

The Chamber Perspectives online

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West Alabama Economic Summit is Wed

The West Alabama Economic Summit: Continuing Onward will be presented on Wed, Jan 28 from 8 am to 1:30 pm at Bryant Conference Center. The free event, presented by The Chamber, UA's Culverhouse College of Commerce, and the Tuscaloosa County Industrial Development Authority, will focus on West Alabama's business climate in light of national economic trends and forecasts.

Complete agenda is posted as an article on our homepage at www.tuscaloosachamber.com. Honorable Bob Riley, Governor State of Alabama, is the keynote luncheon speaker.

Reservations can be made on our website or by calling 758.7588. Deadline is tomorrow, Fri, Jan 23.

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2008 Annual Report Out Now

Your organization should soon receive our printed 2008 Annual Report in the mail, which celebrates our progress and accomplishments over the past year. It's also posted at www.tuscaloosachamber.com and you can view it by clicking [here](#).

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Moving Onward in a Challenging Economy: A



Message to Faithful Members

First, on behalf of the entire leadership team at The Chamber, thanks to so many of our faithful members and investors. Even during a slowing economy, your generous and positive response has been so encouraging and is reflected in the fact that your Chamber is ahead of the previous year in dues investments for 2009.

Your membership investment enables The Chamber's volunteer and professional leadership to move onward aggressively to execute our strategic business plan as well as address a broad range of economic issues that affect every business in Tuscaloosa County and West Alabama. Your loyal support provides the encouragement to provide the business leadership that can and does influence the public agenda.

Whether you're a small firm, a multi-national corporation, a professional, non-profit, educational or institutional organization or an individual entrepreneur – we are all looking for ways to become more efficient and cost-effective while at the same time position ourselves to be more competitive and flourish once the economy turns around.

Your Chamber is a good investment and there is a positive return. A new national study reveals that membership in a local chamber of commerce can significantly boost a business' image and success among consumers. The ground-breaking research found positive perceptions of chamber members in a number of areas, including overall favorability, consumer awareness and reputation, and likelihood of future patronage.

Your Chamber's leadership is moving forward with an aggressive new strategic initiative, known as "Direction 2012", which is posted at www.tuscaloosachamber.com. We encourage you to click [here](#) to review it. Also, watch for The Chamber's 2008 annual report in the mail as well as on our website.

Finally, remember your investment and participation can directly contribute to our area's economic vitality and livability. Through Chamber networking, business training, visibility of your firm to thousands of online visitors on The Chamber's website, and active, daily advocacy in a host of key economic, workforce, education and public policy issues – The Chamber truly provides a return on your investment.

Together, we believe that, even during a time of economic challenge, we are laying the groundwork that will lead our region to a more competitive position and prosperous future. Your investment and positive response when you receive your 2009 dues invoice is vital and very much appreciated.

Thank you for making such a positive difference and for your faithful support.

-Johnnie Aycock, President

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Chamber Adopts "Directions 2012" Strategic Plan

The Chamber has released an aggressive strategic plan entitled "Directions 2012", which includes goals and strategies in six areas for the next four years and identifies key priorities that the organization will begin to address immediately. The plan, developed by The Chamber's leadership over the past six months and adopted by the board of directors, is posted in its entirety at www.tuscalooschamber.com. View it now by clicking [here](#).

"'Directions 2012' is a sounding call to action," said Chamber President Johnnie Aycock. "Even during a time of economic challenges, it is essential that we are bold in our vision and actions and that we work together to position the region to be more competitive, more economically viable and more livable once the economy turns around."

"'Directions 2012' is designed to stimulate creative, engaged, leadership to meet a new horizon of possibilities and effectively carry out The Chamber's economic mission, values and vision."

"Directions 2012" includes objectives and strategies in six critical areas: economic development, communication and technology, education and workforce development, governmental affairs, community development, and organizational development. The Chamber's professional and volunteer leadership structure is designed around these strategies.

"The Chamber's key priorities are important to the economic future of our community and region as well as our livability," said Aycock. "As the largest regional, business-based economic organization in Tuscaloosa County and West Alabama, we will begin to move forward to address these priorities, which include:

1. Actively pursuing and advocating the establishment of a regional career-technical high school for Tuscaloosa County and West Alabama in coordination with the implementation of a new corporate-led regional workforce system and efforts to increase graduation rates.
2. Establishment of a business-based council on the arts to facilitate implementation of the new "culture builds" development plan while maintaining an annual scorecard to measure and report results and progress of cultural development in Tuscaloosa County.
3. Identification and assessment of regional economic development models and management structures that would contribute to improved regional coordination and cooperation among public and private sector organizations and agencies; to achieve more efficient, cost-effective utilization and application of resources, management and leadership.
4. Working to become one of America's most livable communities; and developing the appropriate marketing and communications strategies, resources, and tools that support and contribute to raising awareness, defining and promoting livability and enhancing our image. In

addition, we plan to define 'livability' qualities and develop measurable goals and benchmarks to monitor and report annual progress for an established "livability scorecard".

5. Internally, The Chamber will accelerate recruitment, marketing and advertising initiatives, work to expand the membership base, and expand public awareness of The Chamber.

Aycock adds, "We have exceptional volunteer leadership at all levels of The Chamber and our team is prepared to make a significant impact on our community and region on short-term economic issues as well as in the coming years. 'Directions 2012' provides us with a very good blueprint."

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Small Business, Slow Economy-Tips to Survive the Crunch

"We're in a recession."

No one wants to hear those words, especially small business owners. Now that the phrase has been uttered, what can you do to make sure your business survives?

First - take heart in the fact that, even during a recession, both society and the economy depend on small businesses. The import-dependent US relies heavily on local business owners to stabilize an unsteady economy. Even more inspiring, some of the most successful companies in the nation seen their beginnings during shaky economical times.

- The last large-scale recession in the 70's and early 80's seen the start of FedEx, Microsoft, and CNN.
- During the Eisenhower recession of 1957 and 1958, Hyatt Hotels, IHOP, and Burger King began.
- General Electric was born in the short, but fierce, recession of 1873.

And if we look back to the Great Depression of the 1930's, the banking industry struggled miserably but companies like Proctor & Gamble, Radio Flyer, and even Camel (the cigarette manufacturers) came out on top.

How can your business survive the recession?

Advertise and build your brand. While a slow economy may seem like the time to cut expenses, the companies that prospered during the Great Depression were those that continued to push their brand. In the '30's, radio was the medium of choice. Today, businesses are taking advantage of the world wide web to spread their name.

Buy local whenever you can. Buying your materials and supplies from domestic vendors will stimulate the economy by encouraging employment and profits that, in turn, can increase your own sales and revenues.

Make quality your priority. Even if your product or service isn't one of life's necessities, great customer care and attention to detail can give your business the edge it needs to stay afloat during tough times. Great products from a respectable provider will always have a place in society.

Surviving an economic crunch with your small business isn't easy - but it is possible. Even startups can prosper during a recession with a bit of work and the proper goals. Keep your brand fresh on the minds of prospective clients through effective marketing, do your part to keep the economic cycle flowing, and deliver the absolute best product or service you possibly can and your business will continue to grow - even through a recession.

Source: PricelessWriters.com

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Claude Edwards Named 2008 Member of the Year



The 108th annual celebration of The Chamber was a luncheon event held at NorthRiver Yacht Club on January 15 honoring volunteers, community service and a year of achievements.

Claude Edwards, President of Bryant Bank and active civic leader, was honored as the recipient of the 2008 Charles H. Land Member of the Year, which is The Chamber's highest honor to an individual member. Edwards was selected as the individual whose commitment and efforts contributed most to the advancement of the mission and objectives of The Chamber, and for his exceptional and effective leadership of The Chamber's Organizational Development initiatives over the past year.

The 9th annual Robert C. Tanner Corporate Service Award was presented to Comcast Cablevision. The award, which is the organization's highest corporate honor, is given annually to recognize exceptional charitable, volunteer and philanthropic service by a corporate entity in the Tuscaloosa County/West Alabama region.

The Chamber also recognized outstanding community leadership with the presentation of seven Distinguished Service Awards, which are presented to individuals or organizations that have displayed exceptional service and leadership. The 2008 awards were presented to:

Pam Smith of Ellis Architects, for her efforts in Leadership Tuscaloosa and on the Landscape Task Force.

Ron Price of InStone Masonry, for his efforts in Governmental Affairs and on the Landscape Task Force.

Tracy Waldrop, for her leadership of the Northport Advisory Council.

Roy Clem, General Manager of WVUA TV for media and communications support.

AAF (American Advertising Federation) Tuscaloosa for its partnership in media and communications initiatives.

Ken Swindle, for his service as Tuscaloosa's Chief of Police.

Charles (Chuck) Sittason, for his efforts in Economic Development and leadership in the Tuscaloosa Sports Foundation.

In addition, **Bryan Robinson** of Way, Ray, Shelton & Company, PC-CPA was honored as The Chamber's Ambassador of the Year, for his exceptional service to and on behalf of The Chamber's membership. The Ambassadors are The Chamber's official hosts for all Chamber functions and responsible for member relations.

The official transition to the 2009 leadership team was made at the annual celebration. Randy Skagen, Vice President and General Manager of Nucor Steel Tuscaloosa will serve as our 2009 Chairman.

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First Mixer of 2009 Coming Soon

Our first "Chamber Connects" after hours mixer will be hosted by Epiphany Cafe on Tues evening, Feb 10 from 5 to 7 pm. Of course, there will be fabulous food. Also, a cash bar, music and networking. Plan now to join us!



United Way Celebrates at The Zone
Our final mixer of 2008 was held in Dec

at The Zone at Bryant-Denny Stadium and hosted by the United Way, to celebrate its recent campaign. It was a fun time! Pictured are Homer and Gail Butler.

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Post & Search Jobs on Alabama's Joblink

Our state's Career Center System has an internet-based system in place called AJL or Alabama's JobLink, www.joblink.alabama.gov. All Chamber member businesses are encouraged to use this as a central source for job posting. And the staff at the Tuscaloosa Area Career Center can be accessed for assistance at 758.7591.

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Could America's Next Most Livable Community Be Ours?

That is one of the questions posed through a visionary process, known as "Culture Builds." Following a year-long visioning process, The Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama has recently released the results of the "Culture Builds" study.

The Chamber, in partnership with the cities of Tuscaloosa and Northport, TuscaloosaCounty, The University of Alabama and the Alabama State Council on the Arts, has released the "Culture Builds" report, completed by Partners for Livable Communities, based in Washington, D.C.

"We want to make our community more livable, a place that students and other people see as rich and vibrant. We believe that we can accomplish this by making cultural assets an economic engine for our community," said "Culture Builds" Task Force Chair and City Councilwoman Cynthia Almond.

Partners was contracted by The Chamber for their national expertise in applying cultural assets as tools to enhance aspects of human, economic, social and physical development. Partners for Livable Communities is nationally renowned for consulting expertise with non-profit organizations and communities, and actually ranks the nation's most livable communities.

"TuscaloosaCounty has many rich cultural assets and experiences available, but those assets and experiences have not yet been systematically put to work to address issues of economic growth and equality," said Partners' President, Robert McNulty.

To accomplish this, McNulty added that "any cultural strategy must involve meaningful input from community members to be able to be sustainable and to achieve the social and economic goals identified."

The extensive report follows a year-long process with community leaders and citizens from diverse backgrounds to determine how the Tuscaloosa County/West Alabama region can more effectively draw upon the cultural assets of the area to enhance and expand the quality of life for all residents as well as contribute to the economic competitiveness of the region.

The purpose and objective of the "Culture Builds" process was to develop a comprehensive, creative community development and implementation plan that will enhance the cultural life and livability of the Tuscaloosa County regional community and that will directly stimulate the economic development and vitality of the area.

Partners implemented a tested process that included a kick-off event, two leadership workshops, a series of forums and focus groups, and a survey distributed through The Chamber. In addition, Partners also reviewed various strategic plans of area governmental entities, agencies and non-profit organizations. The newly released report represents the vision and voices of over 500 participants in the "Culture Builds" process.

The framework for the process, developed by the "Culture Builds" steering committee, included four focus areas along with five issue areas. The broad focus areas were: enhanced branding and creating a positive national identity; equity, giving everyone a chance for the good life; regional cooperation; and ageless communities or building communities for the young, old and everything in between.

The five community issues were: neighborhoods; youth development; town/gown partnerships; physical image and development; and healthy lifestyles and wellness.

The report, designed to be the first phase of a comprehensive cultural development plan for Tuscaloosa County, includes a wide range of recommendations and action steps recommended for implementation over the next three years in the areas of: leadership, communications, events, programs and resources.

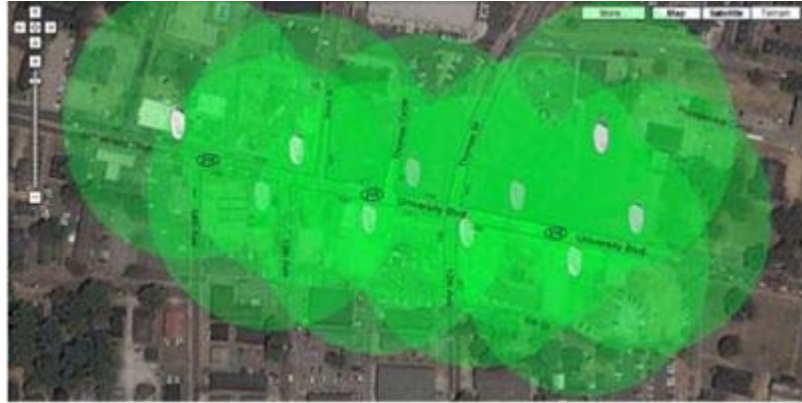
As pointed out in the "Culture Builds" report, in every conversation held, Partners heard that area citizens would like to see more collaboration and cooperation between and among the major stakeholders in the community and more focus on creating cross-sector partnerships that address the livability of the region.

These included: more collaboration between local governments on public policy that address cultural and livability issues; more involvement of the higher educational institutions in the community beyond their students; more investment by local leadership of all kinds in creating a common sense of shared community through branding and diverse activities; and more focus by leadership from all sectors in reaching out to and empowering underserved residents.

The entire report is posted at www.tuscaloosachamber.com. Click [here](#) to view it now. For more info, call 758.7588.

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Tech Council Sponsors Research on Downtown Wireless Internet



Our Technology Council has been researching the potential deployment of wireless Internet technology, particularly the well-known Wi-Fi technology, in selected areas to further economic development and to showcase Tuscaloosa as a technology leader. Note that this is not full blown "Muni Wi-Fi," but limited use public internet access that does not compete with commercial broadband in any way.

Tech Council member George Hamner was able to obtain the resources of the MIS 340 class at The UA in the spring and fall of 2008, and continuing into the Spring of this year. Under the direction of Dung Chau, faculty member, the students researched the inventory of existing Wi-Fi "hot spots" around the city, the business case for use of this technology, and the network design.

The initial areas researched for deployment were the area around Temerson Square and the future FederalPark. The Fall class added the "Strip" to the project and researched how to extend the boundaries of the academic environment, increase traffic to the area businesses, and provide an opportunity for partnering with the Chamber and the City of Tuscaloosa. This project was so successful that we have obtained commitment for funding an experimental network on the Strip for a two year testbed.

The current class will finish the network design, select the equipment to be deployed, decide how the network will be maintained and administrated for the test period, and work with area businesses for sponsorship and ad placement on the log-in screen. The plan is to have an experimental network up and running by the summer break.

With the increased use of "smart phone" instruments and tiny laptops, free high-speed wireless access will be a great attraction to students and other patrons of the Strip. The experimental network will serve a learning vehicle for future deployments in other areas of Tuscaloosa and Northport.

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Are You in the Book?

Make sure your business has a strong presence in our 2009 Chamber Directory! The last version produced is a much-improved one, and many more groups are using it for recruiting purposes, etc. And, we distribute thousands of these to residents, businesses, visitors and people inquiring about relocation. The 2009 book will be expanded to include more area info highlighted by vivid images, some from our recent area photo contest. Contact Ginger Nunley at 850.866.3385 or flmaplady@gmail.com to set a brief appt to discuss your ad.



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Welcome, New Members!

The following joined from Dec 1 to date.

State Farm Agency Recruiter
 Kid One Transport
 Payson Jewels
 Pre-Paid Legal Services
 Light'n Up
 Todd Murphy Agency
 Love My Voice

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Members in Motion/Upcoming Events

Jewish Cultural Festival Has Begun

Arts and Humanities Council of Tuscaloosa and Temple Emanu-El will present the 7th Annual Jewish Cultural Festival Jan 20 – April 12 at the Bama Theatre and The UA. Festival consists of an exhibit at UA's Hoole Library, a Jewish food and film festival, and a book discussion series. Food/film festival passes are available at the Arts Council office for a discounted price of \$30. Tickets for individual films will also be on sale at the box office prior to their start. Note: Screenings will take place at the Bama Theatre and Reese Phifer Hall on the UA campus. For more info, call 758.5195 or visit www.tuscarts.org for a complete synopsis of films and festival details.

Alabama Wind Ensemble performs at UA

The UA College of Arts & Sciences School of Music presents the Alabama Wind Ensemble on Fri, Jan 23 at 7:30 pm in the Concert Hall of the Moody Music Building. Performance will be held in conjunction with the Alabama Music Educators' Association State In-service Conference being held at The UA's School of Music. The concert is free and open to the public. For more info, visit www.music.ua.edu/calendar or call 348.1477.

PARA Offers Yoga Workshop

Tuscaloosa County Park & Recreation Authority announces a Yoga Day USA Workshop, Jan 24, 8--11:30 am at the Phelps Center, located at 2200 Rock Quarry Dr in Tuscaloosa. Workshops and demos for novice and experienced students are free and open to the public. Stretch your mind, body and spirit through the practice of Yoga! For more info, call the Phelps Center at 562.3230.

TA Holds Open House/Spring Preview

Tuscaloosa Academy will host an Open House for all prospective families Sun, Jan 25 from 2--4:30 pm. TA is located at 420 Rice Valley Rd in Tuscaloosa. Parents will have the opportunity to tour the school and talk to teachers one-on-one. Children's activities and refreshments will be available. TA offers small class sizes with a college preparatory curriculum from PK-3 through 12th grade. TA graduates are attending prestigious universities such as Harvard, Stanford, Vanderbilt, and other great schools across the nation. For more info, visit www.whyTA.org or call 758.4462.

2009 Double Exposure Exhibit Opens

The Arts and Humanities Council of Tuscaloosa Co will present the 6th annual Double Exposure Juried Photography Exhibition, Jan 25--Feb 26 at the Bama Theatre's Junior League Gallery. The exhibit will feature works by photographers from throughout the state of Alabama in both adult and junior divisions.

The Exhibit Opening and Awards Presentation will take place on Jan 25 from 2 pm--4 pm in the Junior League Gallery. Gallery hours are Monday--Friday from 8am--5pm. Enter through the PARA entrance, located adjacent to the theatre. Call 758.195 or visit www.tuscartarts.org for more info.

Meet Artur Davis at Harrison Galleries

You're invited to a meet and greet reception honoring Congressman Artur Davis, of the 7th Congressional District, on Thurs, Jan 29 from 6 pm-- 8:30 pm at Harrison Galleries. Address is 2315 University Blvd in downtown Tuscaloosa. Please RSVP to Katie Baker at 322.9096 or kbaker@arturdavisforcongress.com.

Epiphany Hosts Beer Tasting

Epiphany Café will host a beer tasting on Thurs, Jan 29 from 8 pm--11 pm. The Erin Mitchell Band will provide live music and the menu includes Fish Tacos, Kobe Beef Sliders, Kobe Beef "Meatloaf" Crostini, and Salmon Nigiri. Cost is \$30 per person and reservations are requested. Phone # is 344.5583. Epiphany is located on Greensboro Ave. in downtown Tuscaloosa.

UA Presents Stroke Conference

The UA's College of Continuing Studies will present the 1st Annual Stroke Conference on Jan 30 -31 at the Bryant Conference Center, designed for health care professionals who work with stroke patients. To learn more or to register, visit <http://stroke.ua.edu>.

UA Hosts Church Music Conference

The UA School of Music 2009 Church Music Conference is celebrating "A Mendelssohn Year" with world-class series of events at the Moody School of Music on Jan 30 and 31. On Fri evening at 7:30, Gail Archer, organ faculty at Manhattan School of Music, Barnard College, and Columbia University will perform. On Sat at 4:30 pm, Mendelssohn's Hymn of Praise will be performed by massed Tuscaloosa area church choirs. Saturday workshop topics include a lecture on Felix Mendelssohn and Co, organ master classes, hand bells, Psalm singing, liturgical drama and dance, choral singing and a choral reading session. Sat sessions take place from 9 am-4:30 pm. Cost is \$85 if registered by noon on Jan 23, registration at the door is \$95. To register or get more info, visit www.music.ua.edu.

Real Estate Conference Set

The 9th Annual Commercial Real Estate Conference will move from the UA campus to the Birmingham/Jefferson Co Convention Center Sheraton Hotel Complex and will feature David Bronner, chief executive officer of the Retirement Systems of Alabama. Conference will be hosted by the Alabama Center for Real Estate (ACRE) at UA's Culverhouse College of Commerce and Business Administration. The conference, set for Jan 30, will include sessions on networking, professional development, the real estate outlook for 2009, and technical trends in the real estate profession. For more info, contact Grayson Glaze at 348.4117, gglaze@cba.ua.edu, or visit www.ACREConference.ua.edu.

Nancy Taylor Day Spa Hosts Plastic Surgeon

Dr. William J. Hedden, MD will be accepting patients Sat, Jan 31 at Nancy Taylor Skin Therapy & Day Spa. Dr. Hedden is a plastic surgeon in Birmingham dedicated to achieving beautiful, natural looking results for his patients. His formal education and hands-on training are second to none. To book your consultation appt, call 391.4585.

Dine at Epiphany and Support Habitat this Month

This month at Epiphany Café, dine in support of habitat for humanity... A donation will be made upon request. Also, Community Night is every Wed. with a cost of \$29 for 3 courses (per person). Menu changes each week. For more info, call 344.5583. Epiphany is located on Greensboro Ave. in downtown Tuscaloosa.

Free Tax Prep Offered

Impact Alabama, a student initiative at the UA, are now offering free tax preparation services to low-income, working families across Alabama. This service is available to families making less than \$42,000/year with kids in the home or \$20,000/year without kids in the home. Appts can be scheduled by calling 1.888.99.TAX.AL.

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