

Make a difference in South Georgia's economy: THINK B.I.G.!



Jim Matney (SMITH Northview Hospital) might be new in town, but he has already begun to make his presence felt. Matney, invited representatives from several of the largest employers in Valdosta-Lowndes County to meet with him in March and again in April to discuss



Jim Matney, CEO of SMITH Northview Hospital, urges Chamber members to THINK B.I.G. at the Business After Hours at Park Avenue Bank on March 31.

ways to maximize opportunities to ensure that Greater Valdosta recovers quickly from the national economic recession. "Greater Valdosta" includes all of South Georgia. Matney also invited Dr. Cynthia Tori (VNU Associate Professor of Economics), an expert in economic impact analysis, to estimate the effect on our local economy if

Chamber members collectively committed to spending \$5 million in Greater Valdosta that they currently spend outside the regional economy. "While we don't have a great deal of control over the national or global economy, as local business owners and managers, we do have some control over where we purchase the goods and services our businesses use, and that we as individuals and families use," Matney told the group. "SMITH Northview has identified approximately \$80,000 that we currently spend outside the regional economy that can be redirected to businesses located in South Georgia. The Chamber wants to challenge all of its 1,500+ members to do the same - to identify expenditures that are currently being made outside Greater Valdosta, and making the commitment to spend that money in South Georgia instead."

"The participation of the community's largest employers serves as a symbol of business unity," explained **Jay Prince** (Prince Automotive Group), who chairs the Chamber's THINK B.I.G. initiative. "When we spend our money in Greater Valdosta, not only are we making sure our money makes the biggest impact on our regional economy, we keep more money in our community that goes towards paying one additional salary, which keeps one more job alive in Greater Valdosta. Whether you spend it in a WALMART in Valdosta, or a locally-owned business in Quitman - spend it in South Georgia."



Kari Brockington (Chamber) distributes THINK B.I.G. pledge cards to **Jerry and Walter Kozuch** and **Dr. Greg Marth** (South Georgia Vets Centers) at the THINK B.I.G. Business After Hours. "We're asking all Chamber members to commit themselves to spending more of their business and personal dollars in Greater Valdosta," said Brockington. "Together, we can make a difference."



Lane Squire (Epic Associates) models her THINK B.I.G. pin, specially designed for the Chamber by **Jodi Doss** of Jodi's Accessories and available for \$18 at the Chamber, or at the THINK B.I.G. Store on the homepage of www.valdostachamber.com.

Leading Businesses. Leading Communities.™

THINK B.I.G. Kick-Off sponsors say "Buy In Greater Valdosta!"

Chamber members who attended a THINK B.I.G. kick-off event at Park Avenue Bank on March 31 were challenged to commit themselves to "Thinking B.I.G.," Matney, Prince, and representatives from each of the businesses who hosted the Business After Hours event shared their thoughts with the group on why it is important to Buy In Greater Valdosta.



Chamber staff members **Tara Nichols** and **Melissa Wheeler** place a THINK B.I.G. sign in the Chamber's front yard. U.S. Press produced the signs for the Chamber. Help us promote THINK B.I.G.: Signs are available for \$5 at the Chamber, or at the online THINK B.I.G. Store on the homepage of www.valdostachamber.com.

According to Dr. Tori's analysis, every economy generates an economic multiplier effect of 1.65 (see detailed story on page 10).

Gallery. And don't forget to visit the online THINK B.I.G. Store on the Chamber's Web site to purchase your THINK B.I.G. promotional items!

Hawthorn Suites opens its doors for Business After Hours



Evons family says it's just good business to THINK B.I.G.

Hawthorn Suites Valdosta invited the Chamber community in for a grand opening during Business After Hours on Feb. 26.

The hotel serves as another symbol of accomplishment for a family that has made their living as prosperous entrepreneurs in our community. Owners **Gerald Evans, Sr.** and **Gerald Evans, Jr.** have owned many



Left: Tonia McCogle (McCogle Travel) and **Lana Foster** (Foster Travel Agency) share business leads during Business After Hours, hosted by Hawthorn Suites Valdosta. **Right: Jamon Williams** (Georgia Department of Labor), **David Neathen** (U.S. Press), **Michael Anderson** (Express Employment Professionals) and **Ronnie Pierce** (Black Crow Media) all rave about the networking opportunities available at Business After Hours.



businesses throughout the years in Valdosta, including Cotton State Insurance (1978-84), Century 21 (1978-84), Northlake Golf Course (2000-03), Central Park Cafe (2000-02). They have also been in the construction business since 1978.

The family also understands the value of supporting local businesses and putting "THINK B.I.G. - Buy In Greater Valdosta" into practice, which is why roughly 90 percent of the work done to the facility was performed by local contractors.

"When you have the resources available locally that can perform the services you need, it just makes sense to support the home team and work with local businesses," says Gerald Evans, Jr. "Not only are you supporting local businesses, you are supporting a neighbor and a family. As a family-owned business, we understand that importance firsthand."

More pictures of Business After Hours can be viewed on the Chamber's Web site, www.valdostachamber.com. Select Chamber News and Events, then select Photo Gallery.

www.valdostachamber.com