It’s often said you should never mix business with pleasure, but don’t count the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce as big believers in the theory. We want you to have your cake (and whatever other local foods you can think of) and eat it, too, at our 3rd Quarter Business After Hours event — Samplers in the Breezeway, sponsored by HH Technologies, Inc.

This year’s fan-favorite networking opportunity is set for Tuesday, October 24. It’ll start around 5:30 p.m., last until 7:00 p.m. and take place in the breezeway next to the Chamber building.

Samplers in the Breezeway is shifting from the heat of the summer to the fall but is otherwise going mostly unchanged, still featuring a showcase of the delectable local flavors the Cullman area has to offer, as well as live music.

And don’t forget about the business aspect of the evening, either. Be sure to come with a full stack of business cards, because you’re bound to make some serious contacts.

The cost is $15 for Chamber members and $20 for future members, which includes samples from all participating eateries. As with all paid Chamber events, there is a 48-hour cancellation policy. Reservations are required, and tickets are limited.

For more information, to register or for Chamber member eateries interested in participating, contact the Chamber at 256-734-0454 or info@cullmanchamber.org.

Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce
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Entrepreneurship on tap for final Community Luncheon of 2017

Entrepreneurship will take center stage when the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce closes out its 2017 Community Luncheon programming on Friday, October 20 at the All Steak Restaurant. As President and CEO of Innovation Depot in Birmingham, guest speaker Devon Laney knows plenty about the topic. The University of Alabama graduate was selected as one of The Birmingham Business Journal’s “Top 40 Under 40” in 2009 and has lectured at conferences around the world on entrepreneurial development, business incubation, and innovation.

Mr. Laney has worked for Innovation Depot, the recipient of the 2011 Technology Incubator of the Year Award from the International Business Innovation Association, since 2005. He was named CEO in 2014.

Per usual, the Luncheon will be held in All Steak’s banquet room from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Tickets are $15 for Chamber Members and $20 for future members. Call 256-734-0454 or email info@cullmanchamber.org to reserve your seat.

Thank you to our Presenting Sponsor, Shirley Quattlebaum – State Farm Insurance, as well as to our October Sponsor, Alabama Farm Credit.
The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce is saying “YEA!” for the Young Entrepreneurs Academy, a new elective offered at Cullman and Holly Pond high schools this fall.

YEA! guides local students through the process of starting and running a legitimate business or social movement over the course of a full academic year. Since 2004, YEA! has graduated more than 4,000 students and been responsible for the start-up of more than 3,000 businesses and social movements.

Where else can high schoolers start as students and graduate as CEOs? YEA!, that’s where!

YEA! was developed at the University of Rochester in 2004 with the support of a grant from the Kauffman Foundation, and the Chamber is excited to introduce it to the Cullman area. Cullman’s and Holly Pond’s YEA! classes have already enjoyed a field trip to Royal Technologies and are set to start their guest speaker series with a visit from State Farm Insurance agent Shirley Quattlebaum.

Throughout the rest of the course, students will:
- Brainstorm business ideas
- Write a business plan
- Interact with business professionals
- Pitch their business plan to potential “investors” (think Shark Tank meets the Apprentice meets American Idol)
- Obtain funding
- Legally register their businesses
- Participate in a trade show
- Actually launch their own businesses or social movements

The benefits of participating in the YEA! program are endless. Not only do students earn hands-on entrepreneurial experience, but they hear from local entrepreneurs and learn about real businesses and why they succeed or fail. Then, hopefully by the end of the course, they’ve become more confident in their own ideas and abilities.

One of YEA!’s many success stories stems from right here in Alabama. After launching RecMed, a first aid vending machine company, Opelika’s Taylor Rosenthal drew international media coverage for turning down a $30 million buyout offer. Not too shabby for a 14-year-old!

“I’m excited to be part of such a creative and innovative new program for the Cullman area,” said Wes Smith, the Chamber’s Director of Entrepreneurship & Education and YEA! project manager. “YEA! will give local students some very valuable business tools to take with them into the real world.”

Through their interactions with business professionals during the year, YEA! students gain some of the most important knowledge and experience they need to succeed. Local professionals volunteer their time and expertise as guest speakers, mentors, investors, field trip hosts, business plan reviewers, and much more. The time YEA! students spend with adults who encourage their futures is invaluable.

“I am very excited about the Young Entrepreneurs Academy,” said Dr. T.J. Franey, the Chamber’s Vice Chair of Entrepreneurship & Education and the Special Projects Coordinator for the Cullman County Commission on Education. “This program brings outside-the-box thinking to the classroom that encourages creativity and inspires students to take an idea through the YEA! process in order to develop a solution that helps others.

“Entrepreneurship is simply another pathway for student success. We are very appreciative of the many community members who have partnered with the schools and the Chamber through ‘Converging for Success’ to bring this program to our students.”

For more information on the YEA! program or on becoming a sponsor or mentor, contact Director of Entrepreneurship & Education Wes Smith at 256-734-0454 or wsmith@cullmanchamber.org.
October Small Business of the Month

Willoughby Roofing & Sheet Metal named September Small Business of the Month

The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce would like to congratulate Willoughby Roofing & Sheet Metal, Inc. as September’s Small Business of the Month, sponsored by Hallmark Dentistry.

Established in 1981, Willoughby Roofing is a full-service general contractor working in the commercial and industrial roofing sector. The family-owned business installs all types of roofing systems and also offers construction and flooring services. Willoughby Roofing, which serves clients throughout Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and Tennessee, is constantly evolving to increase their operations and outreach to existing and potential customers. They provide thorough training for its employees to install superior roofs for its customers in an efficient and timely manner. Willoughby Roofing has a long track record for excellent performance and is a preferred installer for top quality manufacturers such as Carlisle, Firestone, Sika Sarnafil and Siplast, among others.

The Willoughbys strongly believe in giving back and supporting the Cullman community and surrounding areas. Willoughby Roofing is heavily involved with the Chamber, sponsoring EPIC’s 3rd Quarter social at Goat Island Brewing, as well as a silver table at this year’s Annual Meeting & Gala. Company Vice President Kyle Willoughby serves on the Chamber Board of Directors and EPIC Advisory Council, and graduated with the 2016-17 Leadership Cullman County Class. Owner Van Willoughby has served on the Board of Directors of the Boys and Girls Youth Ranches of Alabama for more than 20 years and annually donates to the cause on behalf of Willoughby Roofing. Being able to help children in need in Cullman County and across the state is something Van has advocated and promoted since becoming the company’s president.

Each month, a sponsoring business helps celebrate and acknowledge the Small Business of the Month winner. If you have a local business you would like to nominate for their outstanding service, please contact Brian Poole at bpoole@cullmanchamber.org. Monthly winners will be automatically nominated for the annual Small Business of the Year Award, which is presented at the Chamber’s Annual Meeting & Gala.
Iowa S.P.O.R.T.S. conference yields great results for Cullman area tourism

Travel season is upon the tourism industry once again! While I hate leaving the family at home while I go on the road, I do really enjoy this part of my job. I am an ambassador for Cullman County that meets with groups interested in coming to the area for any type of event. It just so happens the conference I attended in late September was all about S.P.O.R.T.S. Hosted in the beautiful city of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, S.P.O.R.T.S. The Relationship Conference truly sticks to its theme — relationships. The premise of the conference was to meet with organizations we feel are a great fit for Cullman County and the brand the area projects. While more than 100 rights holders (sports organizations or tournament directors) were in attendance, my allotment of appointments granted me 25 meetings.

One meeting was with Bobby Eads, Sr., the Vice President of Fishers of Men National Tournament Trail, and we confirmed that Cullman County will host the Fishers of Men District 2 Championships at Smith Lake Park in November 2018. The only thing left to do is sign the papers and send them out. Then, the real work begins.

I was also able to meet with other organizations such as the USYSA (United States Youth Soccer Association), AAU (Amateur Athletic Union), USSSA (United States Specialty Sports Association), PDGA (Professional Disc Golf Association), ISSA (International Senior Softball Association), NJCAA (National Junior College Athletic Association) and a couple others I feel we could be hosting in the next year or so.

These meetings went extremely well, and, as always, what seems to intrigue people is the area's proximity to both Huntsville and Birmingham. I truly believe we are an undiscovered oasis for all tourism facets, and slowly but surely, we will be a sought-after destination for travelers.

Sports tourism is going to play a huge role in the tourism strategic plan we're currently putting together. These events generate a tremendous amount of economic impact for the area, which in turn allows our local economy to prosper. The plan is to partner with all local entities — city and county — and work together on recruiting these groups and showcasing our great area.

SAVE THESE DATES!

- Oktoberfest — Oct. 4-8, 2017
- Smith Lake Park Bass Fest — Oct. 7, 2017
- Alabama Gourd Festival @ Cullman Civic Center — Oct. 21-22, 2017
- Mud Creek Arts & Crafts Festival @ Downtown Hanceville — Oct. 21, 2017
- Peinhardt Farm Day — Oct. 21, 2017
- 4D Farm — Open for the fall season
Reliance Worldwide Corporation hosts 3rd Quarter Industry Tour

On September 14, 2017, the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce hosted its 3rd Quarter Industry Tour at Reliance Worldwide Corporation (RWC), sponsored by GSI.

The parent company of Cash Acme and SharkBite, RWC is one of the world’s largest manufacturers of push-to-connect plumbing fittings and specialty water control valves. Cash Acme serves as the North American hub for RWC, a global provider of water control systems and plumbing solutions for residential, commercial and industrial applications. RWC was founded in 1949 and is the market leader in temperature and pressure relief valves, thermostatic valves, and push-to-connect fittings. It’s also a major manufacturer and distributor of pressure regulators, backflow devices, PEX piping, barb fittings, ball valves, water meters and general valves. Many of RWC’s products, most notably its SharkBite fittings, are sold at major retailers Lowe’s and Home Depot.

RWC has enjoyed significant growth in Cullman, expanding from 70,000 square feet of space to around 500,000 since acquiring Cash Acme in 2002. Facilities include a spacious distribution center, 52 docks (a major upgrade from the original two), and plants for Cash Acme and SharkBite. The recycling-minded company’s latest local expansion allows for SharkBite products to be manufactured right here in Cullman. RWC touts SharkBite’s line of push-to-connect fittings and valves, which had previously only been produced at the company’s Australia headquarters, as the fastest and easiest way to plumb any residential or commercial job.

RWC utilizes a three-shift operation and offers 306 jobs in Cullman. The average age of its workforce is 38 years old for hourly employees and 47 for salaried. The average length of service is five years for hourly employees and eight for salaried. Entry level and basic skill positions offered by RWC include production assemblers, machine operators, material handlers, quality associates and shipping associates. Professional positions are offered in engineering, accounting, human resources, quality, logistics, injection molding and maintenance. RWC’s gender diversity numbers are considerably more even in Cullman (52 percent male-48 percent female) than the company average (59-41).

Thank you to Reliance Worldwide Corporation — especially HR Coordinator Lisa Markey and tour guides Chris Girard (Plant Manager) and Randy Graves (Vice President of Infrastructure & Capital Works) — for hosting our 3rd Quarter Industry Tour and for being a valuable part of the Cullman Community.

If your company is interested in hosting an Industry Tour, please contact Brian Poole, the Chamber’s Director of Business Development & Investor Relations, at 256-734-0454 or bpoole@cullmanchamber.org.
Help the Chamber choose a team theme for Halloween/Membership Day!

For those just a little — or a lot — too old to dress up for Halloween, there are still more than enough ways to get in on the holiday fun. The easiest is to live vicariously through the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center staff, which wants YOUR help while gearing up for another awesome Halloween/Membership Day!

Last year, the Chamber staff dressed up as their favorite Star Wars characters. This year, though, they’re seeking a bit more outside input on picking a team theme for visits to various members on Tuesday, October 31. You can make your voice (more like mouse click) heard by completing a short survey at www.surveymonkey.com/r/ChamberHalloween2017. Votes must be cast by Thursday, October 5.

Here are the themes you’ll have to choose from:
• Superheroes
• Pirates
• The Wizard of Oz
• Video Game Characters
• Other (write in a favorite)

To request a quick visit to your business for Halloween/Membership Day, please let the Chamber know in the survey or by contacting 256-734-0454 or info@cullmanchamber.org.

Cast your vote at surveymonkey.com/r/ChamberHalloween2017!
As an advocate for businesses and the community as a whole, the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce works to educate its members on government policies and legislation at the local, state and federal levels. The Government Affairs Committee (GAC) leads this effort within the Chamber.

At the September Community Luncheon — presented by Shirley Quattlebaum - State Farm Insurance and sponsored by Cullman Regional — Cullman County judges were invited to participate in a panel discussion hosted by the GAC. Circuit Judge Greg Nicholas, Circuit Judge Martha Williams, District Judge Kim Chaney and District Judge Rusty Turner generously accepted and shared their insights and valuable information with lunch guests during the 45-minute panel.

Some key issues discussed included prison overcrowding, sentencing reforms, mental health, immigration enforcement, judicial override, and security for judges and their staff members.

- A lack of funding for mental health treatment and facilities has resulted in several community-wide problems that judges are forced to handle. One, according to Judge Williams and Judge Chaney, is that people with untreated mental health issues often end up committing crimes, which place them into the courts and prison system. “The criminal justice system is making up for the lack of funding of mental health,” Chaney said. Once those people have been arrested, judges can require a mental health evaluation, but the state’s facility for treating inmates with mental health issues has more cases than it can handle. Judge Williams shared the story of two inmates who remained in the Cullman County Jail for weeks without receiving treatment despite her order that they be transported to the state facility for treatment. “It got to the point where I cited the state Director of Mental Health for contempt for failing to comply with the order, and finally they were placed,” Williams said.

- The state legislature’s most recent attempt to address the issue of prison overcrowding included sentencing reforms. Chaney explained that a new category of non-violent felony offenses means someone has to commit eight non-violent felonies before a judge can send them to prison. “I can sentence someone to 20 years, but the DOC (Department of Corrections) can turn around and release them in 90 days,” Chaney said. “There is no truth in sentencing at all. It was promised, but I haven’t seen it yet.”

- Judge Turner said there are no current plans to develop a judicial annex. Although building a new facility has been talked about and would be beneficial to all county departments that currently work in the courthouse, the concept has not moved past the preliminary discussion phase at this time.

- Judge Chaney noted that each of the judges on the panel serves the state of Alabama, and federal immigration laws fall outside their jurisdiction. All of the judges said a desire to help people was a driving force behind their career choice. Judge Williams noted that helping people often requires getting involved in difficult and sometimes heart-breaking situations. Being a judge is rarely easy, and it’s not always fun, but each judge agreed that they enjoy the job and consider it an honor to serve their community.

We appreciate these judges for taking time out of their busy schedules to participate in the panel discussion, as well as for the tireless — and often thankless — jobs they do on a daily basis.