

# Constructive Conversations

## Initiating Discussions that Educate and Influence

By CHC Outreach Program Staff

County Historical Commissions (CHC) contribute thousands of hours each month to promote preservation and the history of our state. This job requires CHC appointees to have positive attitudes and develop constructive relationships.

However, leaving a good impression on partners and potential partners is only half the battle. Promoting your work often requires difficult conversations, which may be uncomfortable for volunteers who are typically very agreeable people.

“It’s important to remember that respectfully disagreeing with someone about a situation doesn’t make you a disagreeable person,” says Amy Hammons, CHC Outreach Program coordinator. “In fact, sharing a differing opinion may be the best way to educate others and make a case for preservation.”

Hammons adds that CHC members should consider the following critical conversations that help save Texas’ history and historic resources:

- Correcting assumptions made about historical events



The El Paso CHC partners with a wide range of heritage sites, tourism organizations, and educational institutions to develop outreach initiatives for elected officials and citizens.

- Convincing a property owner, local official, or community to rehabilitate a historic structure rather than demolish it
- Asking for funding and in-kind services to support the CHC’s work.

These discussions are part of the job for a CHC, which is charged with preserving and protecting the historic and cultural resources of its county.

“When initiated in a pleasant and helpful manner, these conversations cultivate an audience that participates in CHC activities,” Hammons says.

“Conversations initiated with complaints and criticisms tend to be uncomfortable for everyone involved, so consider reframing your issue. Think in terms of what your audience needs and wants to know.”

For example, Hammons advises CHCs to consider the needs and wants of county officials, who are interested in work that benefits the county overall and may have particular interests or objectives to accomplish during their tenure. Also, determine the county officials’

ties to county history and how the CHC’s efforts can benefit the county as a whole.

“Frame your argument in terms of how CHC allocations and energy will benefit others—come to the table with documented data, options, and recommendations to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of the situation,” Hammons says. “And, remember to smile! Smiling puts people at ease and softens the tone of your conversation and the manner in which you deliver your message.” ★

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To protect and preserve the state’s historic and prehistoric resources for the use, education, enjoyment, and economic benefit of present and future generations.