



Official News Release
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For 2008-2009

Chamber of Commerce Sets New Priorities

Members of the Effingham Chamber's Board of Directors attended a two and a half-day Board Retreat at Sapelo Island recently to map out strategies for the organization's 2008-2009 fiscal year, Chamber President-elect, Michael Lee (Citizens Bank of Effingham) announced.

"The Chamber has had tremendous growth this past year and we have implemented several new programs to help growing businesses and promote Effingham County," Lee said.

"Our focus in the coming year will be to become more visible throughout the community, communicate more effectively with our members and promote Effingham County to people outside our community," he added.

"At the retreat we took a close look at where we are now and where we need to be in the years ahead. We will be focusing on growing the local economy, helping existing businesses, serving our members and assuring that we continue the quality of life and community values that we enjoy today," Lee said.

The 500 + member organization operates on a fiscal year beginning on July 1 and is now preparing its new Action Plan for 2008 - 2009. The Chamber will be reorganized into four divisions: Business Development, Community Development, Governmental Affairs, and Membership / Communications. Each division will be headed by a Chamber Board Member who will serve as a board liaison with the committees assigned to it.

In the area of Business Development, Chamber leaders will continue their initiative to foster Effingham's entrepreneurial environment and work closely with officials of the Industrial Development Authority to provide additional services to our existing business and industrial communities. With the establishment of a Small Business Council, the Chamber is now offering one-stop services and programs for entrepreneurs and business start-ups. Included in this effort will be the creation of a regional Business Development Center, and establishment of regional Roundtable groups where decision makers can learn from their peers, share ideas and solve mutual business problems. These programs will begin late this summer. The Chamber has already launched its "Small Business Success Series" – a three-part seminar program covering timely business topics. In addition, local Chamber officials

say they will organize a Small Business Summit this fall to showcase local businesses, feature a job fair, and regional forum for Small Business owners.

In 2007, the Chamber began work on its "Effingham Gateways" program to enhance the county's curb appeal and overall image along major thoroughfares and entrances to and from the county. First on the agenda, is an effort to implement a strategic beautification plan for GA Highway 21 from the Chatham County line north to Lisa St. in Rincon. The Chamber has started the initiative by entering an agreement with EMC Engineering to determine specifications, construction and long-term maintenance costs.

Community Development also continues to be a major priority for the Chamber. In August, the Chamber will hold its annual Effingham Community Retreat, an event that brings elected officials, civic and business leaders together to discuss issues facing our community. "In this way, we are serving as a community consensus builder bringing different groups together to address common issues and priorities," Lee said. The Chamber will also hold its Leadership Effingham program for the 11th consecutive year and encourage graduates to serve on local boards, volunteer and community groups.

Governmental Affairs will also be on the Chamber's agenda. "We are the voice of business locally," Lee said. "Each year the Chamber establishes a legislative agenda on the local and state level. This year we want to enhance our relationships with the cities, county and our State legislators to benefit the entire community. We will hold our traditional Eggs & Issues Breakfast, and also a Legislative Appreciation event. Effingham Day at the Capitol will also be reexamined and implemented in some fashion.

In the area of Membership / Communications, the Chamber has set membership retention as its major priority. It will also bolster the Chamber's branding and establish a planned communications program that conveys membership value, organizational accomplishments, and involvement opportunities for our members. "We have been doing a good job for our members, but we need to do a better job of communicating our accomplishments and marketing our community to others," Lee said. A special communications task force will be organized to look at the organization's complete communications and marketing strategy.

Twelve current and in-coming members of the Chamber's Board of Directors participated in the retreat. "I want to thank our Board members and Chamber Officers for taking two and a half days out of their busy schedules for the benefit of our Chamber and community. Each member paid his or her own way and sacrificed time away from their families to help us plan for the future," Lee said.

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