



Sauk Valley Area
chamber of commerce

UNITED STATES CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

ACCREDITED



IN THIS ISSUE:



PAGE 5



PAGE 7



PAGE 8

Partnering for Success

DECEMBER 2025



WARD, MURRAY, PACE & JOHNSON, P.C.
LAW OFFICES

JOIN WARD, MURRAY, PACE & JOHNSON
AND THE SVACC FOR

BUSINESS AFTER HOURS

SVACC Members are invited to a
festive evening of networking,
refreshments, and door prizes!

**THURSDAY,
DECEMBER 18**

5:00-6:30 p.m.

THE RUSTY FOX
1 E. 3RD ST., STERLING



Sauk Valley Area
chamber of commerce

THINK  FIRST
SVCC.EDU

Spring Registration Now Open!

December Meetings

December 9 Exec

December 11 Ambassadors

December 16 Board

December 16 Agri-business Committee

December 17 Professional Women's Network

December 18 Hispanic Business Leaders

December 18 Business After Hours

Sauk Valley Area Chamber of Commerce Directors & Staff

Executive Committee

President: Pam Fluck

First Vice President: Geoff Wright

Second Vice President: Alejandro Rivera

Treasurer: Tim Determan

Past President: Dr. Jon Mandrell

Term Ends January 31, 2026

Pam Fluck, Sauk Valley Bank

Sandi Cavazos, US Bank

Tim Determan, Pinney Printing

Lance Buser, Wal-Mart DC #7024

Term Ends January 31, 2027

Ryan Olson, Ward Murray Pace & Johnson

Mike Ceruzzi, Moore Tire

Josh Knie, Knie Appliance & TV

Term Ends January 31, 2028

Alejandro Rivera, RE/MAX Sauk Valley

Geoff Wright, CGH Medical Center

Josh Johnson, Whiteside Area Career Center

Dr. Jon Mandrell, SVCC

Rebecca Munoz-Ripley, YWCA

Staff

Dallas Knack—Executive Director

Ronda Borgmann—Financial Specialist

The views expressed by any member of the Chamber do not represent the Sauk Valley Area Chamber of Commerce in any official endorsement or support of any specific elected official or political party. Any products, events, statements, views or opinions offered or expressed by members are not the products, events, statements, views or opinions of the SVACC, nor endorsed by the Chamber or its membership at large.

A Message from the Director

As 2025 comes to a close, I want to express my gratitude for your continued support of the Sauk Valley Area Chamber of Commerce. This year, we've made meaningful progress on initiatives like workforce development, leadership opportunities, and community involvement. We've seen increased support and re-energizing of our committees and our membership at large. These efforts reflect the power of collaboration and the strength of our members.

As we look to 2026, our focus remains on fostering growth, supporting Sauk Valley area businesses, and enhancing opportunities for all members. Thank you for your commitment to making the Sauk Valley a great place to live and work.



Nominations are now open for the 2025 Chamber Champion

The Sauk Valley Area Chamber of Commerce is now accepting nominations for the **Sauk Valley Area Chamber Champion Award**—the region's highest honor recognizing exceptional leadership, service, and community impact.

This distinguished award celebrates an individual or group whose dedication, vision, and actions have made the Sauk Valley a better place to live, work, and thrive. The Chamber Champion is someone who truly *goes above and beyond*—whether through professional accomplishments, volunteer service, or extraordinary efforts that strengthen the fabric of our community.

If you know someone whose commitment and contributions embody the very best of the Sauk Valley, we invite you to nominate them for this prestigious recognition.

Submit a nomination by 12/4/25: bit.ly/3LeiBNg

Investor Update December 2025

NEW INVESTORS

Braden Counseling Center PC
2308 E. Lincolnway, Sterling
815-787-9000

Saint Katharine Medical Center
403 E. First St., Dixon
815-288-5531

Stratus Networks
416 E. Main St., Ste 601, Peoria
309-253-9920

Kurt & Brian Properties
603 1st Ave., Sterling
815-535-7947

Sauk Valley Water Ski Shows
Sewards Park, Rock Falls
815-499-3819

The 9th Hole Mini Golf & More
Northland Mall, Sterling
815-499-3819

Matthew's Carpentry
By appointment—Sterling
815-499-3819

Rock Star Donuts
121 E. 3rd St., Sterling
815-632-3110

The Rusty Fox
1 E 3rd St., Sterling
815-787-8369

INVESTOR RENEWALS

Adobe Acrobat
Central Heating & Cooling, Inc.
Duncan Land and Auction
E.D. Etnyre & Co.
Kunes RV
Moore Tires, Inc

PFLAG Sauk Valley
Raymond James & Associates
Rosemeyer Management Group
Sauk Valley Pride
Showplace Antiques & Treasures
Sterling Federal Bank
The Butcher Shop

Over \$1000 Invested

Central Bank Illinois
CGH Medical Center
Community State Bank
Farmer's National Bank
Midland States Bank
Sauk Valley Bank
Select Employees Credit Union
Sterling Federal Bank
The IFH Group
US Bank
Wahl Clipper Corp.
Wal-Mart DC #7024
Ward, Murray, Pace & Johnson

We would like to give special recognition to the following groups who provide extra support to the Sauk Valley Area Chamber of Commerce. This extra effort and support is truly appreciated. If you have the opportunity to express your sincere appreciation to these members, please do so!

150% Club

Helm Civil
Hill's Electric Motor Service, Inc.
Lance's Plumbing
LK Design Source
Loescher HVAC
M5 Industries, LLC
Mattox Insurance Agency

RE/MAX Sauk Valley
Reagan Mass Transit District
Rock River Hospice & Home
Select Employees Credit Union
Stratus Networks
Surf Internet
United Craftsmen

110% Club

Allure of Sterling
Altran Magnetics
Astec Industries
Bargain Exterminators
Best Cob
Bollman Auto Center
Brown Construction Company

Bushel Basket Candle Co., Inc.
Compeer Financial
Dennis Electric of Tampico, Inc.
Gold Star Cleaning LLC
Hollyhock Hill Farms
Kiwanis Club of Sterling
Rock River Lumber & Grain
Scholl Insurance Agency, Inc.

ServPro of Sterling
Showplace Antiques & Treasures
Smeltzer Insurance Agency
St. Vincent DePaul Society
The Mertes Law Firm, P.C.
Trinity Insurance & Financial Services

Chamber Ambassadors

Allie Johnston – University of Illinois Extension

Brad Lucas—Rouse Consulting Group

Brian Hawkins—Brian Hawkins Insurance,
The Cornerstone Agency

Cael Sanders—Sterling Federal Bank

Cassi Pistole—Allure Healthcare

Ethan Harrington—Ken Nelson Auto Group

Esther Salazar —CGH Medical Center

John Kelly—Culver's of Rock Falls

Karen Voss – Morningside of Sterling

Lyndsey Kelly—Sauk Valley Community College

Mary White – Community State Bank

Sami Wiggins — Castor Home Nursing

Sherry DeWalt – CGH Health Foundation

Tygen Bausman—Sauk Valley Bank

Ambassador Spotlight: Brad Lucas, Rouse Consulting

Meet Brad Lucas, originally from Davenport, Iowa, and a proud Sauk Valley resident since 2019. Brad and his wife, Cynthia, have been married for three years and truly enjoy being part of the welcoming and close-knit Sauk Valley community.



Brad is the Business Development Manager for Rouse Consulting Group, an IT managed services provider based in Moline, Illinois. Rouse Consulting Group partners with businesses to deliver reliable technology support, cybersecurity solutions, strategic IT planning, and ongoing technology management. Brad and the Rouse team are excited to expand their presence in the Sauk Valley area and look forward to supporting local organizations as they grow and strengthen their technology foundations.

In addition to his professional role, Brad enjoys serving as a Chamber Ambassador. This role gives him the opportunity to meet and interact with local businesses and the individuals who run them—connections he deeply values.

Brad is grateful to call Sauk Valley home and looks forward to continuing to build relationships and contribute to the community.

Ambassador Spotlight: Ethan Harrington, Ken Nelson Auto

Hi there! My name is Ethan Harrington, and I'm a Sales and Leasing Consultant at Ken Nelson Auto Group right here in the Sauk Valley area. Although I've only been a part of the Sauk Valley Area Chamber of Commerce for a few months, it's already become one of the most rewarding parts of my professional life. At the dealership, my job is to help customers find the right vehicle for their needs, budget and lifestyle. The car buying process can be a huge, stressful hassle but I take tremendous pride in being that helping hand to make things just a little bit easier. Outside of work, I am also a CNA and I'm currently building my own mobile notary business, Prairie State Notary!



I joined the Chamber of Commerce because connection and community matter to me. I absolutely love learning about all of the incredible local businesses, meeting the people behind them and ultimately finding ways to support each other. Whether it's a ribbon cutting, a Business After Hours, or even just a simple conversation, I genuinely enjoy helping people feel welcome and included.

At the end of the day, what drives me is the impact that I can make through relationships. Big or small. I want nothing more than for people to walk away from every interaction feeling heard, seen and valued. Being an Ambassador gives me the opportunity to represent a dealership I'm proud of, contribute to the growth of our already wonderful community, and be a part of something that uplifts and benefits everyone. That's why I do what I do.

Ribbon Cutting



Rock Star Donuts
121 E. 3rd St., Sterling
815-632-3110



Kurt and Brian Properties
603 1st Ave, Sterling
815-535-7947

We are excited to welcome **Sauk Valley Water Ski Shows** to the SVACC! Check out their facebook page to stay up-to-date on their 2026 offerings at Swards Park in Rock Falls.



Sauk Valley Under 40

Sauk Valley Under 40 was honored to receive the Organization Approach Recognition from Illinois Main Street! Under the guidance of Gracie, Cael, and Allie, the group has undergone a rebranding and major re-energizing this year focusing on opportunities such as speed networking and professional development. Attendees have had opportunities to learn about civic organizations, ways to volunteers, and chances to make a difference in the Sauk Valley. Together they are building a community of young like-minded individuals and we could not be more proud of this initiative. Congratulations, Sauk Valley Under 40!

How incredible is the hand-painted award made by Dixon's very own Nora Reuter!?



Written by: Haleigh Dale, Newman Central Catholic High School

"Doors don't open for those who don't knock". This line stated by Parker Valdez has truly validated what our class has been feeling this month as we have begun working on our class business. It's already proving harder than I expected. Not because of the work itself, but because communicating and perceiving things differently makes every decision more complex. Working with 15 classmates and their contrasting perspectives has taught me the value of intentional listening, and patience. Finding collective agreement so our ideas can progress. We are beginning to learn each other's strengths and weaknesses, and how we can use that to effectively create teams in order to move ideas forward, instead of becoming stagnant. On the 14th of November, we received our mentors which has been an exciting aspect of this month. Our class gave our mentors a brief overview of some of our ideas for the class business and the honest feedback they gave us pushed us to refine and rethink our direction so we can create something that fits and engages our audience. We are currently leaning towards an elevated global gala concept, along with incorporating a way to honor Le's 13th year with CEO and her upcoming retirement! Additionally, we want to recognize those who have supported this program through skits highlighting their brand in appreciation for all they have contributed. More than anything, this month has shown us the power of showing up for each other. Nothing is going to move forward unless we move together. We are only as strong as our weakest link. We all have to want the same goal in order to reach it. A successful class business won't come from one great idea, but all of us committed to moving in the same direction. So be on the lookout for our class business tickets and see firsthand all that this program has to offer!



Written by: Jenna Grater, Morrison High School

If asked to describe the last 4 months in CEO I would say, it has been very impactful and uncomfortable. I have found myself talking to and visiting places I never would have imagined as well as learned very important lessons that I will take with me to college and throughout the rest of my life. One of my favorite things a speaker has told us thus far is "Doors do not open, for those who do not knock". I found this the most impactful because I have a tendency to be afraid to just ask; what is the worst that can happen? You will get told no and if you never ask, that would be the equivalent of being told no. Additionally, I think that CEO is a fantastic program for Juniors and Seniors interested in the business world, as well as those who are unsure of their future. The CEO program teaches valuable life lessons you can take with you on many career paths. Applications will open early December for the 2026-2027 class. Following this we will be hosting a bring-a-friend day in late January. For the duration of the class you will be given many amazing opportunities, meet new people, discover businesses and events in your community you probably didn't know about, and most importantly learn to be comfortable with being uncomfortable.



Sauk Valley Community Leadership Program (SVCLP)

Written by Laura Carbaugh, SVCLP Facilitator

At the Sauk Valley Community Leadership Program's session on 11/5/2025, our first speaker, Ben Sondgeroth, Lead Regional Educational Technology Coordinator, Learning Technology Center, was back again, and he engaged us with the concepts of going beyond the first prompt and role-based prompting. We discussed questions that focus on the credibility of AI, "word slop," the bias of AI platforms, and how to best use AI in our respective roles.



Dr. David Hellmich, president of Sauk Valley Community College, led a discussion on the importance of board leadership within our community and prepared us for his next lesson on Ethical Leadership.

Stacie Kemp, President/CEO, Sinnissippi Centers, and Rebecca Johanning, Director of Clinical Services, gave the cohort an overview of the vast array of services they provide in Lee, Ogle, Carroll, and Whiteside Counties.



After a wonderful lunch from Jimmy John's, we were off to take on the afternoon!

On November 18 before any "leadership" work began, the SVCLP cohort remembered and celebrated classmate George Howe who died unexpectedly on 11/13/25. George was the Oregon Park District Park Board Commissioner. We were fortunate to have Dr. Linda Hellmich with us to help us process our grief.

Here are a few quotes from George's classmates (paraphrased):

George was a raw, beautiful soul.

George was put on this earth to meet and love people.

George had confidence without arrogance.

George was a good speaker and an even better listener.

George was easy to trust.

I know there were more beautiful tributes, but this facilitator couldn't see the page for the tears in her eyes.



George made a profound impact on all of us, despite the short time most of us knew him. We have tasked ourselves to be more like George: more engaged, more energetic, more invested in the present and each other. One classmate put it this way: What will the ripple effect of George's life be? Let George's life make a difference in us!

Kim Purvis—former Director of the Whiteside Area Career Center, current co-owner of Koehler and Purvis Farms, and member of the USDA Farm Service Agency Committee—opened our session with a discussion on leadership styles and how to respond to conflict and crisis. After listening to Linda's session, Kim encouraged us to put our phones away whenever possible, truly talk with one another, and be as present as we can in our busy lives.

Rebecca Munoz-Ripley, Executive Director of the YWCA of the Sauk Valley, discussed the YWCA's mission and commitment to empower women, eliminate racism, and to be a resource for survivors of sexual and domestic violence.

Dr. David Hellmich, president of SVCC, led discussion on the cohort's takeaways from Zenger and Folkman's *The Extraordinary Leader*.

To fuel us for the afternoon, Arthur's Garden Deli provided a meal of delicious sandwiches, fruit, baked beans, and salad.



Hispanic Business Leaders Committee

Our Hispanic Business Leaders Committee challenged themselves to try new things and have more of an impact on our community this year. One way in which they are doing that is by volunteering at Elevate Youth Center once per month. They've put in a lot of time and effort to find a collective passion for HBLC and explore new avenues of giving back to our community. We are so proud of our Hispanic Business Leaders Committee for their commitment to the Sauk Valley area!



Workforce Development

This fall juniors and seniors at Ohio High School completed the five-week Certificate of Employability Program. They covered soft skills, learned about career opportunities, and worked on building professional resumes. Thank you to our local employers for taking time out of your day to spend with our high schoolers! The students had the opportunity to meet local leaders in the Sauk Valley including Dana Conkrite, CGH Medical Center; Dawn Castillo and Tygen Bausman, Sauk Valley Bank; Heather Waninger, Elevate Youth Center; and Zak Forkner, Sauk Valley Community College.



Ambassadors

Ambassadors and board members gathered together for a meeting, but more importantly, for a delicious meal from Toast and Plate! We forgot to take pictures of our plates, so here's a picture with the chef himself. Thanks Adrian!

We are grateful for our ambassadors' dedication to our organization; for going above and beyond to support our members. And to our board, thank you for guiding the way and shaping our community .

If you are interested in becoming an ambassador to celebrate businesses at ribbon cuttings, host Business After Hours, and make meaningful connections with our members, please call the chamber office at 815-625-2400.





Invitation to Participate: Downtown Sterling Dollars Program

Sterling Main Street is excited to introduce Downtown Sterling Dollars, a new program designed to drive customers directly to our downtown shops, restaurants, and service businesses. We invite you to be among the first to participate and help us strengthen local spending in the heart of our community.

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

Downtown Dollars are \$10 gift certificates that spend just like cash at participating businesses. When a customer presents a certificate, simply accept it as you would a \$10 bill and provide any appropriate change. Redeemed certificates can then be turned in to Sterling Main Street on a weekly or monthly schedule—whichever works best for your business. Reimbursement will be issued via check or ACH, based on your preference, making the process simple and seamless.

Each Downtown dollar will be the size of a regular dollar bill, full color, contain a real signature, and embossed with a raised seal to help prevent fraud.



BENEFITS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

- Increased foot traffic from customers intentionally choosing to shop local
- Flexibility to opt in or out of the program at any time with notice
- Clear window signage provided to help customers easily identify participating locations
- A no-cost marketing boost that keeps spending right here in Downtown Sterling

Downtown Dollars will be available for purchase at anytime at the Sterling Main Street office, the Twin City Farmers Market or may be ordered online via the Sterling Main Street website. The program will be rolled out with the Sights & Sounds festivities this year, and we will be offering them as part of the prize package.

All businesses, whether retail, food & beverage, or service-based, are welcome to participate. If you accept cash as a form of payment, Downtown Dollars will work for you!

We hope you'll join us in launching this exciting initiative and helping keep our downtown vibrant, active, and thriving. To sign up or learn more, please contact Sterling Main Street—we'd love to have you on board!

Contact:

Email: janna@sterlingmainstreet.org

Office Phone: 815-626-8610

Call/Text Janna's Cell: 815-625-1248

@SterlingMainStreet on FB and Instagram

Janna Groharing, Executive Director



CAREER & COLLEGE *Counseling*

SERVICES OFFERED:

- Aptitude Testing
- Career Exploration
- College Exploration
- Personal Statement Support
- Resume Composition
- Interview Practice

ABOUT ME:


Hello! I'm Kaileen Gaumer, a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor, Professional School Counselor, and Certified Career Services Provider.

I founded Next Step Counseling to do what I love most – helping people move forward with clarity and confidence. My work focuses on supporting high school juniors and seniors, young adults transitioning from college to the workforce, and recent college graduates as they find their footing in the professional world.

I believe in utilizing a strength-based approach and creating a warm, down-to-earth space where clients feel seen, supported, and empowered to take their next steps with purpose.

 <https://nstepcounsel.com>

 kaileen@nstepcounsel.com

 779-861-8148



Dinner Undercover

SVACC Annual Meeting & Dinner

THE CEO CLASS PRESENTS A MYSTERIOUS TWIST ON LOCAL BUSINESS

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29

**DOORS OPEN AT 5:30PM
DINNER AT 6:00PM**

McCormick Center
205 E. 3rd St. Rock Falls, IL 61071



Scan the QR code or visit
<https://bit.ly/447lBxf>

**\$50/PERSON OR
\$400 FOR A TABLE OF 8**

**Register by
January 20, 2026**



Join us for a review of the 2025 year, announcements of things to look forward to in 2026, and awards for Chamber Champion, Ambassador of the Year, and more!

Call 815-625-2400 or email Dallas at director@saukvalleyareachamber.com for more information



STERLING
MAIN STREET
Inspired. Involved.



Sauk Valley Area
chamber of commerce

Proudly present

Sights & Sounds

Shop, Dine, Play the Candyland Way
in Downtown Sterling

Friday, December 5, 2025
5:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Step into a sweet adventure and follow the Candyland Trail through Downtown Sterling! Collect "stamps" at participating shops and restaurants along your journey for a chance to win delightful prizes.

 5:30 PM
Tree Lighting @
Library Plaza Tree



Visits with Santa and
FREE Games &
Activities in the Parking
Lot behind the Theater

Dale Park 
Winter
Wonderland
& Holiday Market

Hop On • Hop Off
Trolley Stops



Scan for all
the details! 

Sights & Sounds
is made possible
thanks to the
following Sponsors!



Loescher
HEATING AND AIR CONDITIONING



Castor Home Health Solutions
First OnSite
Sauk Valley CPR
Showplace Antiques & Treasures

And our Trolley
Stop Sponsors



Edward Jones®
TODD HAAS, CFP®
Financial Advisor



WWW.STERLINGMAINSTREET.ORG



The Dillon Home Museum

1005 E. 3RD STREET • STERLING, IL
815.622.6202 • DILLONHOME@STERLINGPARKS.ORG



42ND ANNUAL

Christmas Walk

AT THE DILLON HOME MUSEUM

**Wednesday, December 10th
& Thursday, December 11th**

Sneak-peek tours by appointment only:
5pm, 6pm, 7pm & 8pm

**Friday, December 12th &
Saturday, December 13th**

Guided tours begin on the hour from 10am-2pm
and self-guided tours from 5pm-9pm

Sunday, December 14th

Self-guided tours from 10am-3pm with live
Christmas music by Kathy Cecchetti from 1pm-3pm


Sterling
PARK DISTRICT

GENERAL ADMISSION: \$7.00
SENIOR 60 AND OVER: \$6.00
CHILDREN 5 AND UNDER: FREE



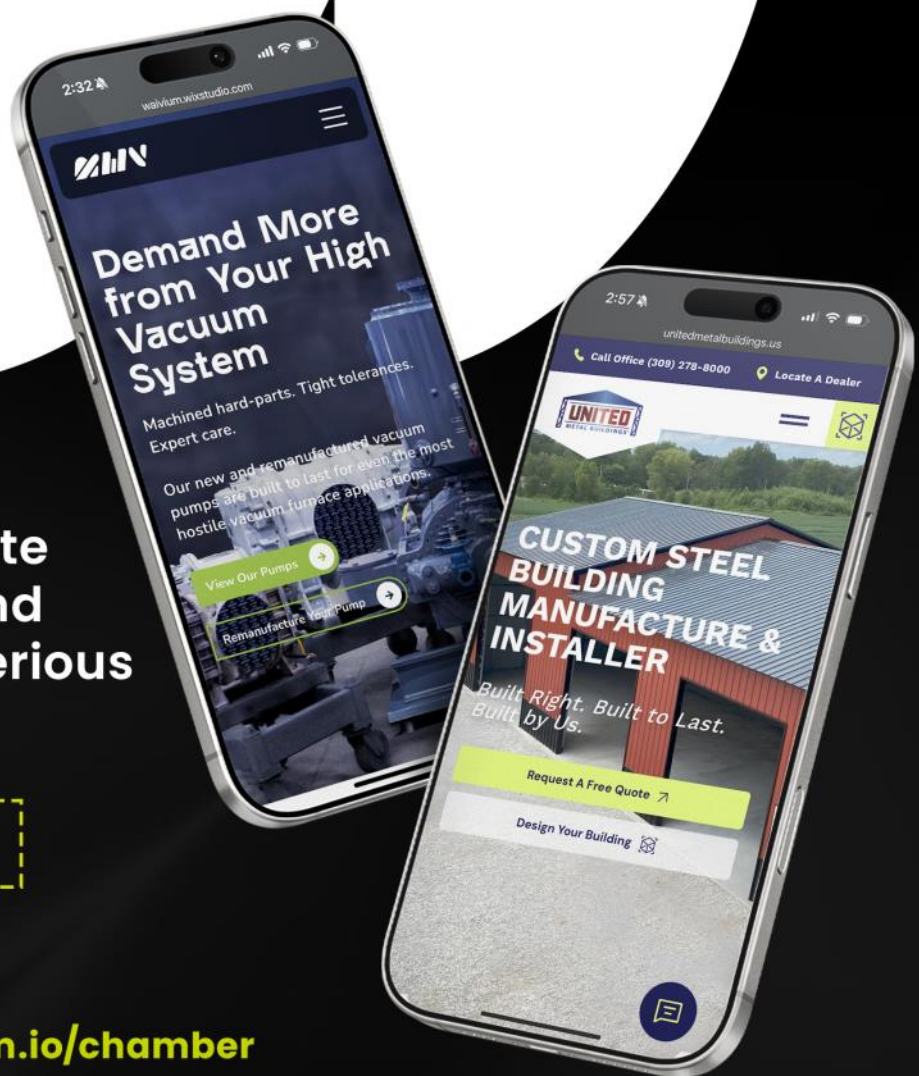
SVACC Members Get 20% Off Custom Websites

For Industrial Manufacturers + Service Providers

Make your website
pull its weight and
turn visits into serious
quote requests.

Mention 'SVACC20'

Learn More at waivium.io/chamber



waivium