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*Official Newsletter*

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## Converging for Success Campaign Kick-off

**T**he Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce's five-year strategic plan has technically been underway since early last December, but it officially launched Wednesday, February 22 with the "Converging for Success" Campaign Kick-Off event.

Several business leaders and members of the community gathered inside TP Country Club to learn more about the plan, how it will be executed, and the positive and far-reaching impact it will ultimately have on the entire area.

The Reverend John Bussman, of St. Paul's Lutheran Church and a Chamber Board Member, provided the invocation, asking for the blessing of the evening and campaign as it's carried out.

Outgoing Chamber Chair Sammie Danford, Director of United Way of Cullman County, and incoming Chamber Chair Jason Spann, General Manager at American Proteins, Inc. in Hanceville, opened with brief remarks



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before handing the floor to Cullman Internal Medicine's Dr. Jeremy Stidham, who spoke on behalf of himself and fellow Campaign Co-Chair Jason Grimmett, Vice President of Drinkard Development, Inc. Dr. Stidham, who moved

to the area in the fifth grade, has come to consider himself an "official Cullmanite." He describes Cullman as the "idyllic" community and wants to do his part to make it more accommodating and inviting to professionals both

near and far.

"Why would you not want to be in my idyllic community?" Dr. Stidham said during his address. "That's what this campaign is about. It's about bringing together a group of people who have the ability to

make this community grow to what it should be, what it can be."

Chamber CEO and President Leah Bolin took the podium next, breaking down the campaign's four primary initiatives — Community Development, Existing Business Growth and Professional Business Sector Recruitment, Entrepreneurship and Education, and Business and Community Advocacy — and the main objectives each is meant to tackle. Bolin stressed the campaign is the culmination of more than 100 interviews with business and area leaders to identify the community's needs and challenges.

"This is not my plan. This is not the Chamber's plan," she said. "This is your plan. This is the community's plan."

The President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama, Jim Page is no stranger to implementing a strategic plan. He followed Bolin by sharing some of his

SEE **CAMPAIGN KICKOFF**, P8

**Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce**

PO Box 1104, Cullman, AL 35056-1104 | 256-734-0454 | F: 256-737-7443 | [info@cullmanchamber.org](mailto:info@cullmanchamber.org)  
[www.cullmanchamber.org](http://www.cullmanchamber.org) | [www.visitcullman.org](http://www.visitcullman.org)



# 'Leading with Labor'

Ron Starner will be the March Community Luncheon guest speaker

This month's Community Luncheon is featuring a familiar face. Join us on the third Friday of the month, March 17, as Ron Starner returns for a presentation on "Leading with Labor." Starner is the Senior Vice President of Conway Data, Inc. and Site Selection magazine, an international corporate real estate publication. His presentation will center around 10 steps it takes to foster favorable recruitment of labor talent. Per usu-

**Call 256-734-0454 to reserve your seat. Tickets are \$15 for Chamber Members and \$20 for future members.**

al, the Luncheon will be held in the banquet room at the All Steak Restaurant 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 to reserve your seat. Thank you to our Presenting Sponsor Shirley Quattlebaum - State Farm and to March's sponsor, ADS Security.

**Presenting Sponsor**

**Shirley Quattlebaum - State Farm**

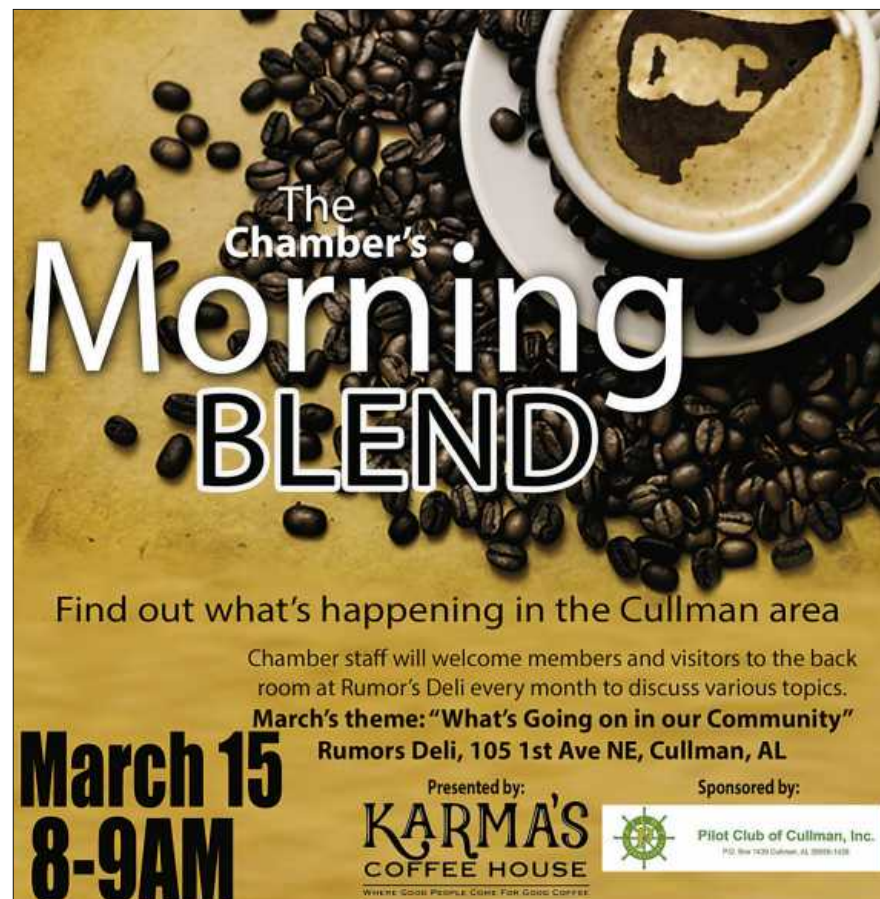


**March's Sponsor - ADS Security**



# March Morning Blend

Come join the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce the morning of Wednesday, February 15 for delicious coffee and great discussion at our Morning Blend, held every third Wednesday of each month from 8:00 to 9:00 a.m. at Rumors Deli in the Warehouse District. The Chamber staff welcomes members and visitors to attend this free event. This month's theme is "What's Going on in our Community," which will provide guests the opportunity to briefly introduce upcoming events around the community. Coffee will be provided by Presenting Sponsor Karma's Coffee House. March's sponsor is Pilot Club of Cullman. For more information, contact the Chamber at 256-734-0454 or [info@cullmanchamber.org](mailto:info@cullmanchamber.org).



# Leadership Cullman County

For the month of February, the 2016-17 Leadership Cullman County Class, sponsored by The Final Touch, focused on "Quality of Life." The class heard from a variety of speakers that impact our quality of life:

**Cullman Emergency Management Agency (EMA)** — Director, Phyllis Little

**The Link of Cullman County** — Executive Director, Dawn Owens

**Cullman Electric Cooperative** — VP Engineering & Operations, Kyle Baggett

**Margaret Jean Jones Center**



— Day Program Director, Debra Hatley

**TP Country Club** — General Manager, Cherri Drake

**United Way of Cullman**

**County** — Executive Director, Cherri Drake

**Cullman Wellness & Aquatic Center** — Executive Director, Nathan Anderson & CWAC Facilities Director, Cameron Everett

**Hope Horses** — Executive Director, Kelsey Rice

Thanks to the Better Business Bureau for sponsoring the February session! If you are interested in participating in the 2017-18 Leadership Cullman County Class, please visit [www.cullmanchamber.org](http://www.cullmanchamber.org) > Publications & Form > Leadership Cullman County Application.





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# 74th Annual Meeting & Gala

## March 9 at Stone Bridge Farms

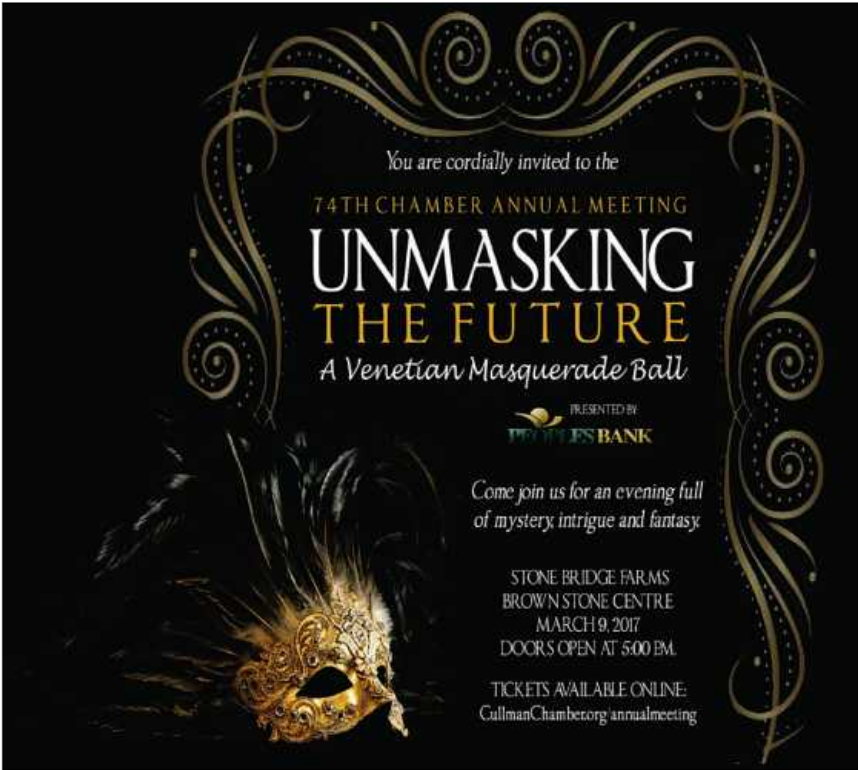
**M**urder is afoot — and it's never been so fun to figure out the culprit!

At the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce's quickly approaching 74th Annual Meeting & Gala, it could be YOU!

We invite you to enjoy an elegant evening full of mystery, intrigue and fantasy Thursday, March 9 at the Brown Stone Centre at Stone Bridge Farms. Doors will open at 5:00 p.m., and the program will be called to order at 6:00 p.m. A fun-filled after party is set for 8:00 to 10:00 p.m.

**A limited number of general admission tickets are still available for \$50. For more information or to purchase a ticket, please contact the Chamber at 256-734-0454 or [info@cullmanchamber.org](mailto:info@cullmanchamber.org).**

This year's theme is "Unmasking the Future: A Venetian Masquerade Ball," meaning masks (think more Victorian/Renaissance than Mardi Gras) are highly encouraged with every outfit. Suggested attire for men is a suit or tuxedo, with a cape or toy sword as potential accessories. Suggested attire for women is a formal ball gown or longer-length dress, possibly accessorized by jewelry, sequins, feather hair pieces, gloves or other theme-appropriate options. Films to reference include The Phantom of the Opera, Romeo and Juliet, Enchanted, The Man in the



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**Post Party Sponsor | James R. Smith Trucking**

Iron Mask, Sleepy Hollow and Labyrinth.

A murder mystery will be woven into the evening and conclude during the after party, which will also feature a fire breather, an aerialist, music and select casino-style card games.

The Annual Meeting & Gala allows us to celebrate the past year's achievements under Sammie Danford, Director of United Way of Cullman County, who will pass the gavel to incoming Chamber Chair Jason Spann, General Manag-

er at American Proteins, Inc. in Hanceville. Winners of the Small Business of the Year, Ambassador of the Year Award, Emma Marie Eddleman Award and the Lucille Galin Award presented by the Mayor's Association will also be recognized.

The Presenting Sponsor is Peoples Bank of Alabama. Byars-Wright Insurance and Warren Averett, LLC are Corporate Sponsors. Cullman Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram is the Entertainment Sponsor, and James R. Smith Trucking is the Post Party Sponsor.

## Youth Leadership 2016-17

The Chamber's Youth Leadership spent February's session enjoying Business & Industry Day.

Cullman Economic Development team members provided a presentation to the students before taking them to visit Cullman Industrial Park. The students received a tour from Royal Technologies and visited Duck River, where they enjoyed lunch.

The last stop of the day was to Cullman Regional Airport.

We would like to thank our Youth Leadership sponsors. R.E. Garrison is this year's Presenting Sponsor, Royal Technologies was February's sponsor and McGriff Industries was the breakfast sponsor for the day.

This program would not exist without the support of our community. We thank you!!



## March Small Business of the Month

Winner - YELTEK



Supporter - AK Equipment Rental and Sales, Inc.



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# State of Our Communities

What used to be four separate events is now being rolled into one.

The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce would like to encourage you to attend the newly titled “State of Our Communities,” an all-day event featuring guest speakers, panel discussions and breakout rooms, on Friday, April 21 at the Cullman Civic Center.

Major session topics include the State of Education, State of Healthcare, State of Local Government and State of Public Safety. There will also be a “Get to know your Mayors” session in the afternoon.

Representatives from agencies and organizations related to human services, utilities and tourism will be set up in the breakout rooms and provide information/

demonstrations to visitors throughout the day.

See below for an overview of each major session:

## STATE OF EDUCATION

During this session, we’ll hear from Cullman City Schools Superintendent Susan Patterson, Cullman County Schools Superintendent Shane Barnette and Wallace State Community College President Vicki Karolewics. The Student of the Year and Career Technical Student of the Year will also be announced.

## STATE OF HEALTHCARE

This panel discussion will be the perfect opportunity for attendees to learn more about Cullman’s ever-expanding healthcare offerings. The Healthcare Professional of the Year will also be announced.

## STATE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

During this session, Cullman County Commission Chairman Kenneth Walker and Cullman City Mayor Woody Jacobs will provide general updates on their respective areas.

## STATE OF PUBLIC SAFETY

Cullman Police Chief Kenny Culpepper, Cullman County Sheriff Matt Gentry and Hanceville Police Chief Bob Long will be on hand to lead this panel discussion.

The “State of Our Communities” is free to the public. For more information or if interested in purchasing an all-access pass (meals & additional items), please call the Chamber at 256-734-0454.



**ALL-DAY EVENT**  
**8AM: STATE OF EDUCATION**  
**10AM: STATE OF HEALTHCARE**  
**11:45AM: STATE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT**  
**2:30PM: STATE OF PUBLIC SAFETY**

**What you need to know:**  
**Where:** Cullman Civic Center, 510 5th St SW, Cullman, AL 35055  
**When:** April 21, 2017 | 7:00 AM – 3:30 PM

**For more information, contact the Chamber at 256-734-0454 or [info@cullmanchamber.org](mailto:info@cullmanchamber.org)**

INDUSTRY TOUR

Limited Space  
Contact Ben Smith



Sponsored by:  


March 16th | 10:00 AM – 11:00 AM  
Free | Meet @ Royal Technologies

# Thanks to early adopters for 5-year strategic plan

**W**e would like to thank our early adopters for the Converging for Success 5-year Strategic Plan. Call today to add your name to our growing list of community investors.

**AGCOR** Steel  
**Alabama** Cullman Yutaka Technologies  
**Alabama** Specialty Clinic  
**Alabama** Web Press  
**Apel** Machine & Supply  
**Bennett** Chiropractic Clinic  
**Chick-fil-A**  
**Cullman** Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram  
**Cullman** Electric Cooperative

**Cullman** Power Board  
**Cullman** Veterinary Hospital  
**Ed White** Jewelers  
**EvaBank**  
**Hampton** Inn  
**Hessaire**  
**Knight-Free** Insurance Agency  
**Nearen** Construction  
**Peoples** Bank of Alabama  
**Pepsi**

**Premier** Productions  
**Quality** Staffing Solution  
**Regions** Bank  
**Rehau** Automotive  
**Stone** Bridge Farms  
**The** Cullman Times  
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# February Small Business of the Month

The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce would like to congratulate Better Than Before as February’s Small Business of the Month, sponsored by All Steak Restaurant.

Sonya Nix opened Better Than Before in 1997 and for the last 20 years it has been known as one of the premier locations for consigned and recycled clothing in the Cullman area. Better Than Before has continued to grow in recent years, even opening a second location in Decatur. Sonya contributes this success to a creative and innovative approach to business. In August, Sonya and her team released the store’s very own “Better Than Before App” on both the Apple Store and Android Play marketplaces. Users can acquire credits by downloading the app, listing items for consignment, and making in-store purchases. Credits can then be used as cash off a purchase or a percentage off sales. Better Than before also offers VIP cards to consigners who frequent their stores,



Sonya Nix receives February’s Small Business of the Month award from the Chamber’s Ben Smith.

Better Than Before

Consignments & Upscale Resale

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which allows the holder a high profit share of final sales. Many of these deals are further incentivized by encouraging consigners to pre-emptively meet the

peak demand season. While Sonya and her business contribute to a variety of community service organizations, such as Cullman Caring for Kids,

### Supporter - All Steak Restaurant

The Pilot Club, the Sheriff’s Fund, Rotary Club, and Disabled Veterans, she views the resale of 2nd generational clothing items as a community service act in and of itself. Recycling clothes for sale that have outlived one owner’s closet can highly contribute to the overall quality of another customer’s wardrobe. This impact is compounded due to most of Better Than Before’s

clients being families looking for budget-friendly clothing options — good condition, brand name items that can be

found for a fraction of the cost. Sonya has been a participant in the Chamber’s past Hops & Shops, 2nd Fridays, and the Christmas in Cullman Window Display Contest. 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 Ben Smith at [bsmith@cullmanchamber.org](mailto:bsmith@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.

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# The 2017 Cullman Area Tourism & Community Improvement Awards

The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center is now accepting nominations for the 2017 Tourism Awards, which are set for May 23rd at 10:00 a.m. In conjunction with the celebration of the Alabama Bicentennial, this year's theme is "Cullman Places," highlighting the area's attractions and businesses that help make Cullman a tourism destination. The program will include brunch and the announcement of the winners of the categories listed below. The event will take place at the Brown Stone Centre at Stone Bridge Farms located at 281 Co. Rd. 717 in Cullman.

Here are this year's categories:

**THE BUSINESS AWARDS**  
These awards recognize businesses and events that differentiate themselves by providing exceptional service, anticipating customers' needs and consistently exceeding visitors' expectations.

**EXCEPTIONAL FESTIVAL OR EVENT AWARD**  
Recognizes a festival or event that attracts visitors as well as locals, generates regional and/or state media attention and positively promotes the Cullman area.

**BEST ATTRACTION AWARD**  
Recognizes a regional attraction (including museums, performing arts, parks, amusement parks, etc.) which attracts visitors and contributes to an outstanding tourism experience.



To nominate your local favorites, go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/9VLRDGV> or stop by the Cullman Chamber to pick up a nomination form in person. The deadline for nominations is Friday, April 14.

**NEAR NATURE. NEAR PERFECT AWARD**  
Recognizes a business, organization, community or outdoor recreation area that has developed a tourism product/service that best demonstrates the ecological, cultural or historical assets of the region.

**SPIRIT OF CULLMAN AWARD**  
Recognizes an outstanding tourism- or hospitality-related business or organization that provides excellent service, exemplifies innovation and causes our region to shine.

**ROCKIN' RETAILER**  
Recognizes a retailer that provides an outstanding shopping experience for visitors.

**EXTRAORDINARY EVERYDAY EATERY**  
Recognizes a restaurant

offering an atmosphere that provides an outstanding experience for visitors.

**THE INDIVIDUAL SERVICE AWARDS**  
These awards recognize hospitality and frontline individuals who consistently deliver warm, friendly and helpful service, exceed visitors' expectations, anticipate customers' needs, and have received written or verbal feedback about their exceptional service from their colleagues, supervisors or their customers.

**THE WHITE GLOVE AWARD**  
Recognizes exceptional service from an individual hotel housekeeping staff member.

**THE SILVER SPOON AWARD**  
Recognizes consistent superior service by a restaurant or food service employee.

**SUPERIOR SERVICE AWARD**  
Recognizes excellent customer service by an individual who has first contact with the public. Front desk personnel, concierges and all other guest service employees qualify.

**SAVVY RETAIL SALES ASSOCIATE**  
Recognizes excellent customer service from a retail sales associate who has first contact with the public.

**HEART OF THE HOUSE AWARD**  
Honors an outstanding individual who works behind the scenes to keep their institution, organization or business operating smoothly, creating a superior experience for the public.

**HOSPITALITY VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR**  
Recognizes any hospitality industry volunteer (i.e. entertainment venues, museums, and festival and event volunteers) who has made an outstanding contribution.

**RIISING STAR AWARD**  
Recognizes an up-and-coming leader for their exceptional efforts to serve and enhance the experience of the public. Those who have been in the tourism industry for five years or less qualify.

**TOURISM PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR AWARD**  
Recognizes a person who has made a significant contribution to the tourism industry through more than five years of innovation,

inspiration and industry leadership.

The Community Improvement Yearly Awards will also be presented at this program as part of the event. These awards are given on a quarterly basis with one overall annual award winner in each category including: Best Landscaping (small), Best Landscaping (large), Best Curb Appeal, Best Restoration, Best New Construction and "Building a Sense of Community." The Community Improvement Committee hopes to inspire others to act and preserve, protect and promote community improvement in the Cullman area.

Single tickets are priced at \$20 for chamber members and \$25 for future members. Table sponsorships start at \$200 and include reserved seating for eight in a prime location with table signage. The presenting sponsor for the event is The Community Shopper's Guide. Corporate sponsors are The Cullman Times and Cullman County Parks & Recreation. The program sponsor is Johnny's Bar-B-Q. Gold, silver and bronze table sponsorships available for this event.

If you would like to reserve your tickets to the 2017 Cullman Area Tourism and Community Improvement Awards, email [info@cullmanchamber.org](mailto:info@cullmanchamber.org) or call 256-734-0454. There are a limited number of seats available, and tickets are on a first-come, first-served basis.



# CAMPAIGN KICKOFF: From page 1

FROM PAGE 1

experiences from Tuscaloosa’s own relatively recent campaign and explaining the role Funding Solutions, represented at the Kick-Off by Fred Mickelson, plays in the process. Funding Solutions is a Texas-based consulting firm with a successful track record assisting chambers across the country.

Like many of the evening’s speakers, Page’s message often circled back to the campaign’s tagline — “Together we can accomplish everything.”

“It shouldn’t be on any one company’s back to carry the water on this,” he said. “It’s got to be a community effort.”

Rob Werner (Werner’s Trading Company), Brian Lacy (Cullman Electric Cooperative), Tom “Big Doc” Williamson (Cullman Veterinary Hospital) and Peggy Smith (Cullman City Economic Development Agency) also spoke, offering their personal perspectives on the importance of the campaign. Werner and Lacy are respective co-chairs for separate initiatives. Smith has agreed to take personal time away from the city to serve as campaign advisor.

Bolin, Page and Mickelson stuck around after the program to field questions. Chamber staff ensured guests were given a campaign case statement as they exited.



## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

**MISSION:** Identify unmet community needs and convene/collaborate with Cullman area community partners to provide solutions to current and future quality of life challenges affecting Cullman County.

**Housing** availability/affordability  
**Renew/strengthen** downtown core areas including connectivity

**Sustainable media/marketing** initiative that promotes all of Cullman County as a live, work, play community

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP & INNOVATION

**MISSION:** Create a culture of entrepreneurship throughout Cullman County – focusing on start ups and technology-based innovation.

**REVITALIZED** Business Resource Center (BRC) “Open for Business” first quarter 2017

**PARTNERSHIP** with our K-12 Schools & WSCC to develop a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation

**ESTABLISH AND DEVELOP** an investors pool of money ready to be tapped into for worthy projects

**RETAINING** our best and brightest

## THE BREAKDOWN

For those interested in learning more about the strategic plan, the case statement can be viewed digitally on the Chamber website at <http://www.cullmanchamber.org/pages/converging-for-success>. See below for a more in-depth look at the campaign’s four key initiatives and some of the objectives each will address.

## EXISTING BUSINESS GROWTH & PROFESSIONAL BUSINESS SECTOR RECRUITMENT

**MISSION:** Lead the effort to identify and recruit a diverse mix of office and professional businesses, retain and grow our existing businesses, and promote a balanced, high quality and diverse employment base throughout Cullman County.

**ROLL OUT** “Think Local” Campaign in 2017

**DEVELOP** a county-wide strategy

to diversify Cullman County’s economic base through the successful recruitment of professional sector companies and careers

**ADD** 30 new, high-quality professional/technical jobs to our Cullman area employment each year

**CREATE** a master plan for economic development through coalitions involving key economic development partnerships

## BUSINESS & COMMUNITY ADVOCACY

**MISSION:** Advocate, at the local, state and federal levels of government, policies and legislation that encourage growth and promotes an environment in which business can prosper

**DEVELOP** Chamber legislative agenda capturing key issues that business & community consider highest priorities – hand

deliver to our elected officials on annual basis beginning 2017

**LEAD** the efforts to advocate for ongoing public investment in transportation and infrastructure projects funding for completion of the 157/278 corridors

**BE** the “solution seeker” for issues affecting our investors, business partners & community



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