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**CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
& VISITOR CENTER**

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Business Resource Center (BRC) making big impact on area's small business landscape

There's a small room at the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce producing big-time results for the area's small business community. It's called the Business Resource Center (BRC), and it's already provided serious assistance to several local entrepreneurs and business-savvy minds since opening 11 short months ago.

Now, just how serious of assistance are we talking? When it comes to the BRC, a service for both new and existing businesses alike, the numbers speak for themselves.

- All since January:**
- * More than 60 businesses have utilized the BRC
 - * Nine small businesses have been helped from the pre-venture stage to opening
 - * More than 15 small



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Kenneth and Sabrina Nail are all smiles following last month's ribbon cutting for Hanceville Primary Healthcare, the very first business to come through the Chamber's Business Resource Center.

businesses have been able to keep their doors open because of the BRC

- * Sixty-six jobs have been created through the BRC, and another 96 have been retained
- * Nearly \$10 million of small business funding has been closed on in

the BRC, with \$103 million still in the pipeline to end the fiscal year

The emergence of the BRC coincides with the Chamber's launching of a five-year strategic plan focused on four key initiatives — Community Development,

Existing Business Growth & Professional Sector Recruiting, Entrepreneurship & Education, and Business & Community Advocacy. Thanks to a strong partnership with the Alabama SBDC (Small Business



Development Center) Network, the Chamber and BRC have already been able to create opportunities for success in each area.

That far-reaching impact can largely be tied to the seemingly endless list of services offered through the BRC. **Said list includes, but certainly isn't limited to:**

- * Pre-counseling
- * Business plan creation
- * Professional business counseling
- * Financial borrowing and lending assistance
- * Location services

- * Market research plan development
- * Healthcare benefit guidance
- * Disaster recovery awareness programs
- * Importing and exporting support
- * Localized business connections
- * Continued follow-up for new businesses for two years

Though the BRC is housed at the Chamber, its services aren't just for Chamber members. And better yet, almost all resources and training are completely free.

SEE **BUSINESS RESOURCE**, P2

Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce

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BUSINESS RESOURCE: BRC making a big impact on small business landscape

FROM PAGE 1

Bringing a one-stop small business shop like the BRC to Cullman has been a long time coming for Chamber President & CEO Leah Bolin.

"The BRC concept came from my days as a small business consultant," she said. "People had great ideas for a new busi-

For more information on the BRC or to utilize its services, contact the Chamber at 256-734-0454 or info@cullmanchamber.org.

ness, but they didn't have a resource to help them put it all together. The Chamber and the SBDC have put together a program that will give these entrepreneurs the tools they need — at no cost. We could not have gotten this far, though, without the assistance of Heather Wright and the SBDC."

Heather Wright has indeed been instrumental in the BRC's early success. Every Tuesday, the passionate and tenacious Small Business Advisor for the UAH SBDC makes herself available at the Chamber to provide customized, one-on-one assistance to local entrepreneurs



Rumors Deli staff and special guests have a little fun showing off the longtime Cullman eatery's new location last month. Owner Annette Harris facilitated her entire search for Rumors' new home through the BRC.

CULLMAN AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

and businesses that request it.

"I think a lot of Chambers and a lot of areas are finding that this is one to mimic," Wright said of the BRC. "Businesses have to have that local community and that local backing and someone who can be there all the time. That's what the BRC is for."

One success story so far has been Hanceville Primary Healthcare, the very first business to come through the BRC. Owner Sabrina Nail and her

husband, Hanceville Mayor Kenneth Nail, have been ecstatic to see the independent Nurse Practitioner clinic overflowing with patients since welcoming the Chamber, the SBDC, and numerous state and area representatives for their grand opening in late October.

"We've had anywhere from eight to 14 patients every day, which is just unbelievable," said Mayor Nail. "As a matter of fact, we're already expanding. We definitely think the

Chamber's assistance is what has made this a successful story so far."

The mayor's counterpart has been equally pleased with the BRC's role in the clinic's start. If she had to recommend the BRC on a scale of 1-10, Sabrina said her answer would be more like an 11.

"I don't even think I would be here without that service," she said. "They have connected me with everybody I needed in order to get this started. They keep

checking in and making sure everything is running smoothly, and I know they're there any time I need them."

Inadvertent or not, Sabrina's continued review of the BRC included the most appropriate of references to Hanceville High School's beloved mascot.

"They're your bulldog in your corner fighting for you to get your dream up," she said. "If anybody wants to get a business going, they are the best resource to ever go to, absolutely."

The BRC isn't just for startups, though. It's for existing businesses, too. When Rumors Deli found itself in need of a new location earlier this year, owner Annette Harris facilitated her entire search through the BRC and was able to announce and toast Rumors' eventual home just last month.

For more information on the BRC or to utilize its services, contact the Chamber at 256-734-0454 or info@cullmanchamber.org.

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Cullman Area Career Awareness Fair introduces local 8th-graders to future job opportunities

This year's Cullman Area Career Awareness Fair went off without a hitch, bringing nearly 1,000 eighth-graders from the city and county to Wallace State Community College on November 7th! The annual fall event is organized by the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center in partnership with the Cullman Economic Development Agency and host and sponsor Wallace State.

Students spent almost the entire school day on the spacious Hanceville campus, receiving hands-on experience and exposure to more than 60 different career options.

"So many opportunities are out there," Cullman County Schools Superintendent Shane Barnette told Cullman Today. "This is great because it gets (the students) early enough so they can start thinking through their high school years about the things they would like to do."

Exploring career options ranging from Welder to Engineer to Healthcare Professional, students were led by volunteer tour guides through 11 different



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Wallace State Community College cheerleaders excitedly welcome local eighth-graders to the Cullman Area Career Awareness Fair on November 7th as they approach the entrance of Tom Drake Coliseum.



**CULLMAN AREA
CAREER AWARENESS FAIR**

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
& VISITOR CENTER



Presenting Sponsor

"career clusters" scattered throughout Wallace State's Tom Drake Coliseum, Wellness Center and outdoor areas.

The career clusters represented were:

- * Agriculture
- * Construction, Trades & Architecture
- * Business, Finance & Marketing
- * Safety & Law Enforcement
- * Transportation & Logistics

- * Engineering & Design
- * Arts, Audio/Video Technology, Communications, Tourism & Hospitality
- * Manufacturing
- * Health
- * Government & Human Services
- * Safety & Life Logistics

"Thinking about possible careers is a new idea for many eighth-graders, but they are at the age where they need to start figuring out what they want to do," Fairview eighth-grade teacher Aaron

Prater told *The Cullman Times*.

Fairview eighth-grader Ben Tankersley, for one, appreciated having the opportunity to learn about so many different career options all in one place.

"It's pretty neat," he told *The Cullman Times*. "There's such a variety of things you can do."

Career Awareness Fair organizers would like to extend a huge thanks to all tour guides, volunteers and area agencies that committed their time to making the event such a success. Thank you as well to Presenting Sponsor, Wallace State; partner, Cullman Economic Development Agency; Hospitality Sponsor, American Proteins, Inc.; and Lunch Sponsors, Cullman Electric Cooperative and Topre America Corporation.



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December Small Business of the Month

Winner - Cabin Fever Beverages – Good Hope

Supporter - College Tire





Cullman Veterinary Hospital named November Small Business of the Month

The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center would like to congratulate Cullman Veterinary Hospital, P.C. as November's Small Business of the Month, sponsored by Hopper's Family Market & Pharmacy.

At Cullman Veterinary Hospital, every pet is special when they



Cullman Veterinary Hospital, P.C.
1636 Main Ave. SW
Cullman, AL 35055
256-734-2181



Cullman Veterinary Hospital, P.C.

walk through the front door. Each has their own personality and is treated as such. The staff of 23 has known most of the pets since they were little pups or kittens and seek to form a bond that grows in strength with each visit. Cullman Veterinary Hospital views pets as family and strives to treat them with the love and respect they deserve. Time is taken every day to ensure all clients and pets receive the best information and top level of care possible.

Open since 1985, Cullman Veterinary

Hospital is very involved in the Chamber and the community. The clinic is an investor in the Chamber's "Converging for Success" five-year strategic plan and recently participated in this year's Cullman Area Career Awareness Fair. Locally, Cullman Veterinary Hospital provides client education on pet care and sponsors events involving pets, such as Kiwanis' K-9s 4 A Kause. Team members are very service-minded and participate in a variety of area organizations, including the Lions Club, Hope Hors-

es, Cullman Caring for Kids, Cullman Regional Foundation, Cullman County Fair Association and Peinhardt Living History Farm Day. The practice also fosters animals for the Cullman Area Animal Wellness Association and participate in the community's annual rabies clinic. On a state level, all four doctors are proud members of the Alabama Veterinary Medical Association, which helps impact policies and legislation for Alabama veterinarians. During the recent crises resulting from Hurricanes Harvey and

Sponsor: Irma, Cullman Veterinary Hospital served as a collection point for pet foods, supplies and monetary donations that were then delivered to locations in need.

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.

Morning Blend hitting the road for 2017 with relevant topic

December's Morning Blend is coming a week early to avoid the holiday rush! Join the Cullman Area Cham-

Presenting Sponsor
Karma's Coffee House
Monthly Sponsor
Cultured Marble of Cullman

Cullman County Commission representatives to talk roads

ber of Commerce from 8 to 9 a.m. on Wednesday, December 13 at Rumors Deli in the Warehouse District for delicious coffee and great discussion. The Chamber staff welcomes members and

visitors to attend this free event. Cullman County Commission representatives will lead the discussion for December's topic: Roads. Coffee will be provided by Presenting Sponsor Karma's Coffee House. This month's sponsor is Cultured Marble of Cullman. For more information, contact the Chamber at 256-734-0454 or info@cullmanchamber.org.

**For more information, contact
the Chamber at 256-734-0454
or info@cullmanchamber.org.**



The Chamber's
Morning BLEND

Find out what's happening in the Cullman area

Chamber staff welcomes members and visitors to the back room at Rumors Deli every month to discuss various topics.

Topic: Roads

DEC. 13 8-9AM

Rumors Deli, 105 1st Ave NE, Cullman, AL

Presented by:
KARMA'S COFFEE HOUSE

Sponsored by:
Cultured Marble of Cullman

Alabama Retail Association kicks off holiday shopping campaign in Cullman

The Alabama Retail Association could only pick one place to kick off its “Shop Alabama for the Holidays” initiative, and it chose right here in Cullman County on November 10 in the Cullman Warehouse District! In partnership with the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce,

‘When you give a gift that you purchased locally, you’re giving that gift twice. You’re giving it to the person who receives it, and you’re giving the gift to your retailer and your community.’

Margaret Hamm
Monograms Plus owner

City of Cullman and the Warehouse District, Alabama Retail announced its statewide holiday shopping initiative and #BabyItsSoldInside hashtag campaign as part of the Warehouse District’s Christmas in Cullman Open House opening festivities.

After hearing from Alabama Retail’s Melissa Warnke, Cullman Mayor Woody Jacobs, the Cullman Chamber’s Magan Bartlett and Monograms Plus’ Margaret Hamm, Warehouse District retailers and several other area representatives lined up



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The Alabama Retail Association’s Melissa Warnke, right, encourages viewers to “Shop Alabama for the Holidays” during a Facebook Live broadcast following opening festivities for Christmas in Cullman Open House.

around Mayor Jacobs to officially unwrap the ribbon on Christmas shopping season. As if that weren’t enough to usher in the holiday spirit, the “snow” that soon fell from above Mae’s Food Hall definitely did the trick!

“Shop Alabama” really is a call to action,” said Warnke, a Cullman native. “It’s a challenge for everyone to spend their holiday shopping and

dining dollars locally. If you spend money here in Cullman, that money goes to support your friends and neighbors, it goes to support and strengthen your local economy, and you’re investing in the vibrancy of your own city.”

As a former retail employee, Bartlett understands firsthand the importance of keeping local dollars in the area during Christmastime

and all year round. Standing in the very

Warehouse District she once worked, the Chamber’s Director of Member Services shed light on the multi-layered “Think Local” campaign the Chamber is set to launch. “We want you to think local for your job or career, your family activities, and, of course, when you shop,” Bartlett said. “When you think local and when you shop local, whether it be in the cities of Cullman, Good Hope, Hanceville or any of our other municipalities, your dollars circulate within our community — so before you buy online this year, think Cullman first.”

Hamm is a longtime

staple in the Warehouse District and Alabama Retail’s newest board member. She’s thankful to have customers who realize the power of shopping local and that to continue even having the option, they must keep shopping local. “Online shopping’s not going away, but that’s just not fun like coming out and shopping with your family and friends,” she said. “When you give a gift that you purchased locally, you’re giving that gift twice. You’re giving it to the person who receives it, and you’re giving the gift to your retailer and your community.”

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Window Display Contest ramps up Christmas spirit in Cullman area

This year's Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce Christmas Window Display Contest proved to be yet another fierce competition! Votes were cast after an awesome holiday trek around the com-

munity one early November night. The judges were thoroughly impressed by the creativity and effort put forth by every participant. Congratulations to the winners and runners-up in each division! Make

sure to window shop (and venture inside, too) at their stores to see their festive Christmas decorations for yourself! You can also check out a photo album including every business that entered on the Chamber's Facebook page.



Restaurant Winner - Karma's Coffee House



Restaurant Runner-Up - Lesia's Meat & Three



Service Runner-Up - Fancher Education Center



Service Winner - Cullman County Youth Advocate Programs, Inc.



Retail Winner - White Willow



Retail Runner-Up - MoMoSHE 103

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Area's premier young professionals group primed to make a membership push!

After a strong finish to 2017, Emerging Professionals Impacting Cullman — better known as EPIC — is looking to be even bigger and better in the coming year. With so much local excitement surrounding Entrepreneurship & Education, one of the four key initiatives laid out in the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce's five-year strategic plan, that should be a cinch.

Having a group like EPIC in Cullman has never been more imperative as it is today. Not only is EPIC a great way for young professionals to get to know each other, but it also positively impacts the area's ability to

recruit and retain top talent.

"With an aging workforce in Cullman, it is very

important that we keep our young professionals in our town or do all we can to bring them back home after college," said Wesley Smith, Director of Entrepreneurship & Education, at the Chamber's recent Converging for Success Victory Party.

Wearing a coat and tie isn't necessarily required to be considered a young professional in Cullman. EPIC welcomes members from all different career backgrounds — so long as you're between the ages of 21 and 39 and care about your community's future.

EPIC membership is \$100 for individuals, which includes entry to all four quarterly events (Wine & Cheese Night, Putts & Pints, a College Football Tailgate at Goat Island Brewing and the EPIC Christmas Sweater Party were on the docket in 2017) and two other premium EPIC events like socials and seminars. Company rates are also available for businesses seeking membership for at least five or 10 employees. Occasional informal takeovers at various local hotspots, of course, are free for EPIC members to attend.

To fill out an EPIC application or view the group's membership guidelines, visit www.cullmanchamber.org/epic. For more information on EPIC, contact Wesley Smith at 256-734-0454 or wsmith@cullmanchamber.org. Keep up with EPIC on the group's Facebook page at [facebook.com/CullmanEPIC](https://www.facebook.com/CullmanEPIC).

