

CHOICES

Deloris McMullen conducts training for several volunteers who will present the CHOICES program to 8th graders during the second semester of the 2004-2005 school year. CHOICES is a hands-on, interactive presentation that empha-

sizes to students the importance of making wise choices in their school career and in life in general. Deloris is manager of education development at The Chamber.



Corporate Giving

Two organizations-Alabama Giving and the Business Council of Alabama-recently collaborated on the production of a booklet on corporate giving. The booklet followed some solid research about corporate philanthropy in Alabama.

Over the next few issues, Perspectives will share information from this booklet. We hope it will help our members evaluate the level of their support of the community. Corporate Giving is Smart Business

Businesses in Alabama see the following benefits to giving:

- Develops a visible, positive corporate image.
- Enhances long-term business interests, opening the door to growth opportunities.
- Increases tax savings.
- Builds company and employee morale.
- Improves employee retention.
- Positions your business as a leader.
- Reinforces relationships with customers.
- Improves communities for employees and customers
- Strengthens relationships with community leaders.
- Builds cohesiveness within your business.
- Invests in a more educated, well-rounded pool from which to hire future employees.

• Mike Reilly, president of Randall Publishing in Tuscaloosa, was quoted in the booklet: "We contribute 5% of our after-tax profit to local charities, but our customer base isn't even in West Alabama. We don't do it to market our business. The people here are our future employees and neighbors, and we want to support that. We do it because it's the right way to run a business, and the right thing to do."

A Dream Comes True: Opening Day

To many Chamber members, the story sounds very familiar. You have an idea for a business that just won't go away. The idea continues to grow and you spend endless hours developing the idea into a business plan. But there are still details to work out, and the timing just isn't right. Eventually, everything falls into place; you take the plunge and open the doors. Sound familiar?

A recent new chapter of the American Dream is Northridge Fitness, the result of the dreams of Mary Cartee. Northridge is the newest and one of the largest fitness centers in Tuscaloosa.

Mary is a native of Tuscaloosa, and has been devoted to fitness most of her life, starting with her first job out of high school. "I became a fitness instructor out of high school and worked at it through college. I went to law school for a year, but I knew what I wanted to do."

After years of experience in the fitness industry, she had an idea that just wouldn't go away. That was in 1997. It took until November of 2004 for everything to fall into place and the doors of Northridge Fitness Center to open.

Both Mary and her partner, Terry Brasseal, have over 20 years experience in fitness. But Mary knew her business had to be special. "The first thing was to emphasize total fitness. There are many places to go to just work out or pump iron. We evaluate a person's overall health, diet and fitness level. Then we work together to develop an overall fitness plan, set goals and manage the achievement of those goals."

Mary's second important ingredient was family. "There are plenty of workout places in town, and each has its niche. But even those places that are 'family friendly' basically offered babysitting for the children while the parents were working out. It just didn't seem right. There's more talk about child obesity now. It didn't make sense to give kids a snack and sit them in front of a television while mom and dad were getting fit."

At Northridge, kids have their own membership card, which gives them a feeling of importance when they sign in. Northridge offers structured programs beginning with Building Blocks, designed for kids from six months to six years. At six years of age, they graduate to the Fitness Factory, which includes stationary bikes and weight training classes. And in each of the training areas, there are always two of three trainers to supervise their activities.

David Jamason is the Membership Services Director at Northridge. He cites the quick success of Northridge to Mary's persistence and attention to detail. "There are plenty of places to work out. Mary is the difference here" David added, "Most days, the hours are 5:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Mary's here most of those hours. You can find her here checking the cleanliness of the facilities, offering advice to members while working out, and always asking them what could make the center more member friendly."

"I've worked at several facilities in several cities", David stated. "Mary has created something unlike anything I've seen before. She instills her attitude in all the members of our staff. As a result, members are comfortable coming to work out alone or with their families. They are especially comfortable dropping their children off for their classes. That comfort level is just unheard of anywhere else I've been."

Like so many other Chamber members, the success of Northridge Fitness is the result of long hours and hard work by the owners and their employees. That seems to be the recipe to make those dreams come true.



Cutting the ribbon are (L-R) Northport Councilman John Myers, Terry Brasseal, Mary Cartee, Northport Mayor Harvey Fretwell and Tuscaloosa Mayor Al Dupont.

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Chamber Survey Strong Support For Chamber Programming

Results from a recent survey of Chamber members show that, generally, there is strong support for most of the organization's programming. That support is especially strong for Chamber efforts to help small businesses grow and prosper.

The survey also showed that members place a premium on opportunities the Chamber presents for them to network with other Chamber members.

In answer to the question of what Chamber services should continue to be offered, more than 63% mentioned Commerce Street, a networking event held several times each year and led by the Chamber Ambassadors. Even more popular among the survey respondents are the small business seminars and workshops The Chamber offers; 83.5% said to continue these efforts. Also high in the opinion of members is The Chamber's annual meeting.

In terms of importance, those surveyed ranked the following the highest: recognizing and supporting small business, recruiting new firms to Tuscaloosa County, and promoting and marketing a positive image of the county.

As far as The Chamber's communications program is concerned, right at 80% of the respondents said the amount of information they receive from The Chamber is "just enough."

More than 56% of the respondents said they had contacted The Chamber in the past year, and nearly 69% of those rated the response from The Chamber staff as "excellent."

One part of the survey asked respondents to indicate what types of seminars and workshops they would like The Chamber to sponsor. Business planning, human resources management, and workforce recruitment were the three subjects mentioned most.

On why their firm is a member of The Chamber, nearly 68% said it was to support economic development. Networking opportunities and making business contacts were the next most popular reasons for Chamber membership.

Finally, about 75% of the respondents said The Chamber has met or exceeded their expectations in fulfilling the reasons for their membership.



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Volunteers

The Chamber Wants You Paige Giddiens is Volunteer Role Model

Wanted: Chamber of Commerce Volunteer.

Jobs Available: many and varied.

Qualifications Required: commitment, energy, enthusiasm, fresh ideas.

Hours: When you can fit it into an already hectic schedule.

Salary: Barter system is used. We trade your time for opportunities to make new friends, learn about your community, promote your company and yourself, and have a good time while you're at it.

Where to apply: Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama, 2200 University Blvd., Tuscaloosa

Now, before you rush down to The Chamber offices and apply for one of the volunteer positions available, run out to B. F. Goodrich, check in at the Security Building, and ask to see Paige Giddiens, the person in charge of communications and special events.

Spend about 30 minutes with Paige, and you'll see that she's a perfect template for a Chamber volunteer.

At its 105th Annual Meeting on January 20, The Chamber recognized Paige's contributions as a volunteer by giving her an award for distinguished service. Paige had recently completed her third year as a Chamber Ambassador, including serving as chair of the group in 2004.

She simply slid from that volunteer role into a new one in 2005. She agreed to bring her energy, enthusiasm, commitment and fresh ideas to a spot on the President's Council.

Some personal notes about Paige: She's a native of Centreville and a graduate of Cahawba Academy. She's married to Roger, who works with NHS Management, and they have two daughters. Both Taylor, 11, and Madison, 7, go to Huntington Elementary.

She's been with B. F. Goodrich for 15 years. Her next big job assignment? A huge Easter egg hunt for the children of the plant's employees.

Paige described her experiences as an Ambassador as exciting and rewarding.

"I like to see people have fun," she said. "I like the fact that Ambassador work produces immediate results—happy Chamber members who are getting good value for their investment in The Chamber."

Receiving the distinguished service award in January means a lot to Paige. So did being named, in 2003, as Ambassador of the Year.

"I've made a lot of new friends. I've established some good business relationships."

Paige said she's thankful that her employer, B. F. Goodrich, allows her to be active in the community. Besides The Chamber, that activity includes a workload at Chapel Hill Baptist Church and serving on the Board of Directors for United Cerebral Palsy.

A strong believer in the benefits of a Chamber membership, Paige cites the networking opportunities The Chamber provides and the training seminars made available to Chamber members at reasonable prices as two of those benefits.

"The word travels fast at Chamber functions about who you are and what your business's product or service is," said Paige about the networking benefit of Chamber membership. "Networking is marketing yourself and marketing your product and service."

Paige Giddiens has marketed herself and her employer well. That's why she was officially recognized by The Chamber twice in the past three years.

And that's why, if you want that volunteer position mentioned above, a visit with Paige would be a good idea.



Paige and a fellow employee, Ronnie Colburn, go over plans for an employee event at B. F. Goodrich.



Federal Funding

West Alabama Workers to Benefit From \$410,000 in Federal Funding For Skills Training

by Susan Miller

Congressman Artur Davis (D-Birmingham) announced in January that the West Alabama Center for Workforce Development of Shelton State Community College will receive \$410,000 through the Omnibus Appropriations Act to aid in the skills training and assessment of West Alabama workers.

One of the primary goals of The Workforce Development Center is to assist in counterbalancing the shortage of skilled workers by helping employers hire and retain qualified employees, and build a stronger workforce for West Alabama.

This federal funding will provide an additional resource for work skills training and ongoing advanced and customized skill training to potential and current workers, as well as pre-employment programs geared specifically for those individuals with limited education and employment skills.

Currently, the Skills Training Division offers a wide variety of short term (three months or less) courses providing certificate programs and customized training that anticipate and meet the changing needs of business and industry. These additional funds will be used to develop of supplementary programs for adults in Building Construction Trades in Greene and Hale Counties that will teach work skills in such areas as masonry and plumbing. Other training initiatives planned include short term Machine Tool Technology Training in Sumter County and Shelton State Community College in Tuscaloosa County. Funding will be used for site preparation, materials, and instructional cost, and tuition scholarships.

The Workforce Development Center, which was created through an initiative of The Chamber, provides competency based education to the workforce for development of basic skills needed for entry and minimal skilled level jobs. This targeted instruction includes training in Computer Literacy, Applied Math, Reading for Information, Essential Workplace Skills, and skills identified by local business and industry are necessary for entry level jobs in their companies.

The pre-employment program offers 400-hour targeted instruction enrolling 10 participants at a time. Training is offered at 10 sites and is available in Tuscaloosa, Pickens, Fayette, Bibb, Hale, Green, and Sumter Counties. Currently, there are approximately 160 people on a waiting list to enroll in the program in this region. Additional sites are planned to help serve the most economically depressed areas of West Alabama.

Shelton State Community College WorkKeys Service Center offers testing, assessment and training for workers in all types of organizations. This assessment tool is used for improving hiring decisions, reducing turnover, and improving employee satisfaction and productivity. Local Industry will have an opportunity to request funds to profile entry level jobs to determine potential employees' skill levels and where he/she needs to improve.

Funding determination will be made on the basis several factors including Industry Designation to insure participation of a diverse industry base (i.e. Health Care, Manufacturing, Service Industries) and size of Industry to maximize assessments of the greatest number of workers and anticipated need of new and entry level employees.

For more information on skills training and assessment, please call the West Alabama Center for Workforce Development, please call 205/391-2482.

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