

The Chamber Perspectives online

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"Chamber Connects" with Summer Mixers

Our summer mixers have been well-planned and well-attended.

Wintzell's Oyster House hosted us in May where we had great seafood, met new people and caught up with others (pictured right).

Capstone Village, on the UA campus, hosted us last week (pictured left). We enjoyed touring and networking in the elegant space and tasteful bites by Chef Tom.

Our next one is set for Tues, July 14 at Desperados Steak House, in Indian Hills Square in Tuscaloosa. Join us from 5 to 7 pm—all employees of Chamber member businesses are invited as well as prospective members.



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Literacy Event Brings Together UA Authors

Crimson Literacy: Up Close and Personal will be hosted on June 26 by the Literacy Council of West Alabama and will feature seven great authors, all with ties to UA Athletics: **Chip Cooper**, "Crimson"; **Ken Gaddy**, "Twelve and Counting: The National Championships of Alabama Football"; **Cecil Hurt**, "Traditions"; **Tommy Ford**, "Alabama Football All Access Vault" (August 2009); **Richard Scott**, "Legends of Alabama Football"; **Kirk McNair**, "What It Means to be Crimson Tide"; **Christopher Walsh**, "100 Things Crimson Tide Fans Should Know & Do Before They Die," "Crimson Storm Surge," "Who's #1?: 100 Plus Years of Controversial National Champions in College Football".



A free Book Signing will take place at Barnes & Noble from 5-6:30pm (books will be available for sale, with a percentage of proceeds benefiting the Literacy Council) and an Authors Reception will follow at I.O. Metro from 6:30-8pm. The latter is a ticketed event to include one-on-one time with authors, food, drinks, live music and silent auction;

cost is \$25/person. Both venues are located in Midtown Village in Tuscaloosa.

Tickets are on sale now and are available at all Bank of Tuscaloosa locations and The West Alabama Chamber of Commerce in downtown Tuscaloosa. Proceeds will help the Literacy Council of West Alabama with our region's literacy challenge. Call 758.7588 more info.

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Check Out our New Webinars



We had 60 people sign up for the free trial webinar held earlier this week! And we've heard many good comments on the ease and convenience of this kind of training. We're delighted to be able to offer these upcoming webinars to you...

Excel 2003 PivotTables 101 is June 23, 9-11am, and Excel 2007 PivotTables 101 is June 23, 1-3pm. Learn more about this powerful and time-saving feature for data analysis, large and small.

Also, a session on Excel VLOOKUP formulas (applies to multiple versions of Excel) has been set for June 24, 1-3pm, more details to come.

It's easy to log in to this live online training. After registering with us, you'll receive an email containing a login link. You'll then be connected to

audio using your computer's microphone and speakers or you may simply dial-in using your telephone after joining the webinar.

Cost is only \$39/person. Call 758.7588 to register or get more info.

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Regional Employer & Labor Availability Assessment Released

We recently completed a West Alabama regional assessment and employer survey related to workforce capacity issues.

The two-part assessment was completed by The Pathfinders of Dallas, Texas, a national consulting firm with broad experience in workforce assessment for corporate clients, site selection firms and communities throughout the nation.

"Even during a time of economic challenge, it is important for us to assess and define continuing workforce and skills capacity in our region," emphasized Chamber President, Johnnie Aycok. "To ensure that our region is positioned to be competitive and prepared to expand workforce capabilities, The Pathfinders study is an important, relevant tool for economic development as well as for our area's employers."

The study developed is in two parts - a [regional employers assessment](#) and a [regional labor availability evaluation](#). Included in the employers' assessment are key elements such as: work ethics ratings, educational ratings, availability of employees, hiring and layoff data, skills needs and identified gaps, training needs and other relevant suggestions for improvement and expansion. Employers operating in the industrial, commercial and service sectors in West Alabama, representing companies ranging in size from 20 employees to over 3,000, were interviewed.

Within the labor availability study, the report provides an assessment of under-employment, unemployment, comparative wage, experience and skills capacity within the West Alabama labor shed, and other key data for economic development purposes as well as for education and training needs. To complete this analysis, The Pathfinders conducted surveys with and developed data on people in the West Alabama region who may desire to change jobs, move up to higher paying employment, and who would be potential candidates for new or expanding employers.

Counties included in the West Alabama regional labor shed include: Bibb, Hale, Greene, Pickens, Fayette, Lamar and Tuscaloosa. To view the reports, click on the links in this article or visit www.tuscaloosachamber.com and click on the Employer Tools icon near the bottom of the homepage.

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New Format for Adopt-A-School Breakfast

The annual Adopt-A-School Breakfast & Workshop, which kicks off each school year,



will be held on July 30 at Shelton State Community College's Martin (main) Campus. A networking breakfast, including a hot wrap station and granola station, will be held in the atrium at 7am and announcements and awards will be presented afterwards in the Bean-Brown Theatre. In lieu of a keynote speaker this year, a guided tour of Shelton's Technical career programs will be given. Workshops for coordinators will follow. Payment for the breakfast is \$8 by July 20 and \$10 after that date; deadline to register is July 24. You may obtain a form by [clicking here](#) or return the one we'll mail out soon. Call 391.0563 or 391.0556 for more info.

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Chamber Membership Drive Going On Now

Our Board is definitely getting more involved with the recruitment of members. For example, several current and prospective members attended a luncheon hosted by Board member Shane Spiller recently to discuss the current economic situation and what we are doing as a Chamber and community to help get through it.



Also, our energetic ambassador group (pictured at a meeting) is currently holding a contest to see how many new members they can recruit.

There are a few special incentives for a new member to join right now: The Tuscaloosa News will match any one print ad purchased through August 2009; opportunity to be included in a drawing for a reception to be catered by Aramark; one free breakfast training session; and one free webinar.

If you or someone in your company would like to get involved in our membership drive, please contact Laura Farmer at laura@tuscaloosachamber.com or 391.0555.

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Tide Fi Update



The Wi Fi network on the Strip is currently in test mode, which means many are already picking up free Wi Fi in businesses there. That internet connection is currently running at a normal DSL speed, but the connection will become faster with more bandwidth

by the time the program is officially launched, probably in late July.

The idea is that the program will pull visitors and those working nearby into the Strip businesses and, also, student groups will have many other venues in which to meet. There will be a 2-hour time limit on usage.

The program was put in place through a partnership between the UA, AT&T, the City of Tuscaloosa and The Chamber. Our Technology Council created and developed the program which UA students work on. Our Vice Chairman of Business Development, Bill Lunsford, said "I appreciate the cooperation of all involved and I believe this to be one of the best projects our Technology Council has developed. It helps businesses and provides a service to their patrons and to those visiting our community."

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Retail Development Is a Key Economic Catalyst

By Johnnie R. Aycock, President
Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama

Retail is a critical ingredient for a community's economic, social and cultural health and is an essential contributor to providing a quality environment for growth. Whether growing The UA's student population, expanding opportunities to attract the "new generation" of professionals and entrepreneurs, or simply meeting the consumer demands of our area's citizens, retail is a key economic and livability catalyst.

Even during a time of economic slowdown, efforts to create an expanding, regional retail base are vital. Positioning the community now to grow our retail sector will support economic vitality in the future through job creation, investment and enhancement of the tax base. As a matter of fact, it has been estimated that as high as 70% of local governmental revenues are derived from sales taxes, making the retail community the most important source of support for sustaining and expanding governmental services.

A vibrant retail economy provides residents, existing and prospective businesses, and visitors with more diverse options, products and services. Often, in communities around the nation, retail development is an important stimulant for stagnant or underserved markets and certainly is a key to recapturing lost dollars to other markets and to creating a competitive edge for a community.

Research confirms that developers and retailers are discovering that many areas offer large, underserved customer markets with untapped purchasing power and pent up demand for wider product and merchandise offerings. The opportunities for recruiting new retail investment as well as redevelopment of existing retail centers are real and timely; even during this challenging economic environment.

The competition is growing as both large and small communities seek to attract retail investment; therefore, our community must be prepared to compete. The Tuscaloosa metro area must be positioned to aggressively

expand our regional retail market and move forward boldly, becoming a more competitive marketplace. It is time to move our community to the next level in terms of retail offerings at every level, taking advantage of the demand for consumers for more choices as well as expanding opportunities for redevelopment of existing shopping venues and recruitment of new retail investment.

To achieve this objective, it requires that all sectors work together with a common purpose and laser-like focus to build our regional retail market. With a growing competitive environment around the nation, it will also take effective public-private partnerships and progressive public policies to successfully expand our marketplace and grow our economy.

From our regional malls to our downtown business districts, from our neighborhood retail centers to the unique, small shops scattered throughout the metro area, the Tuscaloosa regional market is diverse and accessible while offering excellent potential for growth. Whether it's new development or revitalization of existing retail centers, our community has a "win - win" opportunity.

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Chamber Website Posts Useful Info Each Day



There are many things you'll find useful to your business on our website at www.tuscaloosachamber.com. Especially in the Member's Only section. If you don't know your login/password, give us a call at 758.7588.

We've added a couple of new features to the Member's Only section, which include stock picks and business articles to keep you up to date. Also, click on the Economic Development option found there and you'll find our Trends forecast, which we work hard to update each month. We hope you find this info

useful.

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WIB Council Holds Roundtable on Riverboat



Our Women In Business Council held a Roundtable aboard the Bama Belle on June 11 entitled "Speak Your Mind." Format was a mediated Q & A luncheon with guests Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox, Northport Mayor Bobby Herndon, Tuscaloosa City Councilwoman Cynthia Almond and Julie Ramm, Northport

Community Relations Coordinator. Attendees submitted one question, in advance, for Tuscaloosa and one for Northport and these were answered on the boat ride along the Black Warrior River. It was a fun and informative outing.

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Northport Leaders Want New City Hall

Northport City Administrator Scott Collins addressed the issue of a new City Hall building at our Northport Advisory Council meeting at Wintzell's on June 8.

Leaders feel this has been needed for a long time and the new facility is actually moving along very quickly. The city would like to be in a new City Hall by January 2011.

No site for the new building has been chosen, but it will likely not be the present location, which the city feels could be sold as valuable commercial property.

The council approved local architects Ward, Scott, Veron to create a design for the building, which will be affected by what site is chosen. A site should be chosen in the next 90 days with a design within the following 90 days.

As for site selection, they're constrained by two issues. First, Fire Station No 1 is at City Hall. Second, the most convenient location for residents is the center of the city but, with current and future growth, it's unclear just where that will be.

Collins said the new City Hall would also feature a Civic Center auditorium, although smaller than the current one (which is rarely fully used).

Collins said he would like to see construction on the new City Hall begin in December 2009 or January 2010.

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Sips n Strokes Opens



The first franchise of the Birmingham-based Sips n Strokes opened just down from the Shirt Shop on 6th St recently and held a ribbon cutting ceremony. It's a great option for parties or a night out. A nominal fee per person covers all materials and instruction and wine is sold at very reasonable prices. Check out their website, www.sipsnstrokes.com, and click on the "Tuscaloosa" location to see which painting will be created on a given night then call 239.1285 to make your reservation.

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American Family Care Breaks Ground



American Family Care held a Ground Breaking ceremony on May 20. Practice will be located at 9070 Highway 69 South in Tuscaloosa (beside Shelton State). Clinic will be designed, equipped, and staffed to provide comprehensive urgent care, family care, minor emergency treatment, and occupational medicine. For more info, visit www.americanfamilycare.com.

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Community Enjoys Hot Air Balloon Race



Tuscaloosa's first annual Sunrise Community Hot Air Balloon Race took place at the Tuscaloosa Regional Airport on May 30-31 and included

launches of 30+ balloons. Event benefitted people with special needs served by Resources for Independence. Photo shared by Shane and Liz Spiller.

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Welcome, New Members!

The following joined from May 1 to date.

Campbell Cleaning Service
 American Family Care
 Liberty National Life
 Budget Blinds of Tuscaloosa
 Selective Marketing
 Atlas Welding Supply Co, Inc
 Benchmark
 WesterveltWarnerMuseum
 Great Southern Distributing
 Hood's Home Inspection Service
 Tuscaloosa Eye Care
 Black Warrior Printing & Imaging

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