

For small businesses, Chamber a big deal

A summary of an article by KEITH BURNS
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Nationally, small businesses represent 99.7 percent of all employer firms and have generated 60 to 80 percent of the net new jobs annually over the last decade. They employ half of all private sector employees and pay 45 percent of total U.S. private payroll. However, more than 85 percent of the Chamber's members are small businesses -- businesses that employ fewer than 50 employees.

Clearly, the Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce and the Durham community are dependent upon the hard work and success of small businesses. The organization celebrated small businesses during Small Business Month in May.

While the small business owners are welcome in all the programs and committees of the Durham Chamber, the Chamber created the Small Business Council to serve, represent and promote the Chamber's small business members and to enhance the economic health of Durham's small business community.

The Small Business Council accomplishes its mission through a variety of programs, including the Lunch & Learn Series, Cardinal State Bank Breakfast Seminar Series, Business Roundtables, Small Business Administration Days, MarketPlace Business Expo, Business Before and After Hours, and the annual Small Business Excellence Awards program.

The Chamber partners with the **Small Business Center at Durham Technical Community College** and lead sponsor Cardinal State Bank to present The Cardinal State Bank Breakfast Seminar Series. The series generally includes four seminars each year, each lasting around two hours. The 2006 Breakfast Seminar series includes programs on selling or acquiring a business, turbo-charging sales success, and how to market effectively and efficiently.

The Chamber also teams with the **Small Business Center at Durham Technical Community College** to host "SBA Days." On SBA Days, Ivan Hankins, U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) marketing and outreach specialist, meets one-on-one with small-business owners and those considering becoming a small-business owner to discuss SBA loans and services.

MarketPlace Business Expo brings small businesses the chance to showcase their products and services to hundreds of decision makers. The marketing and sales, staff eager to create new opportunities for their companies, create a fun and productive atmosphere. This year's June 22 Marketplace will be held at the historic and popular Brightleaf Square.

Business Before/After Hours is networking pure and simple. On a regular basis a Chamber member will volunteer to open the doors of his or her business for a morning or evening of networking -- no long program, just light refreshments and networking. These events allow chamber members to meet in a relaxed environment to build relationships and make new contacts. These events also give the Chamber members who host an event the opportunity to promote their location, products and services.

The events described above focus on providing educational and marketing opportunities designed to help small businesses grow. The Chamber also stops once a year to recognize and celebrate the success of small businesses in the community. In March or April each year, the Chamber solicits nominations for small businesses and a nonprofit that should be recognized for its accomplishments. The presentation ceremony for the Small Business Excellence Awards program has proven to be one of the Chamber's most successful events, recognizing and celebrating the sound business management, hard work, innovation, financial success and community involvement of these businesses.

Through all these programs and many others, the Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce strives to give its members an edge in a competitive environment. The Chamber realizes the contributions its members make, and Chamber staff constantly work to enhance program services and offerings.