

# The Chamber Perspectives online

## Upcoming Events

Jul 12  
Grand Opening & Ribbon  
Cutting at Hilton  
Garden Inn

Jul 13  
Retail Sales Tax Holiday  
Seminar

Jul 16  
Culture Builds Kickoff

Aug 7  
Chamber in Session

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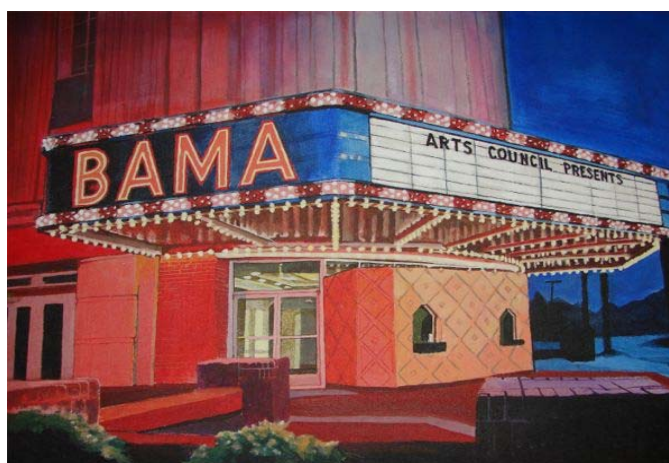
### Tuscaloosa Souvenirs



T-Town Cooler  
\$5.00 Click to purchase

## "Culture Builds" Kickoff Event Set at Bama Theatre

The new "Culture Builds" process, sponsored in part by The Chamber, is designed to define our culture and tap our potential to be a more livable community. The idea is that, as our arts and cultural activities flourish, so will our area.



**The first step is to attend the Culture Builds kickoff event on Monday evening, July 16<sup>th</sup> at the Bama Theatre. Social networking is at 6 PM and the program begins at 6:45 PM. There is no cost to attend. All citizens are invited and all ideas will be welcomed.**

Guest presenters are: Robert McNulty, President and CEO of Partners for Livable Communities in Washington, DC; former Florida Secretary of State, Glenda Hood, who now serves as Chairman of The Partners' Board of Trustees as well as Chair of Culture Florida; Rondell Crier, an internationally-known artist from New Orleans that founded the highly innovative "Young Aspirations/Young Artists" (YA/YA) program for young inner city artists in New Orleans; and Mark Barone, a nationally-known artist and neighborhood arts advocate who currently serves as Senior Director of Institutional Advancement for Syracuse University.

It will be an evening of creativity and entertainment featuring performances by Debbie Bond & The Alabama Blues Project, Tuscaloosa Children's Theatre, Tuscaloosa Community Dancers, Lori Freeman & Sam Ervin from Stillman College.

Be a part of this unique opportunity to raise the level of quality and livability in West Alabama. Hope to see you there!

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### **Shop Smart, Shop Tuscaloosa County During the Back-To-School Sales Tax Holiday**

Capitalizing on the success of last year's successful tax holiday, the City of Tuscaloosa, City of Northport and Tuscaloosa County, along with the state of Alabama, will hold the "sales tax holiday" for 2007, beginning on Friday, August 3<sup>rd</sup> at 12:01 AM and ending at midnight on Sunday, August 5<sup>th</sup>.

Certain school supplies, computers, clothing and book of specific value will be exempt from state and local sales taxes. During the 3-day holiday, sales tax is waived on: clothing - single items priced at \$100 or less; school supplies - single items priced at \$50 or less; books valued at \$30 or less and textbooks valued at \$50 or less - computers and computer equipment - single items priced at \$750 or less.

Retailers are required to participate and cannot charge tax on items legally tax-exempt during the sales tax holiday.

To assist area retailers with preparations for the 2007 sales tax holiday, The Chamber and the City of Tuscaloosa will sponsor and host a Retail Sales Tax Holiday Seminar on Friday, July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1:30 PM to 3 PM, at the Tuscaloosa Fire Logistics Center, located on McFarland Blvd in front of Bruno's. There is no cost to attend. Representatives of local



revenue departments and the Alabama State Department of Revenue will be on hand to assist retailers. Jasper will also host a seminar on this day, please click [here](#) to see our joint flyer containing more information.

In addition, The Chamber and the Tuscaloosa Advertising Federation are co-sponsoring a "Shop Smart, Shop Tuscaloosa County" campaign, along with excellent support from area print and broadcast media, to promote buying at home during the sales tax holiday.

For a concise list of tax exempt items along with other information, go online to: [www.revenue.alabama.gov](http://www.revenue.alabama.gov) or [www.alabamaretail.org](http://www.alabamaretail.org). You can also get information from The Chamber's website by clicking [here](#). For more information about the retail seminar, call The Chamber at 758.7588.

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### **Adopt-A-School Breakfast Kicks Off 2007-2008 School Year**

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Celebrating 22 years of supporting area schools, the annual Adopt-A-School Breakfast Seminar scheduled for Wednesday, August 1<sup>st</sup> will officially kickoff the 2007-2008 Adopt-A-School Year. The seminar, held at University Church of Christ, will begin with breakfast at 7:30AM. The Adopt-A-School Breakfast Seminar provides a unique opportunity for school personnel in both the Tuscaloosa County System and the Tuscaloosa

City System to meet together and network with community businesses and leaders. Attending the seminar will be representatives from all 48 public schools in the Tuscaloosa City and County Systems, as well as, business leaders representing the 81 business and professional organizations who have chosen to adopt area schools.

Retired educator Dr. David Thompson will give the keynote address during the opening session. The theme, "Celebrating the Arts: Tuscaloosa's Hidden Treasures", will continue the emphasis placed on the arts in the 2007 Alabama Year of the Arts. Following the opening session, school coordinators and business coordinators will attend breakout workshops and develop plans for the 2007-08 school year. "The seminar and workshops are a great opportunity for our partnerships to meet, network, and develop new strategies for the upcoming school year," said Loo Whitfield, Adopt-A-School Director.

For more information, contact Loo Whitfield at 391.0563 or [loo@tuscaloosachamber.com](mailto:loo@tuscaloosachamber.com). Click [here](#) to register.

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### **"Second Tuesday" Networking to Resume in August**

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The June 12th "Second Tuesday" event, sponsored by Tanner & Guin and Palmer & Burns PC, was a resounding success. Breezy Capitol Park was a lovely setting in which to enjoy each other's company and the tasty Mexican fare prepared by Gayle's Gourmet. Thanks, Tanner & Guin and Palmer & Burns, for putting this together for us!

July has been a very active month for The Chamber and, because of the major "Culture Builds" kickoff event, we didn't hold a July "Second Tuesday" mixer. We did announce this a few times, in different ways, but there was still a bit of confusion. We apologize for that. We'd also like to thank Country Inn and Suites for offering to host the event and we encourage you to drop by and see Ella Hood and tour their facilities.

The next "Second Tuesday mixer" will be hosted on August 14th by Verizon Wireless at Snow Hinton Park. Please mark your calendars now!

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### **Congressman Artur Davis To Address The Chamber & Rotary**

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Seventh District Congressman, Artur Davis will be the guest speaker at a special program on Tuesday, August 7th at Indian Hills Country Club. The luncheon event, hosted and co-sponsored by The Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama and the Rotary Club of Tuscaloosa, will begin at 12 Noon.

Reservations are required for the program in advance at \$20 per person. Rotary members do not have to register through The Chamber since this is regular meeting of the Noon Rotary Club.

This joint "Chamber In Session" type event is a program of the Governmental Affairs Division of The Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama. For information or to make reservations, contact The Chamber office at 758.7588 or go online to [www.tuscaloosachamber.com](http://www.tuscaloosachamber.com).

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## **Technology Survey Helps Us Help You**

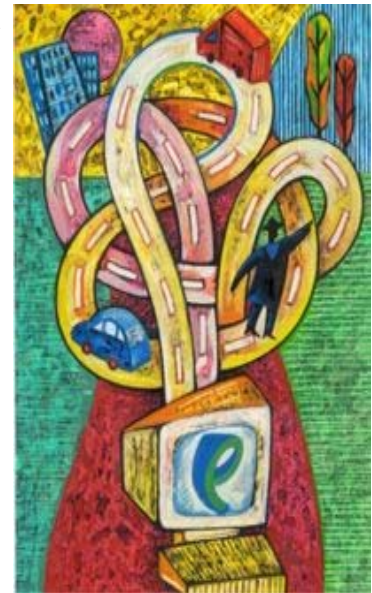
The Chamber recently conducted a survey to identify your technology needs. Most respondents, 52%, were small businesses/organizations, as most of our members are.

Overall, we found that 85% of you have websites, which is good. Those that don't have one gave these reasons: 29% are unsure of benefits, 18% cited cost, 6% had one that didn't work properly, 6% fear the unknown and 59% have other reasons.

Of these websites, 81% are used as an online information piece, 61% are used as a communication tool for newsletters, etc., 45% are used to generate contacts, 22% are used for online sales and 39% are used in other ways as well.

A minority, 23% of respondents, feel that a lack of technology is hindering their business/organization. The Chamber plans to help out here with our new training programs. More on this to come.

As for your investment in technology, 78% say it's increasing, 21% say it's stable and only 1% say it's decreasing.



In the last 12 months, our following technology offerings have been utilized: Online Perspectives Newsletter and Member News, 80%; Chamber website, 78%; Members Only section on The Chamber's website, 39%; technology training series, 23%; Business Resource Center, 9%; One Stop Business License and Permitting Center, 7%; and technology and small business consulting, 5%.

Most of you, 92%, wisely have virus scans and prevention tools in place.

Topics that most interest you in regard to future training programs are: Office on the Go (handheld, wireless devices), 46%; Microsoft Office, 40%; Protecting your Business/Organization (viruses, spam, wireless, backups), 40%; Paperless Office (optical scanning, filing), 38%; Basics of Web Marketing, 37%; Website Basics, 34%; Quickbooks, 29%; and

Small Business Basic Computer/Network Needs, 18%.

Other program topics and support ideas suggested by members include fundraising, producing an effective newsletter, holding weekend classes, advice on phone systems and Chamber member buying power for computer systems and equipment.

Again, stay tuned for information on our new training programs. Using this survey information, we'll design them to best fit your needs.

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### **Transportation Task Force Driving to Make an Impact**

Led by **Norman Crow** of D. T & Freight Company, Inc. and **Brock Corder** of The Builders Group, The Chamber's Transportation Task Force is hard at work to push Chamber-adopted transportation and infrastructure objectives and to build effective working partnerships among the private and public sectors at all levels of government to meet regional transportation needs.



Among The Chamber's adopted public affairs priorities for 2007 is the active involvement of the transportation task force to more aggressively advocate essential highway and bridge projects in the Tuscaloosa County/West Alabama region and to pursue, in cooperation with local governing bodies, more effective partnerships with the Alabama Department of Transportation to achieve transportation objectives.

Over the past months, the task force has held meetings with key public sector leaders at the local and state levels as well as assisted business-based task force members with understanding the processes and systems involved in transportation planning and implementation.

The task force meets monthly on each 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday at 7:30 AM at The Chamber. If you would like to get involved, please attend or contact The Chamber at 758.7588 for more information.

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### **Public Affairs Council Plays Essential Role Representing Business Interests**

The Chamber's Public Affairs Council, led by **Bruce Henderson**, Chairman, of Phelps, Jenkins, Gibson & Fowler, and **Sammy Watson**, Vice Chairman, of the DCH Health System, plays a key role in carrying

out the advocacy role of The Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama. With a broad, diverse agenda, the Public Affairs Council is at the heart of The Chamber's mission.

While there are multiple policy issues and governmental interests on The Chamber's agenda, the adopted 2007 priorities for the Public Affairs Council have included five initiatives. These are:

- An active transportation and infrastructure task force, aggressively supporting and advocating the completion of current highway and bridge projects, including Highways 43 North, 69 South, 82 West, and I-59/20; and aggressively encouraging funding and timely expansion of Buttermilk Road and McWrights Ferry Road, and the development of a North-South corridor via West Alabama.



- Establishment and implementation of a special task force to assess "business friendly" environment of all local governments for conducting business with and through local governments; and develop recommendations to enhance, improve and/or streamline permitting, planning and other essential governmental processes for business development purposes.
- Active leadership and management of tax, license and fiscal policy issues on behalf of the business community and members of The Chamber, including: maintaining active task force to monitor, communicate and manage tax and fiscal policy issues: and review of policies and incentives related to existing industries and firms, and retail and commercial development.



- Maintain regular meetings and communications with elected officials at all levels to build and sustain productive relationships and to sustain advocacy on behalf of business. Among

identified initiatives for 2007 include: Chamber In Sessions programs; Montgomery and Washington based programming; and other appropriate programs to communicate with and involve members of The Chamber.

- Aggressively pursue passage of legislation giving the citizens of Tuscaloosa the right to vote on legalization of Sunday sales of alcohol within the City of Tuscaloosa.

2007 has been an active year for The Chamber's Public Affairs Council, with still much to accomplish on the agenda. Projects on the schedule for coming months are a Chamber/Rotary program featuring Congressman Artur Davis on August 7<sup>th</sup>; the annual "State of the Community" breakfast on September 20<sup>th</sup> ; and the Washington Fly In on September 25<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> . The Public Affairs Council meets monthly at The Chamber on each 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday at 7:30 AM.

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### **All Pro has New Facility and Amazing Success Story**

Darrell Watkins opened All Pro pressure washing and steam cleaning service in 1995 after leaving a job at BF Goodrich. He'd always wanted to work for himself and this was an easy, inexpensive business to start. He borrowed \$10,000 for the equipment and began working out of a small metal building behind Northport City Hall. He never imagined then that, nine years later, All Pro would become a multi-million dollar corporation.



One fateful day he was approached by someone from Johnson Controls, a Mercedes-Benz supplier, about cleaning auto parts, since many new parts come coated with grease to prevent damage. Watkins welcomed the opportunity, even though it meant a lot of work for him and his staff of 4. Watkins then realized he should concentrate on this industrial work and he built on this. All Pro is now a major provider of warehousing, packaging, shipping and parts cleaning services for Alabama's growing automotive industry. Offering all these services makes the business unique and in demand.

Darrell and his wife Tracy, who manages the books, recently celebrated the completion of All Pro's new headquarters in Airport Industrial Park with an open house to showcase the \$5 million, 162,000 square foot

facility that houses the offices, main warehouse and transportation center for the company's 14 trucks. This facility is prepared for growth and should serve Watkins for a long time. The new address is 6801 5<sup>th</sup> St in Northport.

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### **Habitat for Humanity Grants Another Wish**



Omega Allen left crime-ridden Camden, NJ and moved to Tuscaloosa to make a better life for herself and her five daughters. Tuscaloosa has certainly proved to be more peaceful but Allen and her daughters still had a hard time. They kept moving because rent kept going up.

The girls wished for a place of their own and, on June 14, they finally got one. That morning, a stretch limousine, donated by Crown Limousine Service, arrived at their apartment in Northport to take them to their new four bedroom, two bath house on Colonial Dr in Northeast Tuscaloosa. Allen initially told the girls that the limousine was for a special girls' day out. The girls were then totally surprised to learn that they had been selected for a Habitat for Humanity home; Allen had kept that a secret since being notified just before Christmas in 2004.



It took a moment to set in then the girls started to cry and claim their rooms. Allen said that the home, sponsored by The Coalbed Methane Association of Alabama, is a blessing and she thanks God for Habitat. Susan Bishop of Habitat for Humanity said this was probably the most emotional dedication ceremony in her memory. For more information on Habitat for Humanity, please contact Susan at 349.5343 ext. 6.

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### Cuppy's Coffee & More of Northriver Celebrates Opening

Cuppy's Coffee & More drive-thru is now open at 1825 New Watermelon Road, across from Publix at the Shoppes of Lake Tuscaloosa.

A grand opening celebration with ribbon cutting was held on the afternoon of June 22nd. The plush mascot, "Cuppy," was on hand to greet the kids and there were plenty of smoothie samples to go around. Strawberry-Banana Extreme was a favorite among the kids and Cuppy's Colada, with minced pieces of coconut, was a real hit among adults. You have to try one!

Cuppy's Coffee & More offers customers a wide range of gourmet specialty drinks including the 100% real crushed fruit smoothies. Owner Kristy Hearing points out that "We don't just sell coffee; our smoothie business in the afternoon is incredible since it's so hot."



Cuppy's of Northriver is open Monday-Friday, 6 AM to 7 PM. For more information, please contact Kristy Hearing at 345.6510 or visit [www.cuppys.com](http://www.cuppys.com).

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### Regions Opens New Branch on Lurleen Wallace



The new Regions Bank on Lurleen Wallace Blvd in Northport opened about 3 weeks ago and a ribbon cutting was held on the morning of June 27. James Barnett, Regions Vice President of Business Development,

addressed the crowd and dedicated the facility to the people of Northport for their support over the years. He then recognized staff and commended their loyalty.

Regions bought the land from the City of Northport in 2006. Barnett says they were thrilled to get the "historic" spot, the former location of the old Northport City Hall, which later became a police and fire station, both of which have since relocated.

Construction of the 5,000 square foot, one-story structure on Lurleen Wallace Blvd began in December. The branch is almost twice as big as the previous location just across the street, which Regions occupied for 39 years. The new branch bank has 3 drive-thru lanes, entrances and exits on 3 streets and a conference room available for public use. "We needed to have bigger and better facilities here in Northport," Barnett said.

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### **Plastic Surgery of Tuscaloosa Breaks Ground on New Location**



Plastic Surgery of Tuscaloosa, Dr. Ross Bunch's office, held an official groundbreaking ceremony on the morning of July 10 for their new location in The Falls office park, behind Cuppy's of Northriver. Address is 1847 Commons North Loop in Tuscaloosa.

Manager Pamela Harvey said the building should be finished early next summer and the practice would then relocate from its present location in the medical tower at DCH. Plastic Surgery of Tuscaloosa specializes in corrective and

reconstructive cosmetic surgery.

For more information, please contact Pamela at 349.0049.

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### **Mercedes Holds 10th Anniversary Reception**

The first M-Class rolled off the production line at Mercedes-Benz U.S. International (MBUSI) in Tuscaloosa County in February 1997. The production launch of the vehicle marked the start of a remarkable success story not only for the Mercedes-Benz brand but also for the entire automotive industry in the Southern United States. In addition to the M-Class, today the R-Class and GL-Class are now built at MBUSI.



This milestone has been celebrated among team members there since February and a reception to commemorate the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Production at Mercedes-Benz U.S. International, Inc. was held on the evening of July 11 at the Mercedes-Benz Visitor Center. Many special guests were in attendance, including Gov. Bob Riley and Dr. Dieter Zetsche, COB of Daimler-Chrysler AG. Congratulations, Mercedes!

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### **Thanks, Sam's Club of Tuscaloosa**

**Sam's Club of Tuscaloosa** manager Jeff Young & marketing guru Sherry Parsons made a considerable monetary contribution to the remodeling process on behalf of the business. They also headed up the effort to involve the Tuscaloosa and Northport Wal Mart stores. This funding really helped to make the redo a reality. Your efforts are appreciated more than you know!

Sam's Club is one the nation's largest membership warehouse clubs offering exceptional values on high quality merchandise and services for business owners and consumers. Services include health insurance, web

site development and maintenance, cost effective merchant credit card processing solutions and auto and travel programs among others. Most locations feature Pharmacy, Tire and Battery, Photo, Bakery, Optical, Café and Floral departments.

Becoming a member at Sam's Club has never been easier. Visit them at 1401 Skyland Blvd. East or join online. There are three types of memberships: Advantage, Business, and Sam's Club Plus. To learn more, log onto [www.samsclub.com](http://www.samsclub.com).

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## **How to Create a Strong Business Letter**



Are you bogged down by communication clutter? Studies have found that the average executive receives more than 40 voice mail messages a day, 60 e-mail messages, 25 faxes and a couple dozen "While You Were Out" slips. One sales manager said she receives more than 150 e-mails each day.

While we live in a fast-spreading electronic environment, written messages remain a large part of communication. Well-written messages still help you make your point, build your case, and sell your product or service.

Before you rate your own writing against the below checklist, remember this "golden rule" of communication: Know your audience. The more you understand your readers, the better - their backgrounds, needs, interests, abilities, and expectations.

Here are some guidelines to help create a message that spells success:

1. Map out your thinking. It's good to brainstorm, particularly if you are suffering from writer's block. You must decide what your major points are, prepare an outline, and develop a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end.
2. Get your reader's attention. Start out your message by testing your audience with an inviting benefit, a startling statistic, or a strong injunction. Engage them by asking eye-opening questions or to think about possible choices and solutions. Keep readers involved by continuing to deal directly with their concerns.
3. Write simply. The easiest way to apply this principle is to use a conversational style: Write like you talk. Pick short, familiar words. Don't be afraid to use a lot of contractions. And choose strong nouns and verbs. In addition, use personal pronouns throughout your message, especially

"you." In business and sales writing, short words, sentences and paragraphs are preferred because they take less time to read.

4. Be specific. Be concise. Don't be vague about the features and benefits of what you're selling. For instance, tell people exactly when they can expect to hear from you, not some time "in the near future". Describe products and services in concrete terms. In short, create a clear mental picture for the reader.

5. Accentuate the positive. Avoid using negative language and positioning. Play up the pluses of what you're communicating, rather than the shortcomings of your rivals.

6. Edit your work. You edit to shorten, sharpen, and simplify. After you edit your own work, perhaps have a colleague look over your work as well. Finally, conduct a thorough proofreading.

7. Save the best for last. Studies have found that people often recall the first thing they read and the last thing they read. So your last sentence (or two) should contain a powerful selling point or an offer the reader won't want to refuse.

If you have any questions or would like advice on other workplace issues, visit the Dale Carnegie web site at [www.birmingham.dalecarnegie.com](http://www.birmingham.dalecarnegie.com) or email [Nancy\\_Covert@dalecarnegie.com](mailto:Nancy_Covert@dalecarnegie.com).

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### **Don't Forget to Share & Pass Us On to your Colleagues**

Remember that all employees and associates of Chamber-member firms are members, too. So, forward this issue of Perspectives on to all team members in your business/organization. Thanks!

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