

# The Chamber Perspectives online

## Calendar of Events

**Mar 30**  
**Women In Business**

**Council Annual**  
**Seminar**

**Apr 4**  
**1st Annual State of the**  
**Schools**

**Apr 4**  
**Entrepreneur Institute**

**Apr 6**  
**Entrepreneur of the**  
**Year Nomination**  
**Deadline**

**Apr 6**  
**Exceptional Customer**  
**Service**

**Apr 25**  
**Microsoft Outlook**  
**Seminar**

**May 25**  
**Maximizing Your Office**  
**Technology**

## Inside this issue

- [Welcome To Perspectives Online - Your Chamber's New Electronic Newsletter](#)
- [The Chamber - Business In Action](#)
- [Continuing Education For Our Members Is A Value-Added Priority](#)
- [Problems Finding Qualified Employees? Check Out Alabama JobLink](#)
- [Nominations For Top Entrepreneurs Sought](#)
- [Resources That Make A Difference - Make The Connection](#)
- [2006 Wage, Benefits & Skills Survey Underway](#)
- [Seven New Members To Be Inducted Into The Civic Hall of Fame On April 20th](#)
- [Wanted: Business Experts For SCORE](#)

## Welcome To Perspectives Online - Your Chamber's New Electronic Newsletter

Designed to expand information to more members and more business people, **Perspectives Online** will provide broader, more timely, and less costly communications to a wider range of our member employers and your employees. While we still plan to provide a printed newsletter two or three times per year, **Perspectives Online** will soon become The Chamber's primary communications vehicle.

As we begin to implement **Perspectives Online**, we encourage your feedback, comments and suggestions. Our objective is to provide timely, relevant information about the many activities and initiatives of your Chamber, but we need to hear from you.

You are encouraged to share **Perspectives Online**. You can forward to your key people - you can print it out and distribute - or you can add employees to our email list, at no cost. Remember that all employees of a member firm are members of The Chamber and can participate in all of our activities and programs.

Watch for Perspectives Online as well as another electronic communications piece in the works, called "The Agenda", which will be focused on governmental and public affairs issues and activities. In addition, once we have tested our new online communications, advertising will be available in the future for Chamber members.

We hope you enjoy and benefit from Perspectives Online.

[Top](#)



## The Chamber - Business In Action

Representing employers of all sizes and shapes in Tuscaloosa County and West Alabama, The Chamber has grown into an essential voice of business and advocate for economic and community development as well as an influence on the direction and vitality of the region. With membership from virtually all sectors, including business, industry, retail, health care, education, professional and others, The Chamber is business in action on a daily basis.



Volunteer-led and volunteer-driven, The Chamber works daily on many fronts that impact and influence a positive climate for business, sound public policies and economic initiatives that support and contribute to a prosperous and vibrant economy. The basic mission of The Chamber is to act as catalyst and unified voice in preserving and enhancing the ability of our community to prosper and raise the standard of living.

To accomplish the basic mission and objectives of The Chamber, hundreds of volunteers from area firms come together to invest their resources, talents and energies in the development and implementation of defined strategies and initiatives contained in an annual business plan. This bold, proactive agenda is led and directed by involved volunteers with an understanding that if we all work together, we all win!

The Chamber's 2006 business plan is ambitious, and offers opportunities for involvement in a diverse menu of strategies, all designed to influence the economic health and future development of the region. And there are many exciting possibilities!

The business plan provides strategies and action items in five areas: business development, governmental affairs, community development, education and workforce development and organizational development. And The Chamber's volunteer and professional leadership structure is designed around these five core areas to insure coordination and effectiveness.

Within the organizational development division of The Chamber, there are strategies to expand membership, value-added services and benefits for our members, communications and marketing projects, enhanced technology and various other efforts to build a strong, healthy management system that supports the efforts of Chamber volunteers.

The business development division's strategies, which are primary and essential aspects of The Chamber's mission, include efforts to promote, market and sustain economic growth opportunities, job development, enhanced support for existing firms, and a positive environment for business investment.

Among the priorities in 2006 are continued development and promotional activities to expand retail sales, investment, and the area's competitiveness, and to market the community's business environment. The Chamber's plan also calls for expanded support for existing industries; technology and small business training and support; establishment of a new Women In Business Roundtable; and continued support for the development of the central business districts and riverfronts in Tuscaloosa and Northport.



## Continuing Education For Our Members Is A Value-Added Priority

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Over 700 plus business people participate on an annual basis in The Chamber's quality seminars and workshops, realizing The Chamber provides current, relevant and timely information on a myriad of issues and topics at a very reasonable cost.

"The Chamber understands the importance of providing our members continuing education opportunities to help grow their businesses, especially our small firms," stated Chamber Chairman, Gene Poole. "Our workshops and seminars are not only popular with our members, they have proven to be an excellent return on investment."

Workshops and seminars are provided in a variety of ways and formats and at a variety of times that hopefully can match up with any business person's schedule. The "Lunch & Learn" series is normally held during the lunch period and focuses on various business subjects, while the "Breakfast Series" tends to focus on technology-based issues and subjects.

In addition, The Chamber offers the Entrepreneur Institute, which is designed for more seasoned businesses to upgrade their skill levels and stay on top of ever-changing business trends and the economic environment.

Among the upcoming programs include the 2006 Workforce Development & Employment Law Seminar on April 26<sup>th</sup> and the popular "Exceptional Customer Service" seminar on April 6<sup>th</sup> .

On the menu for The Chamber's Breakfast Series is the April 25<sup>th</sup> program on "Becoming Efficient With Microsoft Outlook", and on May 23<sup>rd</sup> , "Maximizing Your Office Productivity."

For a complete listing of all workshops and seminars, dates and registration information, call The Chamber at 758.7588 or go online to <http://www.tuscaloosachamber.com/> .

## Problems Finding Qualified Employees? Check Out Alabama JobLink.

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One of our area's continuing challenges is workforce development and employers finding qualified employees. The good news is that partnerships are being put together to help build a more integrated, comprehensive system in Tuscaloosa County and West Alabama.

Through the leadership of Dr. Carloyn Dahl, Dean of the College of Continuing Studies at The University of Alabama and Vice Chair of The Chamber's Education & Workforce Development Division, The Chamber has partnered with the Alabama Employment Service and the Tuscaloosa Area Career Center, to present to area employers an innovative way to keep tabs on the local and state labor markets.

The system is known as **Alabama JobLink**. Initially put in place in June, 2005, **Alabama JobLink** offers several self-service options that can take some of the effort and expense out of recruiting and locating potential employees for your business - and it's FREE.



A PowerPoint presentation has been developed as a way to introduce you to JobLink and the tools that are available through this system. To access this presentation, simply click on the following link:

### [Chamber Job Link Training](#)

or

<http://www.tuscaloosachamber.com/memberarea/train/workforce/WorkforcePresentation.htm>

In addition, to this online presentation, Richard Crawford, Manager of the Tuscaloosa office of the Alabama Employment Service, will present a training session on April 26<sup>th</sup> during The Chamber's Workforce Development & Employment Law seminar. To register, call The Chamber at 758.7588 or go online at <http://www.tuscaloosachamber.com/>.

[Top](#)

## **Nominations For Top Entrepreneurs Sought**

Nominations for the annual Entrepreneur of the Year awards are currently being accepted and encouraged, according 2006 Chairman of the award committee, **Sam Parks** of the First National Bank of Central Alabama. The deadline for nominations for the 18<sup>th</sup> annual awards, sponsored by The Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama, will be **Thursday, April 6<sup>th</sup>**.

The annual awards program is designed to honor small business owners and entrepreneurs in four categories. Awards will be presented to the Entrepreneur of the Year, Innovator of the Year, and Advocate of the Year; and the Rising Star award will be presented to young, growing firms. Traditionally, The Chamber also honors a company or an individual with a Life Time Achievement Award based on their overall, long-term success and impact.

"This is a very special and prestigious recognition program," stated Parks, "for it highlights the essential role of small businesses and entrepreneurs in building our vibrant economy. Small business owners, managers and entrepreneurs take risks daily and are at the heart of job creation and economic growth. This annual

program gives us an opportunity to focus on and underscore their vital roles."

"Nominations are encouraged and invited from any group or individual in Tuscaloosa County and West Alabama," according to Parks. Nominations must be submitted on the official nomination form, which is available at The Chamber or online at <http://www.tuscaloosachamber.com/>. For details, call 758.7588 or 391.0559.

"We have a marvelous entrepreneurial climate in Tuscaloosa County," said Chamber President Johnnie Aycok. "The spirit of private enterprise is reflected in the many diverse contributions small businesses make to our flourishing economy. Our annual volunteer-led awards program plays an important role in honoring and spotlighting local business leadership and impact."

The 18<sup>th</sup> annual awards will be announced and presented on Wednesday, May 3<sup>rd</sup> at an 11:30 AM luncheon event at the Four Points Sheraton. Watch for details and registration information.

[Top](#)

## **Resources That Make A Difference - Make The Connection**

There are resources and opportunities available that can make a positive difference in your success as a business owner, manager, entrepreneur or even a 'wanna be' businessperson. Too often we tend to look elsewhere for the answers, when those answers and that assistance is right here in our own backyard.

The Chamber offers a wealth of resources, support and connections for new and existing small businesses and entrepreneurs as well as those firms desiring to move up to new levels of competitiveness. Whether online or on premise, The Chamber can provide connections to counseling, guidance, expertise, demographics and information resources that can and will create more informed decision-making and a more knowledgeable businessperson.

For example, go online to <http://www.tuscaloosachamber.com/> and spend some time. This extensive and in-depth website offers a wealth of information and guidance and will connect you to even more resources

with many of our key partners, including the Small Business Development Center at The University of Alabama, the U. S. Chamber of Commerce, public agencies, such as SBA, SCORE and a vast array of many other diverse resources.

While you're visiting the web, check out one of the most unique business-oriented resources available anywhere, Tuscaloosa County's own "One Stop" Resource Center. This partnership effort between and among The Chamber, local governments, the Alabama Revenue Department and others, has resulted in one of the few comprehensive, online licensing and permitting sites anywhere. It provides a multitude of training and planning modules for business planning, financial information, marketing and other essential elements for a successful enterprise. Just click on the "One Stop" logo on The Chamber's website.

There are resources available to you at and through The Chamber that can make a difference between success and failure. Make the connection!

[Top](#)



## **2006 Wage, Benefits & Skills Survey Underway**

The Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama is currently conducting our bi-annual survey of wages, benefits and skills in the Tuscaloosa County/West Alabama region. One of our most valuable and useful tools, the results of the survey will provide accurate and current data on wages and benefits being provided in the manufacturing and non-manufacturing sectors.

The Pathfinders of Dallas, Texas, in partnership with The Chamber, is conducting the study. "This will be the fourth bi-annual survey conducted by The Pathfinders for us," said Johnnie Aycock, President of The Chamber, "and we have found the firm to be highly competent and their work very reliable and accurate."

Currently, a cross-section of over 200 firms have been mailed the survey to be completed no later than April 20<sup>th</sup>. However, any Chamber member firm that would like to participate can request a survey for completion by contacting The Chamber at 391.0559.

[Top](#)

## **Seven New Members To Be Inducted Into The Civic Hall of Fame On April 20th**

Seven exceptional citizens will be inducted into the Tuscaloosa County Civic Hall of Fame on Thursday evening, April 20<sup>th</sup> at the Four Points Sheraton Hotel beginning at 6:30 PM. Coordinated and sponsored by The Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama, this is the sixth annual induction program.

"The Civic Hall of Fame is designed to honor exceptional citizens who have made significant, long-term contributions to the overall development of Tuscaloosa County," stated Lin Moore, Vice Chairman of The Chamber's Community Development Division. "Our 2006 class of honorees are outstanding and all have made an impact on the quality of our community."

The Civic Hall of Fame was born during The Chamber's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary year in 2000, and since its inception, 40 citizens have been honored as members of the Hall of Fame. The 2005 class of honorees included Robert Jemison, Henry Holman Mize, T. Y. Rogers, Jr., Minnie C. Miles, Harlan Meredith, Sam Faucett, and Tommy Hester. The 2006 class of honorees will be announced in the coming days.



Tickets and reservations for the induction ceremony for the 2006 Civic Hall of Fame will be available through The Chamber. Watch for more details, but set aside Thursday night, April 20<sup>th</sup> on your calendar for this very special evening.

[Top](#)

## **Wanted: Business Experts For SCORE**

The Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama is looking for experienced talent and business expertise to help and support a new generation of small business owners, entrepreneurs and future businesspeople.

"A person's business experience, no matter at what level on the corporate and entrepreneurial ladder, can be of immense value to a new business or to someone considering going into business for the first time," said Chamber President Johnnie Aycock. "Through SCORE, seasoned business veterans can directly impact the start up, growth and success of a small business in our community."

"Our local SCORE chapter is an excellent source of counseling, support and assistance, but it's a well kept secret," stated Aycock. "We want to grow our SCORE chapter in Tuscaloosa County and expand its reach."



SCORE, which stands for the Service Corps of Retired Executives, is a U. S. Small Business Administration supported initiative, housed at The Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama. "Everyday, across America, thousands of SCORE expert volunteers provide high-quality, confidential advice and counseling to small business owners, entrepreneurs and 'wanna be' businesspeople," according to Aycock, "and we have a successful SCORE chapter right here at home."

"However, we need to build our SCORE chapter and recruit additional experienced business talent and volunteers so we can expand our outreach and assistance," said Aycock. "We are currently seeking volunteers that are willing to share their expertise with individuals looking to start or grow their businesses."

An individual can be retired, semi-retired or still active in their business or profession. SCORE needs volunteers who have specialized knowledge in a variety of business areas and who are willing to provide confidential counseling and assistance. SCORE provides an orientation and training process for all volunteers to guide an individual through the counseling program.

"The Tuscaloosa-based SCORE chapter is looking for experienced volunteers that want to share their real-world expertise with entrepreneurs that need your help," said SCORE Chapter President, Don Townsend. "SCORE counselors take part in one-to-one mentoring and team counseling. The assignments are varied and challenging and can include a broad range of business issues and needs."

"Community service takes many forms," said Townsend. "I retired from a company after 36 years in various management positions. A friend suggested SCORE as an active business related service entity which offered a lot of challenges and as an opportunity to stay close to business while providing some personal fulfillment. I've now been a SCORE volunteer for over eight years and have enjoyed the satisfaction of contributing to the success of others."

Known as "counselors to America's small businesses," SCORE is a non-profit, volunteer organization with more than 10,500 working and retired business professionals in chapters across the country. As a resource partner of the U. S. Small Business Administration, SCORE annually counsels more than 350,000 small business people and entrepreneurs.

The local SCORE chapter receives support from SBA and the national SCORE organization. At the local level, The Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama provides the chapter with help and support for day to day operations, including facilities for monthly meetings and client sessions and referrals of potential clients seeking business counseling.

For anyone interested in getting involved in SCORE or wanting more information, call The Chamber at 758.7588 or 553.0957, or visit online at [www.score.org](http://www.score.org).

[score.org/volunteer.html](http://score.org/volunteer.html) .

Inquire today for a challenging and rewarding tomorrow through SCORE.

[Top](#)

