businesses and individuals know that Entergy is prepared for the worst to happen and we’re going to bring full force to restore power,” he added.



Entergy Texas is a community-minded utility that has supported the Chamber since 1934.

*“The Board also voted a resolution of appreciation to Mayor Crighton for furnishing office furniture and to Charles Harritt for transporting it to the Chamber of Commerce office in City Hall,” according to the Courier, June 29, 1934.*

**1949** – The Chamber plays a major role in the production of Conroe’s Historicade celebration – a five-day event that captures the founding and rich history of Conroe and Montgomery County early pioneers. The event was held in Lewis Park and was put on by a Hollywood producer.





In addition to being able to nurture relationships with the community, Entergy, a Platinum Chamber partner, also values the leadership development and networking opportunities the Chamber provides.

Entergy Texas is well represented on the Conroe / Lake Conroe Chamber Board, as Steve Pilgrim (retired) serves as Vice Chair-Government Affairs on the Executive Committee and Brittany Chandler, Sr. Manager, Residential Strategy at Entergy Texas, is a Director.

"We stay connected across all the areas we serve," said Barrett, who has served on the Board of Directors for The Woodlands Area Chamber of Commerce for the last two-plus years.

## HCN, The Courier



For 132 years, HCN, The Courier has served Montgomery County in a myriad of roles. Ever since its birth in 1892, it's been a chronicler of history; a familiar, folksy back-fence gossip; a champion of just causes; a watchdog against corruption; and more generally, a great source of news, information and entertainment in Montgomery County. What began as the Conroe Enterprise evolved into the weekly publication known simply as the Conroe Courier. The title "Daily" was inserted on the newspaper's nameplate in 1955, soon after owner Rigby Owen Sr. began publishing five days a week (except Saturday and Monday). In 1976, the paper became the Montgomery County Daily Courier, in an attempt to better reflect the explosive growth of The Woodlands and South Montgomery County. Today, it is known as The Courier, published by the Houston Chronicle's Houston Community Newspapers group, reflecting its countywide identity and coverage.

**THE COURIER**  
OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY

## Consolidated Communications. Inc.



With roots dating back to 1894 when the Mattoon Telephone Company was incorporated, Consolidated Communications, also a Platinum Chamber member, has become a "leading broadband and business communications provider serving businesses across rural and metro communities and a 20-plus state service area."

In 2004, Consolidated Communications purchased Dallas-based TXU Communications, which had acquired the Lufkin-Conroe Telephone Exchange in 1997. The Lufkin-Conroe Telephone Exchange, founded in 1898 and incorporated in the State of Texas in 1910, "brought telephone service to the East Texas town of Lufkin, with its service area expanding to include Conroe, Texas, and the surrounding communities."

Through decades of acquisitions and mergers, Consolidated Communications – which announced in October 2023 that it was going to be acquired by a private-equity firm in a move expected to close by early 2025 – continues to put great value in its partnership with the Conroe/Lake Conroe Chamber of Commerce.

"The partnership with the Chamber has really been productive," said Bob Udell, Consolidated Communications President and CEO. "I'm thrilled to have seen the community change and to be able to benefit from all that the Chamber has meant to me in terms of getting acquainted in Texas – I moved here in the late 90s. One of the values I've promoted in our company is building stronger community. Partnering with the Chamber and being active is important to our success in the Greater Montgomery County region."

Udell said the three biggest positives of Chamber memberships are the workforce development opportunities, educational opportunities, and advocacy.

"The Chamber has been really effective in being a strong partner for us as we pursue turning our network platforms into solutions for the community," he said. "The Chamber gives us an avenue for what's important."



**Bob Udell, Consolidated Communications**

**1950s** – A small agricultural committee from the Chamber began hosting "Field Days" each year. As time went on, these small events eventually resembled something close to what the community now knows as The Montgomery County Fair. In 1979, the Montgomery County Fair Association was incorporated, separating this new entity from the Chamber.

**1965** – In partnership with the local committee of The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, the Chamber helps spread the word about the first annual Go-Texan activities and sporting events. In 2024, the Conroe / Willis / The Woodlands Metro Go-Texan Committee along with the Chamber will be a part of the 59th annual Go-Texan Parade. ➔