

LKN Chamber Connects Young Professionals



The Advanced Wealth Strategies (AWS) Front Office Team (from left) are Renee Simpson, Douglas Marion, Amelia Black, Rich Jakiel, Jay Neal and Chereese Spand.

by *Karel Bond Lucander* | photography courtesy of *Douglas Marion*

Are you between the ages of 21 and 39 and want to network with other young professionals, but aren't sure where to do that? Maybe you work remotely or recently moved to the Lake Norman area and want to make career and social connections? Then the Lake Norman Chamber of Commerce's Young Professionals (YP) could be just what you're looking for.

"Even if you're between jobs, as long as you want to be involved in the community and better yourself, the organization would open its arms to you," says Bill Russell, president and CEO of the Lake Norman Chamber of Commerce.

Currently, there are nearly 50 YP members, and each month they are invited to attend a professional development event at Eleven Lakes Brewing in Cornelius and an "off-the-clock" social

at different area venues. The YP group also holds a quarterly philanthropic event, with proceeds helping local organizations including the Ada Jenkins Center, Pat's Place and Angels & Sparrows Community Table & Resource Center.

"We recently held our putt-putt tournament at Frankie's to benefit Pat's Place, and it was a lot of fun, raising more than \$3,000," says Douglas Marion, long-time member of the YP group. Between events, YP members often meet to help more.

"We landscape, paint and clean up trash at Ada Jenkins on Saturdays," Marion says. They also assist with the area Big Brothers Big Sisters of America annual summer event, Big Day at the Lake. This event gives underprivileged kids a chance to play in Lake Norman, ride boats and enjoy a picnic lunch.



Douglas Marion - board chair

For a \$50 annual fee, YP members have all access to all-member Lake Norman Chamber events. These include coffee hours, networking lunches, after-hour mixers, ribbon-cuttings and grand-openings, round table meetings and an annual golf outing.

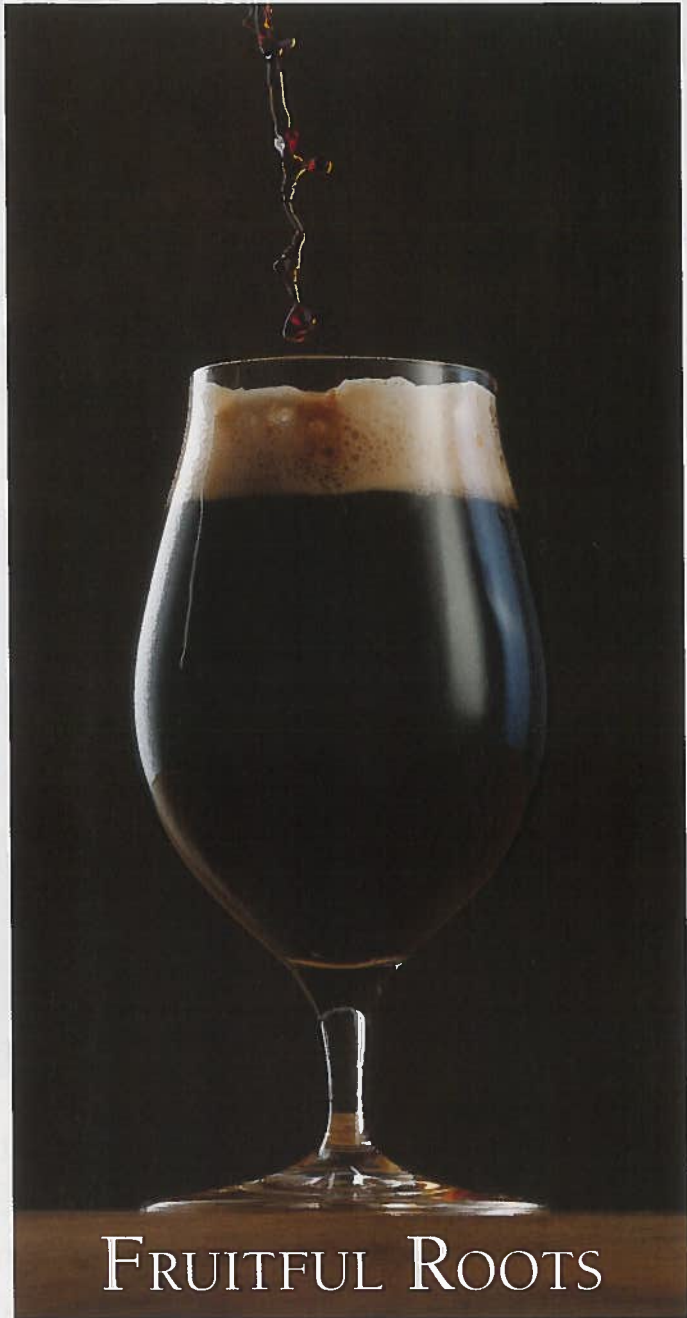
Beginning Jan. 1, Marion, who has served as the finance chairperson of the chamber's board for three years, will be appointed the new chairperson of the board. Now 36, he began his association with the Lake Norman Chamber 12 years ago at age 24. He was instrumental in helping to launch the chamber's YP group in 2014.

For eight years he has been involved as a young professional, but now will be overseeing the entire chamber," Russell says. "We're excited to have Douglas as our board chair; I think he's going to do a fantastic job."

Marion is president of Advanced Wealth Strategies, a financial planning and advising company in Cornelius. He says his association with the Lake Norman Chamber's Young Professionals has been important for his own growth as a business owner. "It's a great avenue to meet people and get involved in the area business community. There are people from all kinds of backgrounds, from those working for large corporations to those who own their own business." He says it also fills a void in this region, where many young professionals are moving from other parts of the country.

Many of these members have moved from somewhere else and haven't been able to meet other young professionals," he says.

As someone who has spent years with the Lake Norman Chamber, primarily through the Young Professionals, Marion is committed to continuing to strengthen and grow this group along with the rest of the Chamber. For more information, visit www.lakenormanchamber.org. ■



Thirsty for more meetup venues, Douglas Marion and his wife Shannon, brother Travis, and wife Chelsea plan to open "Fruitful Roots Brewing" in Old Town Cornelius, across from the new Cain Center for the Arts in early 2024. With a decade of brewing experience, Travis has already won many awards for his craft beers. At Fruitful Roots, they will feature family-influenced recipes, like the pecan stout that's a nod to grandma's famous pecan tarts. Another new addition on the horizon: Douglas and Shannon are expecting their first child, a daughter, in January.