

**VALDOSTA - LOWNDES COUNTY
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

Leading Businesses.
Leading Communities.™



Highlights!
January - December
2009

**Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce
Operations & Administration
January - December 2009
Highlights!**

Finance Committee – Paul Nichols (Nexxstep Technology), Chairman

- Reviewed current service contracts.
- Updated the Chamber's bid policy.
- Prepared BEST and TCH financial statements in-house to reduce costs.
- Developed a courtesy-call plan for largest dues payers.
- Developed a credit card security policy to protect members.
- Monitored budget bi-monthly.

Chamber Activity

- **5,083** member referrals have been made (**6,752** last year).

Web Site Activity

- Averaged **125,494** hits/month (**146,785** last year).
- Tracked search engine location monthly.

IMPACT 2012 Oversight Committee – Bill DeCoudres (Guardian Bank), Chairman

- Met semi-annually to review collections and disbursements, monitor current budget, and set 2010 budget.
- Hosted two shareholders lunches to report to investors; 95 in attendance at mid-year meeting, and 75 in attendance at year-end meeting.

Organization Task Force, Community Public Education Foundation – Leroy Butler (Woodlawn Forest Church of Christ), Chairman

- Organized the Community Unification for Educational Excellence Task Force.
- Became incorporated, developed Policies & Procedures, and elected officers.
- Interviewed four potential consultants; signed letter of agreement with The Moriah Group to assist with the group's mission of facilitating the unification of our public schools.

Barber Trust Advisory Board – Al Turner (Al Turner, Attorney), Chairman

- Met in August to inspect the Barber House and to provide oversight to the Barber Trust bank account.

***Business Expansion Division
Terri Lupo (Georgia Power), Vice Chairman
January - December 2009
Highlights!***

Targeted Business Expansion Committee – Bill DeCoudres (Guardian Bank), Chairman

- Surveyed 320 local businesses to benchmark long term growth. Fifty-three businesses responded.
- Measured the 1990-2007 employment and wages trends of the Valdosta MSA to benchmark the impact of Targeted Business Expansion initiatives through IMPACT 2012 and presented to the Chamber Board and other key community leaders.
- Hosted the third “Metro In Motion Speaker Series” with Chris Miller with Creative Cities Consulting on March 3 at VSU.

Information & Environmental Technology

- Created interactive Web site Directory for IT & ET businesses to advertise services.
- Hosted **three** quarterly IT Professionals Network meetings averaging 15 members per meeting.

- Co-hosted the annual Technology Association of Georgia Excalibur Awards and highlighted the Valdosta nominees, Valdosta Technical College, Azalea Health Innovations, Inc. and SMITH Northview Hospital.
- Hosted a Cloud Computing Workshop for IT professionals.

Medical Services & Support

- Established a MS&S sub-committee to develop a plan to promote MS&S career choices to appropriate grade levels and parents.
- Developed, submitted and was approved through Valdosta Technical College to develop educational videos giving a 'real world' view of 4-6 non-traditional medical related careers. The videos are intended to drive interest in non-traditional medical careers.

VALET – Jodi Doss (Jodi's Accessories), Chairman

- Hosted the annual Business Outlook Breakfast with Dr. Jeff Humphries and Dr. Cliff Lipscomb. More than 90 business leaders attended.
- Hosted four VALET meetings bringing together all professionals and organizations in Lowndes County which provide services to businesses, industries, and entrepreneurs.

- Developed a user's guide for start-up and expanding business to understand the licensing, zoning, permitting and occupational process. The document includes FAQ for licensing, zoning, permitting, and occupying a business in Valdosta-Lowndes County, and a list of 'must haves' when establishing a business in Valdosta-Lowndes County.
- Created a "No Wrong Door" graphic and brand for VALET.

Membership Development Division
David Newbern (U.S. Press), Chairman
January - December 2009
Highlights!

Membership Development & Retention

- Chamber membership retention rate for 2009 is **84%**. Retention rate for 2008 was 87%. (Goal for 2009 was 88%; industry average is 80%)
- **246** write-offs for 2009. (**105** were out of business in 2009; **43%**) Write offs in 2008 was 177 (75 were out of business 2008; 42%).
- New members for 2009 are **229**. (Goal for 2009 is 100.) In 2008 we had 216 new members.
- 105 Members attended Chamber 101 in 2009 compared to 94 last year.
- First year retention rate is **90%** compared to 91% last year.
- Second year retention rate is **83%** which is an increase over last year's 62%.
- Total Chamber membership is **1,529**.

- 55 members participated in the MemberCare Alliance Insurance Discount program covering an estimated 648 employees compared to 72 members and 952 employees that were covered by the program in 2008.

**DRUGS DON'T WORK in South Georgia
Program- Katinka Kelly (American Drill Bushings),
Chairman**

- Coordinated annual Greenleaf Center breakfast for supervisors with 53 in attendance (65 in 2008).
- Coordinated a supervisor seminar with Doctors Laboratory Inc. with 16 members participating.
- Recruited 16 new members (16 new members in 2008).
- Total of 267 members (last year's total was 266).
- Worked with Regional Chamber Partners (Quitman-Brooks, Moultrie-Colquitt, Adel-Cook, Nashville-Berrien, Douglas-Coffee, Ashburn-Turner, Lakeland-Lanier and Worth County-Sylvester)

Ambassadors Committee – Jerry Kozuch (South Georgia Vein Center), Chairman

- 37 served as Ambassadors (23 in 2008).
- Coordinated 81 Ribbon Cuttings and five Ground Breakings (91 and five respectively in 2008).

- Acted as Chamber hosts at 12 Business After Hours and four Early Bird Breakfasts.
- Coordinated “Operation Thank You”.
- Created a new member retention program, “Member Crashers”; visited 60 businesses with 17 businesses renewing their memberships.
- Ambassadors represented the Chamber at many Chamber events totaling more than 700 hours of volunteer service in 2009
- Rhonda Miller (Fox 49) was this year’s “Ambassador of the Year”.

**Marketing & Public Relations – Phyllis Royal
(Full Circle Marketing and Advertising),
Chairman**

- 20 television stories (47 in 2008).
- 4 Chamber Commercials:
 - THINK B.I.G.
 - Guardian Bank Business Plan Competition
 - Membership Recruitment
 - THINK B.I.G. for the Holidays
- 64 Radio Presentations (89 in 2008):
- Promotion of Chamber programs and events on Talk 92.1 and Black Crow Media stations
- Interviews with members who have hosted a Ribbon Cutting on WAAC

- 52 Print Articles (58 in 2008).
- 35 Chamber presentations made to area clubs and organizations made by Chamber staff/Chamber representatives (26 in 2008).
- Created a weekly e-publication *Events Update*, continued weekly *Chamber In Motion*, and continued special e-blasts for special events.
- The industry standard open rate for a non-profit organization is 24.1 percent. Our annual averages are:
 - *Chamber In Motion*: 27.5%
 - *Events Update*: 27.2%
 - E-blasts for special invitation to events: 30.6%
- *Progress* magazine produced quarterly with a distribution of 5,000.
- 2008 Annual Report published to inform members of the highlights and accomplishments for the previous year.
- 2009 Business Plan published to inform members of the goal and plan the Chamber will be working toward in the coming year.

Economic Development Division
Tom Gooding (Elliott, Blackburn, Barnes & Gooding,
P.C.), Vice Chairman
January - December 2009
Highlights!

Triple Crown Hometowns Program

- Relocated 46 (33 in 2008) new retiree households to Lowndes, Brooks, and Lanier Counties for a total of 296 new retiree households (250 in 2008).
- Web site, www.georgiaretire.com had over 84,602 hits (74,800 in 2008).
- Developed nearly 3,700 retiree prospect leads from 47 states and 3 countries.
- National Advertising on the Golf Channel during the South Georgia Classic.
- Named Top 100 towns in U.S.A. to live by Relocate-America.com.
- Featured in *Forever Young*, a Canadian 50+ publication, April issue.
- Triple Crown Hometowns billboard on I-75 Exit 18, traffic count 46,000 vehicles daily.
- Implemented social networking blog interfacing with Triple Crown Hometowns Newsletter and Web site.

- Published 12 e-newsletters, Hometown Happenings sent to over 1,300 retirees.

S.E.E.D.S. Center of South Georgia

- **493** clients have been served within the region, including Berrien, Brooks, Cook, Echols, Lanier, Lowndes and Turner Counties (2009 goal is 600; 633 in 2008).
- **11** businesses established within the region using S.E.E.D.S. Center assistance.
- **146** ABC's of How to Start a Business' have been distributed (222 in 2008).
- **113** demographic reports have been generated (144 in 2008).
- **286** targeted direct mailing lists have been created for clients (275 in 2008).
- **5** commercial property owners used Retail Lease Trac to target prospective retail businesses (8 in 2008).
- Added the 'Tools For Business' Web site portal to the S.E.E.D.S. Center Web site with **4,140** page views.
- Coordinated the 5th Annual Entrepreneur Resource Fair, Entrepreneurs In Action.

- Co-hosted a Commercial Property Investment Forum.
- Co-hosted the 'Maximum Marketing Series' with the SBDC.
- The Web site (www.seedscenterofsga.com) had **4,856** visits and **226,626 hits** (4,717 visits and 204,234 hits in 2008).
- Distributed 11 editions of the *SPROUTS Newsletter* to the 493 S.E.E.D.S. Clients, our 5 Regional Partners, and the 33 members of the Professional Consultants Group (distribution was 10 in 2008).

Guardian Bank Business Plan Competition

- Awarded \$15,000 in start up capital to the fourth annual Guardian Bank Business Plan Competition winner, Robbin Miller, SEGA Medical Research, as well as over \$50,000 of in-kind professional services such as free accounting for one year, free legal services for one year, marketing consulting, and advertising.

Professional Consultants Program – Greg Reid (Edward Jones Investments), Chairman

- Added 10 new Professional Consultants (2009 goal is 12; 33 total consultants).
- Consultants spoke at 3 Valdosta Networking Professionals meetings, at Small Business Owners Network meetings, MetroOne events, the Commercial Property Investment Forum and Lunch-n-Learns.
- Held **56** hours of consultations (2009 goal is 80 hours of consultation; (86 consultation hours in 2008).

Small Business Owners Network – Anne Barnas (SmithBarnas & Associates), Chairman

- Hosted 5 speaker sessions with industry experts.
- Hosted 6 roundtable discussion sessions for an open forum of communication for small businesses.
- Held 11 SBON Meetings for all Chamber member businesses with 15 or fewer employees.

Inventors & Innovators

- Identified all patent and trademark attorneys in South Georgia – Valdosta, Thomasville, Albany, Jekyll Island, Brunswick and Savannah.

- Identified manufacturers with potential for prototyping in the South Georgia region.
- Identified all current patent-holders in Lowndes County.
- Hosted 2 workshops for patent-holders and intellectual property owners to learn how to market, sell, license and develop their inventions. Surveyed all patent-holders and intellectual property owners to create a network for them in 2010.

Valdosta Networking Professionals - Greg Reid (Edward Jones Investments), Chairman

- The 30 members of Valdosta Networking Professionals met weekly to share sales leads (18 members in 2008).

Corporate Coaches

- Paired two business owners with a Corporate Coach and recruited one new Coach.

South Georgia Partnership for Regional Development

- Hosted a lunch with Mike Gaymon, President & CEO of Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce, who shared innovative ways to work together by pooling resources, strengths and voices to bring more value and visibility to the region.

Public Affairs Division
Tim Jones (Citizens Community Bank), Vice Chairman
January - December 2009
Highlights!

Government Affairs Council –Paula Goff (SMITH Northview Hospital), Chairman

- Hosted State Legislative Briefing in Atlanta with Local Delegation, GA Retail Assoc. and South GA Businesses for Econ. Dev. and the GA Chamber.

- Championed the following State business development initiatives in the 2009 Legislative Session:
 - HB 120 - Renewal of Sales Tax Holiday
 - HB 160 - increases fines for “super speeders,” providing an estimated \$23 million annually to address the state’s trauma care needs
 - Regional Water Council was formed and includes two representatives from Lowndes County, Wesley Langdale and Rusty McCall
 - SB 31- Georgia Nuclear Energy Financing Act, provides for a utility to recover from its customers the costs of financing associated with the construction of a nuclear generating plant

- Coordinated Federal Legislative Committee meeting with Representative Jack Kingston.

- Co-hosted the Stimulus or Stymied Seminar: Employee & Labor Law Legislation with SmithBarnas & Assoc. and Moore, Clark, Duvall and Rodgers, PC.
- Coordinated the 2009 Federal Legislative Overview Lunch with U.S. Senator Johnny Isakson as keynote speaker and US Chamber Labor Law Executive Director, Michael Eastman.
- Coordinated meeting with Representative Sanford Bishop regarding Employee & labor Law legislation.
- Coordinated the annual Washington, DC trip with 11 members who met with members of Congress, USAF officials at the Pentagon, and US Chamber staff.
- Participated and promoted AAUW Candidate Forum, convened the following legislative meetings:
 - GA Chamber Listening Session
 - Get Georgia Moving meeting
 - Meeting and reception with GDOT Commissioner Vance Smith
- State Legislative Lunch (with three local Rotary Clubs; 150 in attendance)
- Produced Legislative Alert and Update E-Publications (26% open rate).

- Developed and implemented Gateways Committee.

Military Affairs Committee – Brian Geary (Ace Electric), Chairman

- Hosted three Red Carpet Parties to welcome Moody's leadership to our community.
- Participated in 25 Right Start Programs for all newcomers to MAFB.
- Attended 3 Quarterly Awards Ceremonies, 8 Change of Command Ceremonies and the Airman Appreciation Day

***Workforce Development & Education Division
Greg Justice (Regal Marine), Vice Chairman
January - December 2009
Highlights!***

**Existing Industry Committee – Marcie Dennard
(The Park Avenue Bank), Chairman**

- Revised Business Retention and Expansion Process (BREP) Survey for electronic distribution with 19 respondents (16 in 2008).
- CJB Industries named the 2009 Manufacturer of the Year at Salute to Manufacturer's Early Bird Breakfast with 150 in attendance (115 in 2008).

**Business/Education Support Team – David
Newbern (U.S. Press), Chairman**

- Recruited and trained 15 new CHOICES volunteers and presented the workshop to 1,202 8th Grade Students (1,273 students in 2008).
- Organized Job Shadow Day for 97 Lowndes High School Career and Technical Education students and recruited 25 businesses to host them.
- Coordinated and hosted the STAR Banquet for Region 10 STAR Students and Teachers.

- Organized and co-sponsored the Annual Sam's Club Literacy Fair with 23 vendors and over 4,000 books collected and redistributed to area non-profits.
- Hosted the EAGLE Award celebration to honor the 2009 recipient

Workforce Development Committee – Greg Justice (Regal Marine), Chairman

- 364 parents have experienced 'Helping Your Child Succeed'. Since the program's launch in spring 2008, 644 parents in 18 businesses have viewed the presentation.
- 101 participants attended the Boot Camp for Supervisors program; goal for 2009 was 100 (104 attended in 2008).
- Hosted industry specific meetings to promote the Work Ready Program.

MetroOne – Erika Biddix (MAC Meetings & Events) and Emily Browning (Fowler, Holley, Rambo & Stalvey), Co-Chairmen

- Coordinated 12 professional development opportunities including a half-day seminar for 55 participants (43 participants in 2008).

- Launched the Metro Valdosta Emerging Leaders program-the area's only recognition program celebrating the success and professional accomplishments of area young professionals – with 4 Emerging Leaders named and 19 applications submitted.
- Launched the MetroOne Mentor Program with 16 mentors and protégés currently paired.
- Significantly grew active membership by 31% (436 members in 2009, compared with 333 in 2008) and increased Web site traffic, www.MetroOneValdosta.com (3,310 visits with 46% new visits in 2009; the site went live in late 2008 so 2009 stats will serve as our benchmark going forward).
- Participated in community volunteer activities such as a Habitat Build Day and established partnerships with the Valdosta Early College Academy and Second Harvest Food Bank.
- Created MetroOne LinkedIn and Facebook groups to increase social networking opportunities for members.
- Drafted a Strategic Plan to provide vision and benchmarking for 2010-2012.

World Class Recognition Program – Sherry Zipperer (First State Bank & Trust Company), Chairman

- Expanded the World Class Recognition Program to include awarding 1st America Drugs as a Small Business World Class Employer and South Georgia Medical Center as a Large Business World Class Employer.
- Received 29 total World Class Employee Nominations (22 in 2008).



**To all of our outstanding
Board members,
thank you for a
WONDERFUL 2009!**

**A special thanks to our outgoing
Board members:**

- **Giovanni Panizzi**
- **Lee Morgan**
- **David Newbern**
- **Debra Tann**

