



2009 Annual Report

VALDOSTA - LOWNDES COUNTY



CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Leading Businesses.
Leading Communities.™

mission

The mission of the Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce is to serve as the unifying force and focal point for enhancing the economic, social and cultural well-being of the regional community it serves. The Chamber shall seek to accomplish its mission by being the voice for business within the community; by addressing economic, political and quality of life issues, and through a selective business plan to achieve attainable community goals.

vision

Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce will lead economic growth in our regional area, creating a community that is entrepreneurial, open to change and fully integrated with other institutions to improve education and quality of life for all.



from the chairman of the board

Chamber Members,

I want to begin by simply stating what an honor it has been to serve as your Chairman during 2009. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity! We have an awesome Chamber, and we have an awesome community. It is a humbling experience to witness firsthand the number of people who work so hard, every day, to make Valdosta-Lowndes County the best place to live and work. To all of our members, volunteers, Ambassadors, committee members, directors and staff —thank you for making 2009 a special year!

Our priority for the year was to focus on the task at hand and to execute the Business Plan that was already well underway. Our Past Chairman, Walter Hobgood, spearheaded the development of a sound plan and vision for our future. But none of the programs could be possible without a solid membership base as we need a strong base to sustain the many programs that we have underway. I am very proud to report that while many other Chambers were seeing membership declines of 15-20 percent, our Chamber membership remains strong at 1,535 members, maintaining 83 percent of our membership from 2008.

The best way to retain members is to keep them active and engaged; to have strong participation. I am very proud and thankful to all that came out to our events. We had record crowds at virtually all of our functions throughout 2009. THANK YOU for supporting us and the many programs we offer! This is a good indication that our members see value in their membership and are taking advantage of the opportunities provided. I encourage all of you to remain active and use these opportunities to network and to promote your business.

What better way to support our community and our local economy than to Buy In Greater Valdosta? We have had the THINK B.I.G. program for years, but in 2009 we really increased our emphasis to promote it year round. It is rewarding to hear people all over town repeating the THINK B.I.G. phrase and boasting about spending their dollars locally. Thank you all for embracing THINK B.I.G. and please, keep it going! We were able to document over \$25 million of funds spent locally from this effort. With the 63 percent return provided by the multiplier effect, we kept over \$40 million in our community to go into the pockets of our local businesses. THANK YOU!

Of course, we all know that 2009 was a difficult year for many. It seems that most everyone worked harder, worked longer and worked for less. The Chamber recognizes and understands the economic situation and the difficulties that have resulted from the recession. However, we also recognize that our local economy has fared far better than most. While that is no consolation, it is reassuring to know that our Chamber is prepared to address these challenges with real solutions that are already in place and are working. If we execute our programs, continue to be active and engaged and support each other, we will not only survive these difficult and trying times but we will be better off for having endured them.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to serve! I look forward to seeing you at the Chamber soon.



Jeff Hanson (The Park Avenue Bank)
2009 Chamber Board Chairman





business expansion

Vice Chairman: Terri Lupo (Georgia Power Company)

Targeted Business Expansion Committee

Chairman: Bill DeCoudres (Guardian Bank)

The Targeted Business Expansion Committee, better known as TBEC, has made progress in 2009 moving toward the goal of facilitating the creation of 1,000 jobs by the year 2012. The group surveyed 320 local businesses to benchmark long-term growth. It also hosted the third “Metro In Motion Speaker Series” with Chris Miller of Creative Cities Consulting.

The headline-making news from TBEC was the analysis of the 1990-2007 employment and wages trends of the Valdosta MSA to benchmark the impact of TBEC initiatives through IMPACT 2012. The information was shared with the Chamber Board and key community leaders. This information will help TBEC track the changes in employment and wage growth.

Information and Technology

TBEC has also made strides in the area of information technology. The group hosted three meetings with the IT Professionals Network and created an interactive Web site directory for information technology and environmental technology businesses to advertise their services. These directories can be accessed from the Chamber’s homepage, www.ValdostaChamber.com.

A workshop on the cutting-edge practice of Cloud Computing was hosted by TBEC to educate members of the business community on computing of the future. The committee also brought the Technology Association of

Georgia’s Excalibur Awards to Valdosta as they highlighted Valdosta nominees: Valdosta State University, Valdosta Technical College, Azalea Health Innovations, Inc. and SMITH Northview Hospital.

Medical Services and Support

Advancing the initiative of growing jobs in the area of Medical Services and Support, TBEC established a sub-committee to develop a plan to promote career choices in this industry to appropriate grade levels and parents.

VALET

Chairman: Jodi Doss (Jodi’s Accessories)

The Valdosta And Lowndes Expansion Team, referred to as VALET, aims to do just as a valet does—be of service. The team hosted the annual Ameris Bank Business Outlook Breakfast with Dr. Jeff Humphries and Dr. Cliff Lipscomb to give the 90 top business leaders who participated in the breakfast a forecast for business in the coming year.

VALET hosted four meetings, bringing together all professionals and organizations in Lowndes County that provide services to businesses, industries and entrepreneurs to develop a user guide for start-up and expanding businesses. The guide addresses zoning, licensing, permitting and occupying a business in Valdosta-Lowndes County. The group has also created a brand and graphic for this program appropriately dubbed “No Wrong Door.”

Government Affairs Council

Chairman: Paula Goff (SMITH Northview Hospital)



The Government Affairs Council works diligently to promote pro-business legislation. In 2009, the group hosted a state legislative briefing in Atlanta with the local delegation, the Georgia Retail Association, South Georgia Businesses for Economic Development and the Georgia Chamber. The group also co-hosted the “Stimulus or Stymied Seminar: Employee & Labor Law Legislation” with SmithBarnas & Associates and Moore, Clark Duvall and Rodgers, PC.

The Government Affairs Council also organized the following meetings and events:

- A Federal Legislative Committee meeting with representative Jack Kingston
- The 2009 Federal Legislative Overview Lunch with U.S. Senator Johnny Isakson and U.S. Chamber Labor Law Executive Director Michael Eastman
- A meeting with Representative Sanford Bishop regarding employee and labor law legislation
- The annual Washington, D.C. trip with 11 members who met with members of Congress, USAF officials at the Pentagon and U.S. Chamber staff

The Government Affairs Council championed state business development initiatives in the 2009 Legislative Session including HB 120-Renewal of Sales Tax Holiday and HB 160-Increases fines for “super speeders,” providing an estimated \$23 million annually to address the state’s trauma care needs. The Council monitored the formation of the Regional Water Council and endorsed representatives from Lowndes County, Rusty McCall and Wesley Langdale.

The group also participated in and promoted the AAUW Candidate Forum and convened legislative

meetings such as the Georgia Chamber Listening Session, Get Georgia Moving meeting, a meeting and reception with Georgia Department of Transportation Commissioner Vance Smith and the State Legislative Lunch, which was co-hosted with three local Rotary Clubs.

To stay in contact with Chamber members and to inform them about important legislative issues and updates, the Government Affairs Council produced two e-publications, *Legislative Alert* and *Legislative Update*, with a 26 percent open rate.

The group also began a new endeavor with the development and implementation of the Gateways Committee. The Gateways Committee was formed to bring all stakeholders to the table to develop a comprehensive strategy that will give the gateways of the Valdosta-Lowndes County community a cohesive and aesthetically pleasing appearance.

Military Affairs Committee

Chairman: Brian Geary (Ace Electric)



The Military Affairs Committee serves as a liaison between the business community and the military, which plays a vital role in the local economy. In 2009, the Military Affairs Committee hosted three Red Carpet Parties at Ocean Pond in Lake Park to welcome the leadership of Moody Air Force Base to the community.

The committee also participated in 25 Right Start orientation programs at Moody Air Force Base to introduce Moody newcomers to the Valdosta area. To show the business community’s support for the military, members of the Military Affairs Committee attended three quarterly awards ceremonies, eight change of command ceremonies and the Airman Appreciation Day at Moody Air Fore Base.

Membership Development & Retention

Even in this tough economic climate, the Chamber's membership retention rate for 2009 is 83 percent. Compared to other Chambers in communities similar to Valdosta, this is a true success and a testament to the strength and diversity of the Valdosta-Lowndes County economy.

Unfortunately, the Chamber did see 257 write-offs for the year with 109 being out of business. Two hundred forty-seven new members joined the Chamber in 2009, surpassing the Chamber's goal of recruiting 100 new members. The year ended with a total membership of 1,535.

The Chamber hosted monthly Chamber 101 sessions to inform members about what the Chamber has to offer. In 2009, 101 members attended Chamber 101 compared to the 94 who attended in 2008.

The Member Care Alliance Insurance Discount program is an added benefit for Chamber members and provided a discount of insurance costs. Fifty-five members participated in the program in 2009 covering an estimated 648 employees.

DRUGS DON'T WORK in South Georgia

Chairman: Katinka Kelly (American Drill Bushing)

DRUGS DON'T WORK is the statewide drug-free workplace program established by the Georgia Chamber of Commerce. Members of the program see benefits including a 7.5 percent discount on Workers' Compensation premiums, reduced absenteeism and increased productivity. In 2009, the Chamber recruited 16 new DRUGS DON'T WORK members for a total membership of 267. To help employers maintain a drug-free workplace, the Chamber coordinated the annual Greenleaf Center breakfast for supervisors with 53 supervisors attending and coordinated a supervisor seminar with Doctors Laboratory, Inc. with 16 participating members.

Ambassador Committee

Chairman: Jerry Kozuch (South Georgia Vein Center)

Thirty-seven members served on the Ambassadors Committee in 2009 to welcome members to the Chamber and to assist with Chamber functions and activities. The group coordinated 81 Ribbon Cuttings and five Ground Breakings and acted as Chamber hosts at 12 Business After Hours and four Early Bird Breakfasts.

Rhonda Miller (Fox 49) was named Ambassador of the Year for her outstanding service to the Chamber through this group. The Ambassadors coordinated "Operation Thank You," a program to deliver annual



membership plaques and packets to the more than 1,500 Chamber members, and represented the Chamber at numerous Chamber events totaling more than 700 hours of volunteer service.

The Ambassadors have also aided the Chamber in membership retention with the creation of "Member Crashers." The group visited 60 Chamber members to let them know how much their Chamber membership is valued.

Marketing & Public Relations

Chairman: Phyllis Royal (Full Circle Marketing and Advertising)

The Marketing Committee directly addresses IMPACT 2012 advertising contributions each year to promote Chamber programs and events. In 2009, the contribution and public relations efforts resulted in 20 TV stories, four Chamber TV commercials, 64 radio presentations, 52 print articles and 35 Chamber presentations to area clubs and organizations.

*Vice Chairman: Greg Justice
(Regal Marine)*

workforce development & education

Existing Industry Committee

Chairman: Marcie Dennard (The Park Avenue Bank)

The Existing Industry Committee revised the Business Retention and Expansion Process Survey for electronic distribution with 19 respondents compared to 16 in 2008. The survey is administered to manufacturers in the Valdosta-Lowndes County area. CJB Industries was named 2009 Manufacturer of the Year at the Salute to Manufacturer's Early Bird Breakfast with 150 Chamber members in attendance.

Workforce Development Committee

Chairman: Greg Justice (Regal Marine)

Thanks to the Workforce Development Committee's commitment to growing a better workforce, 364 parents have experienced "Helping Your Child Succeed" this year. Since the program's initial launch in spring 2008, 644 parents in 18 businesses have viewed the program's presentation about ways to help your children.

Boot Camp for Supervisors, a half-day professional development seminar, educated 101 participants to help supervisors be more productive, efficient and better leaders. The Workforce Development Committee also hosted industry specific meetings to promote the Work Ready Program.

World Class Recognition Program

Chairman: Sherry Zipperer (First State Bank & Trust)

The World Class Recognition Program is designed to reward and recognize outstanding members of the Valdosta area workforce. Twenty-nine World Class Recognition nominations were submitted in 2009. South Georgia Medical Center was named Large Business World Class Employer and 1st America Drugs was named Small Business World Class Employer.



Business/Education Support Team

Chairman: David Newbern (U.S. Press)

The Business/Education Support Team recruited and trained 15 new CHOICES volunteers and presented the workshop to 1,202 eighth grade students. The team also organized Job Shadow Day for 97 Lowndes High School Career and Technical Education students and recruited 25 businesses to host them. The STAR Banquet was coordinated for Region 10 STAR Students and Teachers as well as the EAGLE Award Reception to honor the 2009 EAGLE Award recipient. The team also organized and co-sponsored the Annual Sam's Club Literacy Fair with 23 vendors, and more than 4,000 books were collected and distributed to area non-profits.

MetroOne

Co-Chairman: Erika Biddix (MAC Meetings & Events)

Co-Chairman: Emily Browning (Fowler, Holley, Rambo & Stalvey)

MetroOne is the Chamber's young professionals network. In 2009, MetroOne coordinated 12 professional development opportunities including a half-day seminar with 55 participants.

MetroOne launched two new programs this year, Metro Valdosta Emerging Leaders and the MetroOne Mentor Program. The Metro Valdosta Emerging Leaders program is the area's only recognition program, celebrating the success and professional accomplishments of area young professionals with four Emerging Leaders named. The MetroOne Mentor Program paired 16 seasoned professionals with young professionals to help young professionals gain from their experience and advice.

Membership in MetroOne grew by 31 percent this year to 436 members. Web site traffic to the site

www.MetroOneValdosta.com increased by 46 percent. To facilitate communication with members, MetroOne also launched LinkedIn and Facebook groups.

MetroOne also provided opportunities for young professionals to give back to the community. Members volunteered with Habitat for Humanity Build Day and established partnerships with the Valdosta Early College Academy and Second Harvest Food Bank.

MetroOne made a leap in the development of the group by drafting a Strategic Plan to provide vision and benchmarking for 2010-2012.



Vice Chairman: Tom Gooding (Elliott, Blackburn & Gooding, P.C.)

economic development

Triple Crown Hometowns Program

Triple Crown Hometowns is a retiree attraction partnership between Lowndes, Brooks and Lanier counties and seeks to attract amenity-seeking retirees.

The program is credited for relocating 46 new retiree households to Lowndes, Brooks and Lanier Counties this year for a total of 296 new retiree households since the program's launch.

The program's Web site, www.GeorgiaRetire.com has over 84,602 hits for the year. The program developed nearly 3,700 retiree prospect leads from 47 states and three countries. The program was able to secure national advertising on the Golf Channel during the South Georgia Classic and thanks to the program, Valdosta was named one of the top 100 towns to relocate in the U.S. by Relocate-America.com.

Triple Crown Hometowns was also featured in *Forever Young*, a Canadian publication for readers age 50 and older. The program was featured on a billboard on I-75 Exit 18 with a traffic count of 46,000 vehicles daily.

To keep in contact with retirees to let them know about the area and what Triple Crown Hometowns Investors have to offer, the program implemented a social

networking blog, interfacing with the program's e-newsletter and Web site. The program's e-newsletter *Hometown Happenings* was published monthly and distributed to more than 1,300 retirees.

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

The S.E.E.D.S. Center is a resource center for businesses and fosters business growth and development in the region.

Four hundred ninety-three clients were served in 2009 within Berrien, Brooks, Cook, Echols, Lanier, Lowndes and Turner Counties. Eleven businesses have been established in the region using S.E.E.D.S. Center assistance this year alone.

Two hundred eighty-six targeted direct mailing lists have been created for clients in 2009 compared to 275 in 2008. Retail Lease Trac was utilized by five commercial property owners to target prospective retail businesses.

The S.E.E.D.S. Center coordinated the 5th annual Entrepreneur Resource Fair, "Entrepreneurs in Action" and co-hosted a Commercial Property Investment Forum with local commercial real estate experts as well as the "Maximum Marketing Series" with the Small Business Development Center.

Adding to the wealth of resources available to businesses, the S.E.E.D.S. Center Web site now includes the "Tools for Business" Web site portal which gives up-to-date information for both seasoned and developing businesses. The portal had 4,140 page views and the S.E.E.D.S. Center site, www.SeedsCenterofSGA.com had 226,626 hits.

To maintain contact with S.E.E.D.S. Center clients and to give them information crucial to growing businesses, 11 editions of *SPROUTS* e-newsletter were distributed.

Guardian Bank Business Plan Competition

The Guardian Bank Business Plan Competition seeks to grow businesses and high wage careers. In 2009, Guardian Bank awarded \$15,000 in start up capital through the program to Robbin Miller (SEGA Medical Research), 4th Annual Winner. Miller also received a prize package of donated services valued at \$50,000.

Professional Consultants Program

Chairman: Greg Reid (Edward Jones Investments)

The Professional Consultants Program is a free service to aid businesses. Professionals in areas such as accounting, legal, marketing, finance, etc. donate an hour of their time to meet with S.E.E.D.S. Center clients. In 2009, the program welcomed 10 new professionals for a total of 33 consultants. Fifty-six hours of consultations were held, and consultants spoke at the Valdosta Networking Professionals meetings, Small Business Owners Network meetings, MetroOne, the Commercial Property Investment Forum and at Lunch-n-Learns.

Small Business Owners Network

Chairman: Anne Barnas (SmithBarnas & Associates)

The Small Business Owners Network is a group of small business owners that come together to discuss issues facing their businesses. The group hosted five speaker sessions with industry experts in 2009 and six roundtable discussions for an open forum for small businesses. Small Business Owners Network meetings are open to all Chamber member businesses with 15 or fewer employees.

Inventors & Innovators Network

In an effort to assist inventors in the region, the Chamber formed the Inventors & Innovators Network. The Chamber identified all patent and trademark attorneys in South Georgia as well as manufacturers with potential for prototyping inventions. One hundred local current patent holders were also identified. Two workshops were co-hosted with the Georgia Tech

Enterprise Innovation Institute for patent holders and intellectual property owners to learn how to market, sell, license and develop their inventions.

Valdosta Networking Professionals

Chairman: Greg Reid (Edward Jones Investments)

This group of Chamber members meets weekly to share sales leads. The group has grown to 30 members from 18 in 2008.

Corporate Coaches

Corporate Coaches is designed to provide small businesses, six months or older, access to invaluable experience and advice through a one-year mentoring program. In 2009, two business owners were paired with Corporate Coaches and one new Corporate Coach was recruited.

South Georgia Partnership for Regional Development

South Georgia Partnership for Regional Development is a partnership among Southern Georgia Regional Commission and the Berrien County, Brooks County, Cook County, Lanier County and Valdosta-Lowndes County Chambers of Commerce. In 2009, the partnership hosted a lunch with Mike Gaymon, President and 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.



operations & administration

Finance Committee

Paul Nichols (Nexstep Technology Services, Inc.)

The finance committee provides guidance to the Chamber regarding budgeting and financial decisions and monitors the Chamber budget bi-monthly. This year the finance committee reviewed current service contracts and updated the Chamber's bid policy. In an effort to reduce in-house cost, the finance committee prepared financial statements for B.E.S.T. and Triple Crown Hometowns. The committee also developed a courtesy-call plan for largest dues payers and a credit card security policy to protect members.

IMPACT 2012 Oversight Committee

Chairman: Bill DeCoudres (Guardian Bank)

The IMPACT 2012 Oversight Committee is a group of top business leaders who oversee the implementation of IMPACT 2012 contributions. The committee met semi-annually in 2009 to review collections and disbursements, monitor the current budget and set the 2010 budget. The group also hosted two shareholders

lunches to report to investors and to report how their contributions are helping the community.

Organization Task Force, Community Public Education Foundation

Chairman: Leroy Butler (Woodlawn Forest Church of Christ)

The Organization Task Force organized the Community Unification for Educational Excellence Task Force. This task force became incorporated, developed Policies & Procedures and elected officers. The task force interviewed four potential consultants and signed a 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

Chairman: Al Turner (Al Turner, Attorney)

The Barber Trust Advisory Board met in August to inspect the Barber House, which houses the Chamber offices, and to provide oversight to the Barber Trust bank account.

2009 membership awards

Large Business World Class Employer



World Class Employee: Ron Lowery (Langdale Forest Products Co.)



World Class Employee: Margo Smith (Ole Times Country Buffet)

Small Business World Class Employer



World Class Employee: Amanda Garland (Commercial Banking Company)



World Class Employee: Leroy Godfrey (SAFT)



Manufacturer of the Year: CJB Industries



Small Business of the Year:
Ellis, Ricket & Associates



A.L. Girardin Award: Jodi Doss
(Jodi's Accessories)



Minority-Owned Business of
the Year: Antoine's The
Flavor of New Orleans



Ambassador of the Year:
Rhonda Miller (Fox 49)



Guardian Bank Business Plan Competition Winner:
SEGA Medical Research



BIG Thinkers: Stan and Sue Cox
(Covington's Dining & Catering)

board members



Back row: Tim Coombs (Coombs Heating & Air Conditioning), Stan Fillion (The Park Avenue Bank), Allan Dear (Allan Deal Real Estate), Paul Nichols (Nexxtep Technology Services, Inc.), Myrna Ballard (Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce), Giovanni Panizzi (Cypress Lakes Development, Inc.), Walt Gill (Pinnacle Prime Contractors, Inc.), Tim Jones (Citizens Community Bank), Walter Hobgood (Express Employment Professionals) *Front row:* Phyllis Royal (Full Circle Marketing & Advertising), Terri Lupo (Georgia Power Company), Jeff Hanson (The Park Avenue Bank), Tom Gooding (Elliott, Blackburn & Gooding, P.C.), Sally Bloom (Mediacom), David Newbern (U.S. Press) *Not Pictured:* Ed Cockman (Family Health Care), Jeff Fulp (Erco Worldwide, Inc.), Greg Justice (Regal Marine), John Manning (John's Body Shop), James MaGahee (South Georgia Medical Center), Lee Morgan (Southeastern Federal Credit Union), Jay Prince (Prince Automotive of Valdosta), Jerome Riley (Riley Church Pews), Debra Tann (Genesis Christian School)

committee chairmen



Back Row: Paul Nichols (Nexxtep Technology Services, Inc.), Leroy Butler (Woodlawn Forrest Church of Christ), Greg Reid (Edward Jones Investments), Sherry Wood (City of Remerton), Erica Biddix (MAC Meetings & Events), Emily Browning (Fowler, Holly, Rambo and Stalvey), Tom Putnam (Langdale Industries), David Newbern (U.S. Press), Bill DeCoudres (Guardian Bank) *Front row:* Phyllis Royal (Full Circle Marketing & Advertising), Sherry Zipperer (First State Bank & Trust), Paula Goff (SMITH Northview Hospital), Jodi Doss (Jodi's Accessories), Sally Bloom (Mediacom), Marcie Dennard (The Park Avenue Bank) *Not Pictured:* Anne Barnas (SmithBarnas & Associates), Brian Geary (Ace Electric, Inc.), Katinka Kelly (American Drill Bushing), Jerry Kozuch (South Georgia Vein Centers), Greg Justice (Regal Marine)