

Walking the Talk

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*'The chief business of
the American people is
business.'*
Calvin Coolidge, Jr. (1872 - 1933)

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE DOUGLAS COUNTY CHAMBER WITH GOVERNMENT

A Chamber of Commerce is an integral part of any community, but it's not part of City or County government. It is an independent, non-profit organization - a 501(c)(6) business league - governed by its own Board of Directors. I recently sat down with Douglas County Chamber representatives to learn more about the mission and purpose of this vital organization.

The DC Chamber's mission is to support, promote, and attract business for the advancement of Douglas County. It is an organization composed mainly of business owners, managers, and entrepreneurs who want to network, learn and grow their business. Membership is voluntary.

Douglas County government is a member and supports the Chamber through collected hotel/motel taxes because we feel that this is the best place to directly interact with the local and regional business community. The Chamber hosts monthly networking events - the Georgia Power Business4Breakfast at 8 a.m. on the 2nd Thursday of each month, and the Comcast Business After Hours at 5 p.m. on the 4th Thursday of each month. The monthly GreyStone Power Luncheon is held at 12 noon on the 3rd Tuesday and features a guest speaker on hot topics in the business community. Each of these events provide opportunities for businesses and us to interact with each other, build contacts, and promote themselves.

The Douglas County Chamber works with the Douglas County Economic Development Authority to help businesses grow and thrive. In partnership with the Development Authority, the Douglas County School System, West Georgia Technical College and others, they also work to ensure that there is a current and viable workforce as well as preparing for a future workforce. For those looking for jobs, the Chamber hosts www.DouglasJobs.com, a listing of employment opportunities with Chamber members.

There are multiple programs facilitated by the Chamber that specifically cater to small businesses. The Small Business Development Center of the University of West Georgia provides free business counseling to Chamber members, and the Chamber itself presents monthly professional training seminars on topics ranging from social media to finance and marketing. Chamber Connections is a group that directly focuses on members connecting with each other to generate leads and enhance their business. In 2016, the Chamber kicked off its inaugural Small Business Sustainability Program which focuses on helping businesses create an action plan to grow their business in our community for many years to come.

In addition to services to Chamber members, it also serves as the New Resident Welcome Center which is funded in part by the hotel/motel tax, and is quite often the first stop for visitors or newcomers entering our community. The Welcome Center provides services including complimentary community guides and maps as well as referrals for local service providers such as doctors or real estate agents.

The Chamber also operates the Douglas County Chamber Foundation - a 501(c)(3) non-profit foundation that houses all of their leadership development programming. Leadership Douglas is a program for adults who are interested in developing their leadership skills and learning more about the community, while Youth Leadership Douglas focuses on guiding high school students through a similar program. The Foundation also provides professional development and networking opportunities for 21 - 40 year olds through the Young Professionals Connection, as well as scholarship programs for all ages.

Cost of Chamber Membership is based on type of business and number of employees. Approximately 50% of the Chamber budget comes from memberships, and the remaining amount comes from fund-raising events such as the annual Chamber Golf Classic, Winter Ball Awards Banquet, Chicks Night Out Women's Expo, and Chamber raffle.

So, while the Chamber is not part of government, it provides services that help build our community. It gives County government the opportunity to hear from our local businesses so that we can better meet their needs and make it easier for them to do business with us. None of us can successfully operate within a bubble. Working together creates an environment in which businesses can prosper, and that makes for a vibrant local economy.

Walking the Talk with You,

Romona

