From the Chamber President

Do I hear Chamber Music?

Chamber of Commerce. What image comes to mind when you read these words? Business? Money? Boredom?? Recently I was having a conversation with a group of people about our upcoming Annual Meeting and Gala. I was telling them about our plans for a classic Vegas theme with live music, dancing and fun games. They stopped me midsentence and said, “This can’t be a chamber event, it sounds like too much fun.” I realized at that moment, that our rebranding campaign had only just begun. Business as usual does not apply to chambers, industries, small business or corporate America anymore. “We are not interested in mapping out what we did yesterday – we are looking for the people, activities, situations, markets, relationships, interactions, value propositions and business models we’ve never seen before – presented in a context the business understands and can use” (ebusiness) Business and marketing theory is being rewritten as we speak. The reality is that we live and compete in a brand new era. We have altered our course. We are connecting with those who are defining the future of business and commerce. Not with boring meetings and events, but with effective networking opportunities and valuable resources for you and your business. Even though it is the end of business as usual, it is the beginning of a new age of opportunity. Suits and flow charts have been replaced by business casual and interactive computer images.

Historically, chambers have always moved with the times. The days of the predictable and lackluster chamber style music are over, replaced with a refreshing and updated style that is timeless. For instance, did you know that a chamber helped pay for Charles Lindbergh’s flight across the Atlantic? A chamber also bought the permit for the Woodstock Music & Art Fair in 1969. No, chambers of commerce aren’t boring… at least not your chamber. We provide people with the valuable tools and offer exciting events they need to further their business. All while having fun doing it. You will actually enjoy these sessions and workshops while taking away a new piece of insider information. Join us this month for our Annual Meeting and Gala. We’re calling it Rollin’ in the Dough. Sister Schubert (yes, she makes those delicious rolls) will be our guest speaker and The Retro Catz will be piping in the tunes ‘til 10:30. With all of the new opportunities this year at the Chamber, you could be rolling in the dough, too. It’s true – you will hear chamber music this year, but probably not what you expect. Big things are coming your way from the CoC, and we are as committed as ever to bringing you the cutting edge tools and necessary information to ensure that your business grows and prospers to its fullest this year.

Visit our website for a schedule of programs, seminars and events for 2014. We’ll be waiting for you.

Leah Bolin
President & CEO, Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce
The Chamber will host its monthly "Community Luncheon" on Friday, February 28, in the All Steak Restaurant Banquet Room (323 3rd Ave. S.E.). Our featured speaker will be Lew Drummond, Executive Director of the Alabama Automotive Manufacturers Association. The event is sponsored by The Quality Staffing Solution, Inc. Doors open at 11:30 am to allow networking opportunities before the program begins at 11:50 am. Lunch is $15 per person for Chamber members and $20 for "Future" members. Reservations in advance are required*. Please register online at www.cullmanchamber.org or RSVP by contacting the Chamber via e-mail at info@cullmanchamber.org or by calling 256-734-0454.

* 48 hours cancellation notice or subject to billing. No payments will be taken at the door but can be invoiced or paid online.

Meet Lew Drummond of AAMA

As director of the West Alabama Center for Workforce Development, Lewis Drummond focuses on helping people get the skills local employers need.

In 2011 he donned an additional hat. Drummond became executive director of the Alabama Automotive Manufacturers Association. The 10-year-old association has more than 450 member companies and organizations in Alabama and neighboring states. It includes automotive manufacturers Mercedes-Benz, Honda, Hyundai and Toyota; hundreds of automotive parts suppliers and firms providing professional services; and government entities and private organizations interested in seeing the state’s automotive industry succeed. The association doesn’t lobby elected officials or take political positions, Drummond said.

“The mission of the association is to provide growth and continued improvement in Alabama’s automotive industry,” he said. Quarterly meetings held around the state let its members interact and get information on manufacturing trends, techniques and concerns.

The Alabama Automotive Manufacturers Association’s goals mesh with those of the West Alabama Center for Workforce Development, which is affiliated with and housed at Shelton State Community College. Drummond grew up in Huntsville and came to Tuscaloosa to attend the University of Alabama. After graduating, he settled in Tuscaloosa and took a job with IBM. He worked in IBM’s higher education unit that developed informational technology solutions for colleges and universities. His territory included Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee, and he became familiar with area colleges’ needs.

After retiring, he joined the staff of Shelton State and five years ago, he became director of its Center for Workforce Development. The center opened in 2003 and was part of then-Gov. Bob Riley’s plan that set up 10 workforce development centers across the state to meet existing industries’ needs. The Shelton State center covers employers’ workforce needs in seven West Alabama counties — Tuscaloosa, Bibb, Fayette, Greene, Hale, Lamar and Pickens.

Drummond said he is optimistic about the state’s auto industry, which continues to grow, and what it means for workers with the skills and training needed by that industry. They have a bright future, he said.
Phone Etiquette Seminar is a Success

The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce recently held one of its many programs this past Thursday, January 23 called Phone Etiquette with speaker Lacy Beasley. This seemingly simple seminar turned out to be anything but as the room filled with almost 20 people who signed up to attend the free seminar.

“I was very pleased with the turnout. We had had a high level of interest and everyone was able to attend. The message was great. The interaction between the attendees and the speaker was great. Lacy did an excellent job talking about this topic, covering cell phone and in-office phone etiquette,” Director of Business & Workforce Development Jackie Moore said.

“This is something that the Cullman Chamber is working really hard to find resources for small business and large business, business period, in the area and resources they can use that have value to them which will help businesses improve or fine-tune their skill set.”

Attendees were excited to participate in this interactive seminar and take invaluable tips away to help instill in their own businesses. Lacy was a charismatic and energetic speaker whose tips were extremely effective. When asked why such a simple task of answering the phone is so important, she explained that it’s all connected. The phone call is the first communication established with almost any potential customer, and that first means of contact is a reflection of your business.

“The goal is to make Cullman a more vibrant community. And the more we can improve the businesses locally, the more we increase the quality of life and the amount of business that flow into Cullman,” guest speaker and Vice President of Retail Strategies Lacy Beasley said. “So, continuing to have these workshops and to keep all the local businesses up to speed on the best business practices, the better it makes the entire city as a whole and helps the local economy.”

Explaining her day job, Beasley stated, “Retail Strategies is a municipality-consulting firm. We help cities bring in new businesses and help the existing businesses grow. Essentially, we grow a better retail environment for municipalities.”

The Cullman Chamber strives to bring pertinent and business changing programs, seminars, workshops, etc. to the table for their members. They want to help grow business locally on all planes.

Retail Development Coordinator of Cullman Economic Development Agency and Chairperson for the Chamber’s Retail Committee Susie Hood Ashley said, “We’ve spent a lot of time coming up with new events, programs, seminars and workshops to try to revitalize existing businesses, as well as bring in new businesses and invite them to join the Chamber and to be a part of these events to improve their businesses. Whether it is through customer service or reintroducing best practices, things you already know day to day, but may forget when you are consumed in other duties. It’s just a refresher course for business basics.”

And no one is ever too old to have a refresher on a seemingly simple task as answering the phone. Just as technology and times change, so too does the way in which we communicate. There is still an art to answering the phone – be it a cell phone or an in-office phone – in a professional setting and a professional mannerism.

www.CullmanChamber.org
Last Thursday, January 23rd, the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce held their quarterly meeting for new members called Membership 101. Director of Membership & Marketing Deonne Ludwig helped to facilitate the event along with Chamber staff.

The quarterly meeting is a basic introduction into what the Cullman Chamber does and educates new members on how they can make the most of out of their membership. The meeting was from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. and covered a vast variety of information.

Cullman Chamber President & CEO Leah Bolin stepped up to the plate to deliver her enthusiastic and entertaining repertoire of chamber history, knowledge, goals and events. The crowd of attendees sat in their seats heavily engrossed in Bolin’s speech.

Following the President’s introduction, Director of Business & Workforce Development Jackie Moore presented an extensive Powerpoint covering her business prowess and development efforts. By the end of her last slide, one thing was clear – people were undoubtedly surprised by what the Cullman Chamber really does. 

There seems to be a lot of misconceptions in regards to what a chamber really does, let alone our very own Cullman Chamber. A chamber is a private organization whose goal is to grow the commerce in their area to the best of their abilities through a variety of efforts. Bolin said of this common misconception, “I am often surprised to find out that members do not really understand the role of a CoC or how many benefits are associated with this membership organization. Additionally, they are surprised at the many things we do for the community.”

Membership clearly has its perks and privileges, but here is just a partial listing of what one may receive when they join the Chamber as a member: 
- business networking opportunities; 
- member-only monthly marketing reports; 
- complimentary meeting rooms; 
- additional member-to-member discounts; 
- additional business referrals and contacts you may have otherwise missed; 
- two free business listings on www.cullmanchamber.org; 
- free business listing in the “Cullman Area Who’s Who Business Directory;” and 
- a free listing in “Classic Cullman.” 

“Membership has its privileges, but if you do not know what those are, it is hard to take advantage of them. Membership 101 provides the history of the CoC, the CoC program of work and an overview of who we are and who we aren’t,” Bolin stated.

Following Moore’s presentation, Administrative & Media Specialist Natalie Bonner spoke about the growing tourism field and travel industry as she filled in for Tourism Director Cecelia Smith who was busy.
Director of Membership & Marketing Deonne Ludwig went into specifics about membership and showed new members how to navigate our Chamber website and how to make the most out of their membership. “Attending a Membership 101 will give the Chamber member the opportunity to see how to put the Chamber to work for their business. During the informal meetings, most that attend are astonished at everything that the Chamber does in our community and to promote their members,” Ludwig said.

“One new feature of our Memberships is the ability to enhance their online presence through the Chamber and I think most realize how valuable that is and don’t know that aspect is part of their investment.”

One thing is for sure, the Cullman Chamber is invested in their members and, likewise, their members are invested in their chamber. For more information on how to become a member, please call (256) 734-0454 or email dludwig@cullmanchamber.org.

Chamber helped to celebrate growth in the Cullman area

JIM N NICK’S BAR-B-Q
216 2nd Avenue SE, Cullman
Statistics indicate that people searching the internet are experienced, educated consumers who use the web to help make purchase decisions! In fact, 78% of American adults use the internet and 83% of users have purchased a product/service online.*

Are you reaching this targeted market?
Many members realize the benefit of their membership and the value of targeting the market already driven to the Chamber’s Online Business Directory. It is about utilizing the web and the Chamber name to promote your business.
Upgrade opportunities are available, including the ability to display your logo in our Online Business Directory, increase visibility to your own web link, and provide enhancements that give a professional first impression. Contact the Chamber for more information.

Stand Out from the Crowd!!
- Enhance your Listing
- Logo, Photos, Priority Placement in the Online Business Directory, a 1600 Character Business Description, with an additional 200 Character Description right in the Search Results
- Receive an Enhanced Map Listing
- Pin which includes more information when clicked
- Be Highlighted in your Business Category
- Display a custom banner ad as one of our Limited Business Category Sponsors
- Select Premiere Visibility on High Traffic Pages
- Choose to become a Complete Website Sponsor

For more details regarding these opportunities, please contact Deonne Ludwig at dludwig@cullmanchamber.org or 256-255-0726.

Also available - A Free Basic Listing instructional video can be provided!
Your FREE Listing on the Chamber’s Online Business Directory includes
- Online Member Profile – mini webpage
- 200 character business description
- Hours of operation/Driving directions
- Personalized keywords that help people searching online find YOU.
- Free event postings
- Free online job postings
- Free online promotions / Advertise with Hot Deals and monitor internets hits.
- Ability to register for Events and pay online.
- Access your data from anywhere, at anytime!
- Updates are displayed on the Chamber’s website automatically, immediately.
- Access lead lists tailored to your business category(ies)
- Lodging members may view and update vacancies, facilities and room amenities.

The basic listings require your attention to update your business description, 8 key word/search terms, hours of operation and driving directions to enhance your ‘searchability’.

You can review and update this information through the Chamber’s website, or by going directly to www.chamberlogin.com. Contact the Chamber for your login and password if you don’t have it. To view an instructional video about the online features please visit http://benefits.cullmanchamber.org

Take a few minutes to update your information to take advantage of your online potential!
Leadership Cullman County - February Session to be Held

| FEBRUARY 20, 2014 - “QUALITY OF LIFE” |

The program is designed to identify, prepare and build upon leadership resources within Cullman County. It brings leaders together to discuss the present and future direction of our county and prepares them for greater involvement through volunteer roles in the community.

The program consists of eight monthly meetings focused on various topics such as education, criminal justice, local government, health care, state government, economic development, and quality of life. For more information contact the Chamber at 256-734-0454.

Nominate your favorite small business today

The Retail Committee of the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce is proud to provide special recognition to our small business community by presenting one (1) monthly recognition award and one (1) yearly award. Monthly award winners will be considered the nominees for the yearly recognition award to be presented at the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce Annual Meeting held each February. Visit CullmanChamber.org to show some love to your favorite business.

January Session Held: “Ag Day”

The Chamber’s Youth Leadership Class visited Wallace State Community College and toured the Horticulture Department. After the tour the group returned to the North Alabama Agri-plex Heritage Center for lunch. Travis Kress with Soil and Conservation and also a local farmer provided information on careers in Agriculture, Ag Industry and Technology. Rachel Dawsey, coordinator at the Agri-plex provided information on programs offered at the facility. After lunch the group visited Clark Haynes, Sweet Potato Farm and also received a tour of Kim Haynes greenhouse facility. Thanks to all the sponsors and the Agri-plex for all the help assisting with this tour. Thanks Big “Doc” for joining us on this day.

The class will visit Montgomery on March 5, 2014. The cost for participants is $50 which includes transportation (bus) to and from Montgomery and lunch.

The program will also include presentations from various governmental and agency directors who will meet with our group and provide an update on their respective programs and activities. Furthermore, our local Cullman area state legislative delegation has been invited to join us for lunch that day to provide an overview on legislative issues.

CoC Seventh Annual Montgomery Drive-In

| MARCH 5, 2014 |

The Chamber’s 7th Annual Montgomery Drive-In presented by the Cullman Economic Development Agency and Cullman County Industrial Development Authority is set for Wednesday, March 5. The cost for participants is $50 which includes transportation (bus) to and from Montgomery and lunch.

The program will also include presentations from various governmental and agency directors who will meet with our group and provide an update on their respective programs and activities. Furthermore, our local Cullman area state legislative delegation has been invited to join us for lunch that day to provide an overview on legislative issues.

Thank you to our Breakfast Sponsor:
PEPSI COLA DISTRIBUTING COMPANY
www.pepsi.com

February 27 and have lunch with legislators and also tour the capitol. Breakfast will be sponsored by Serra Visser Nissan.

Thank you to our Lunch Sponsor:
JEB WILLIAMSON CPA, LLC
www.jwilliamsoncpa.com

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The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce’s 71st Annual Meeting & Gala “Rollin’ in the Dough” presented by Peoples Bank of Alabama is scheduled for Thursday, February 13th and will celebrate the past year’s accomplishments under Melissa Cartee’s leadership and kick-off the new year of programs and activities under 2014-15 Chamber Chair Jim Weidner’s leadership.

The Annual Meeting & Gala event will be held at Loft 212 with doors opening at 5:30 p.m. and the program beginning at 6:00 p.m. The Post Party will be from 8 to 10:30 p.m. The event is “Old Vegas” dress optional. A limited number of tickets for $50 per individual remain as well as a few Silver tables.

Guests can expect a traditional annual meeting. Melissa Cartee will be handing the gavel over to our incoming chair Jim Weidner. We will present our Emma Marie Eddleman Award and the Mayors Association will present the Lucille Galin Award. Of course, there will be a few new things added to the agenda. We are going to honor that tradition with a post party. There will be a “big band,” a dance floor, plenty of games and food and, of course, our Drawdown,” Bolin added.

For some added fun, there will be a Drawdown for the chance to win $10,000 presented by Drinkard Development. There is a one in 300 chance of winning.

Director of Membership & Marketing Deonne Ludwig said, “The Gala will continue to grow each year, but this year is going to be hard to top.” It sounds like it will certainly be a fun, informative event. For more information, to make a reservation or to purchase a Drawdown ticket, please contact the Chamber at info@cullmanchamber.org or by telephone at (256) 734-0454.

Win $10,000 DRAWDOWN

- Tickets to the Gala and the Drawdown are sold separately -

1 Ticket $100 DONATION

Don’t “Wild Card” chance - 9:50

Win $10,000 DRAWDOWN

Final Drawdown # will be announced at Post Party 9:00PM

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