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THE ROAD THAT LIES AHEAD

As I sit in my near-empty office on a Saturday morning, I can't help but reminisce. It is hard to believe that I have been with the Chamber for seven years. In some ways, it seems like I have been here all my life, but in other ways like I just walked through the door. I remember feeling overwhelmed at the challenges that lay ahead and hoping and praying I didn't let the board or our members down. It was apparent changes needed to occur for our businesses and our communities to thrive. I wasn't sure what to do first, but I knew why I was doing it: For my friends, my neighbors and my community. If the Chamber wanted to succeed, we had to strike out on new paths rather than travel the worn paths of yesterday. There were many roads to prosperity, but one had to be taken. Inaction leads you nowhere. The Chamber has taken action, and I believe Cullman County is better for it. The Cullman area is viewed as one of the most progressive and successful regions in our state, and our Chamber has been rated as one of the top four in the nation. This is because of you.

The road to success hasn't always been smooth, but it has been an adventure —

one I was fortunate to be a part of. You are what made me jump out of bed every morning. You have been my "why." I believe the future of this Chamber and our communities is brighter than it's ever been. "How lucky I am to have had something that makes saying goodbye so hard." Thank you for allowing me to serve as your president. I look forward to continued relationships and for the road that lies ahead.



“ SOMEONE IS SITTING IN THE SHADE TODAY BECAUSE SOMEONE PLANTED A TREE A LONG TIME AGO. -WARREN BUFFETT ”

"Someone is sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago." -WARREN BUFFETT



ENTREPRENEURSHIP & EDUCATION

Hanceville snags Student of the Year sweep at annual State of Education



Student of the Year Alex Campbell and Career Technical Student of the Year Gracie Hudspeth

The State of Education was held on April 26 at the Cullman Civic Center as part of the Chamber's third annual Chick-fil-A State of Our Communities. The breakfast event was sponsored by Wallace State Community College and featured the announcement of the 2018-19 Cullman Area Student of the Year and Career Technical Student of the Year.

Hanceville High School swept both awards, with Alex Campbell winning Student of the Year and Gracie Hudspeth — who also attends the Cullman Area Technology Academy (CATA) — being named the Career Technical Student of the Year. Each winner was presented with a scholarship from the Wallace State Future Foundation. Also nominated for Student of the Year were Matthew Blair, Cold Springs; Riley Carroll, Fairview; Rachel Hall, Vinemont; Lili Harris, Holly Pond; James McWhorter, Good Hope; Emma Pierce, St. Bernard; Mary Kate Stan-

ford, Cullman; and Lily Whitesell, West Point. KC Lenz, of West Point and CATA, rounded out the nominees for Career Technical Student of the Year.

The State of Education opened with updates from Cullman City Schools Superintendent Dr. Susan Patterson and Cullman County Schools Superintendent Dr. Shane Barnette. Both superintendents were given the opportunity to recognize their systems' Teachers of the Year. Cullman City Schools winners were West Elementary's Salena Mayberry (Primary) and Cullman High's John Drake (Secondary). Cullman County Schools winners were Holly Pond Middle's Beth Metcalfe (Primary) and Vinemont High's Shannon Bridges (Secondary). Cullman Electric Cooperative and Cullman-Jefferson Gas were State of Education Corporate Sponsors, and Knight-Free Insurance Agency served as Awards Sponsor.



Cullman County Schools Primary Teacher of the Year - Beth Metcalfe, Holly Pond Middle



Cullman City Schools Primary Teacher of the Year - Salena Mayberry, West Elementary



Cullman County Schools Secondary Teacher of the Year - Shannon Bridges, Vinemont High



Cullman City Schools Secondary Teacher of the Year - John Drake, Cullman High



Student of the Year nominees



Career Technical Student of the Year nominees



STRIKES & GUTTERS

Cullman young professionals: be sure to save the date for the EPIC's newest event, "EPIC Strikes & Gutters." This event will be held on Thursday, July 18th at the newly renovated Cullman Bowling Center. (5:30PM - 9:00PM)

As you have probably already guessed, we will be bowling that night (whether good or bad.) There will be several lanes set aside for EPIC attendees. After you register, just jump on a lane and try to bowl your highest score possible. At the end of the night, we will have a championship round for ladies and guys. Winners will receive prizes and the coveted EPIC Strikes & Gutters Inaugural Champions Trophy. EPIC Strikes & Gutters will be free to EPIC Members and \$25 for non-members. This will include food and soft

drinks from Valley Tavern and Grille, as well as some great drink specials. Your bowling shoes and lane rental are also included. This is a great way to experience everything the new and improved Cullman Bowling Center has to offer. EPIC is Cullman's premier young professionals group. If you're in Cullman and between the ages of 21-39, EPIC is a great way to network, spread the word about your business, meet new people or just have fun.

Big thanks to our Presenting Sponsor, Drinkard Development and to our quarterly event sponsor, Homtex, Inc. For more info about EPIC, please contact us at info@cullmanchamber.org or call 256-734-0454.



ENTREPRENEURSHIP & EDUCATION

Entrepreneurial high schoolers sought for Year 3 of YEA! program

Youth Leadership Cullman Co. graduates 2018-19 class



The Chamber's Youth Leadership Cullman County program is officially finished with its teens — in more ways than one! The 2018-19 class celebrated its graduation on May 7 at Stone Bridge Farms, marking the successful end of the program's 19th year.

This year's Presenting Sponsor was R.E. Garrison Trucking, with River Valley Ingredients serving as Graduation Sponsor. Chamber Chair T.J. Franey (Cullman County Schools), Youth Leadership Co-Chairs Wes Moore (City of Cullman), Micah Rice (Cold Springs K-8) and Breana Posey (Chickfil-A of Cullman), and Chamber Director of Entrepreneurship & Education Wesley Smith all provided remarks to the 18 graduates and their family members. Former Co-Chair Natalie Godwin (Wallace State Community College) was also recognized for her contributions to this year's class. Kyle Willoughby, the Vice Chair of

Entrepreneurship & Education on the Chamber's Executive Board of Directors, led the invocation and Pledge of Allegiance.

Per tradition, each high school junior was given the opportunity to take the podium and share their experiences — often in entertaining fashion — from each session throughout the nine-month program: Experiencing Leadership Day, Education & Etiquette Day, Tourism & Community Day, Quality of Life Day, Public Safety Day, Local Government Day, Business & Industry Day, Agriculture Day, and State Government Day. The evening culminated with the presentation of the graduates' plaques, which were donated by Video & Awards Sponsor, The Awards Palace.

On behalf of the 2018-19 Youth Leadership class listed below, thank you to all the sponsors, businesses and individuals that made this year possible!

2018-19 YOUTH LEADERSHIP GRADUATES

ALYSSA JACKSON
- Cold Springs -

EMI HARBISON
- Cold Springs -

ALEXANDRIA BARKER
- Cullman -

KINSLEE BORDEN
- Cullman -

LAUREN GRACE EVANS
- Cullman -

NIC BRYANT
- Fairview -

SARAH LANEY
- Fairview -

CADY MARTIN
- Good Hope -

EMILY TAYLOR
- Good Hope -

WILL AKIN
- Hanceville -

KELLY PICKETT
- Hanceville -

COOPER JONES
- Holly Pond -

ELIZABETH MILLER
- Holly Pond -

ZACK REYNOLDS
- Holly Pond -

ARIA MCMILLAN
- St. Bernard -

MACY WHALEY
- St. Bernard -

EMILY DYER
- St. Bernard -

CARSON PARTAIN
- West Point -

The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce is extremely committed to helping local students however possible. We're also wholly committed to helping Cullman County citizens interested in entrepreneurship realize their dreams of becoming business owners. That's why it's been an easy decision to combine the two — partnering with the national Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!) since 2017.

As hard as it is to believe, it's already time to start preparing for Year 3.

With the Wallace State Innovation Center as Presenting Sponsor and 412 Public House and Drinkard Development as Corporate Sponsors, the second year of YEA! was a big success and a lot of fun. Several students received actual seed money to help fund their businesses at the second YEA! Investor Panel in late March. This event, sponsored by Lazarus LLC, is very similar to the hit show Shark Tank. The Investor Panel was made up of the following judges and their sponsoring businesses: Eddie Canaday, Lazarus, LLC; Blinda Walker, River Valley Ingredients; Stephen Skinner, In-N-Out Self Storage; Gary Nunn, Premier Bank of the South; Stephen McRea, First Community Bank of Cullman; Tom Dekle, Milo's Hamburgers; Lance Self, Zero RPM; Suzanne Harbin, Wallace State Future Foundation; and Leah Bolin, Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce.

The big winners at the end of the evening were Sara Owens and Lona Shelby of TeenLink. The idea behind their non-profit business is to provide a series of classes aimed at helping fellow students cope with various issues including depression, bullying, anger management, etc. As YEA! Investor Panel winners, Sara and Lona received investment dollars and assistance with their business. Additionally, the Good Hope duo earned a recent trip to Rochester, New York to compete for the Saunders Scholarship at the YEA! national semifinals.

If you haven't heard about YEA! yet, here's a brief overview of the program. YEA! guides students through the process of starting and running a legitimate business or social movement over the course of a complete academic

year. Since 2004, YEA! has graduated more than 4,000 students who have started over 3,000 businesses and social movements. These young adults start as students and graduate as CEOs!

Over the course of the academic year, students in the YEA! program:

- Brainstorm business ideas
- Write business plans
- Interact with business professionals
- Pitch their business plans to potential investors (think Shark Tank meets The Apprentice meets American Idol)
- Legally register their businesses
- Participate in a YEA! Trade Show
- Actually launch their own businesses or social movements

The YEA! program is open to all high school students in the Cullman area. Sessions are once a month for 10 months, similar to the Chamber's longstanding Youth Leadership Cullman County program. Students meet at the Chamber in the morning and spend the day learning the tools to become successful entrepreneurs!

There are 22 spots to fill for the 2019-20 YEA! class, and we'd ideally like to have two students from each area school. We ask that students be in grades 9-12 and have access to reliable transportation and a laptop.

If you know a student in the Cullman area that is passionate about entrepreneurship or product innovation, please encourage them to apply. For more information on the application process or YEA! program in general, contact Wesley Smith, the Chamber's Director of Entrepreneurship & Education, at wsmith@cullmanchamber.org or 256-734-0454.





EXISTING BUSINESS

Another awesome summer of 2nd Fridays set to start on June 14th



Every Friday is a good Friday after a long week in the office. But the second Fridays of summer in the Cullman area?

Now those are pretty epic.

The return of 2nd Fridays is nearly upon us at long last, with the streets, shops and restaurants of Downtown Cullman ready to welcome locals and visitors alike for the first of four 2019 events on June 14th. Sponsored by Cullman Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram and presented by the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center and Cullman Parks, Recreation, & Sports Tourism, 2nd Fridays will run through September and once again feature a wealth of live music, kids activities, one of the state's biggest and best classic car cruise-ins and much, much more.

And if this year's 2nd Fridays seems bigger than usual, it's because it is. The event is officially expanding this summer, with the Cullman Downtown Merchants Association sponsoring the area across Hwy 278 and providing plenty of family-fun entertainment and activities.

Among the highlights of June's much-anticipated kickoff:

- Blind the Sky on the Cullman Dairy Queen Grill & Chill Restaurant Stage
- Johnathan East on the Shirley Quattlebaum State Farm Insurance Stage
- Alex Swindle on the Listerhill Credit Union Stage
- Youth Night in Depot Park, presented by EvaBank and sponsored by Domino's
- Year 3 of the James R. Smith Artist Alley, & Chamber member pop-up shops lining 1st Street NE
- The wildly popular Branham Accessories - Line-X antique and classic car Cruise-In
- Farm Y'all, sponsored by the Cullman County Industrial Development Authority and spotlighted by a specially opened Festhalle Farmers Market

- The R.E. Garrison Trucking Show Lot, showcasing watercrafts from various chamber members
- The Buffalo Wild Wings Kids Zone
- Food demonstrations and samples, sponsored by River Valley Ingredients
- The Urban Grace Watermelon Seed Spittin' Competition
- More food trucks and tents than ever
- Extended retail and dining hours at participating Cullman Warehouse District and downtown stores
- And much, much more!

The party isn't reserved just for June 14th, either. Go ahead and mark your calendars now to also join us on July 12th, August 9th and September 13th for another three months of wholesome 2nd Fridays fun.

Admission is completely free, but don't forget your pocketbooks to support area eateries, merchants, vendors, artists and farmers! Attendees are highly encouraged to bring their own chairs as well.

The Show Lot, located across from the Stiefelmeyer Building on 1st Avenue SE near Hwy 278, will open up to various recreational displays throughout the summer. Other 2nd Fridays Farm Ya'll activities planned for 2019 are a Cake Walk, Bale Tossin' Contest and Mechanical Bull Ridin'. Other Depot Park activities are Ladies Night (July), Dog Day in Depot Bark (featuring the Furry 5K Race & 1-Mile Fun Run) (August) and the Fling It Like You Mean It Cornhole Tournament (September).

For updates each month, be sure to check out the event Facebook page: 2nd Fridays Cullman. For more information or to apply as a live musician, artist, pop-up shop or food vendor, visit cullmanchamber.org/2ndFridays or contact the Chamber at 256-734-0454 or info@cullmanchamber.org.

Cullman Cabinet & Supply Company hosts 2nd Qtr Industry Tour

The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center hosted its 2nd Quarter Industry Tour at Cullman Cabinet & Supply Company on Wednesday, May 8. The tour was sponsored by HH Technologies, Inc.

Cullman Cabinet opened in October 1947 as a two-man shop and has remained one of the industry's leading innovators ever since. Founder Robert Edge spent much of the early years convincing builders kitchen cabinets could be built off-site rather than as a customary step of

in-house construction. Those efforts paid off in 1954, when Cullman Cabinet became the first producer of post-formed laminated countertops in the Southeast.

The company began supplying other cabinet shops with doors in the early 1980s and, in 1985, made the bold decision to stop cabinet production and concentrate solely on supplying cabinet doors and post-formed countertops. Any worries about the decision were quickly cast away when 1986 turned out to be a record year for sales.

Cullman Cabinet is proud to be a "totally green" facility after reworking countertop production lines to use environmentally, water-based adhesives in 2008. The fourth-generation company moved to its current location on Childhaven Road in 1971, incrementally expanding from a modest 90,000 square feet to the approximately 175,000 square feet it occupies today. Cullman Cabinet employs about 135 people, touts two customer service offices and ships within a 350-mile radius in the Southeast, in-

cluding Little Rock, Arkansas, its farthest shipping point.

Thank you immensely to Robert Edge (President), Danny McAfee (Vice President) and Lane Butcher (Plant Manager) for serving as such excellent tour guides, and to Cullman Cabinet for its continued contributions to the vitality of the Cullman area. The Chamber's 3rd Quarter Industry Tour will be Wednesday, Aug. 7 at Webb Wheel Products. Contact the Chamber at 256-734-0454 or info@cullmanchamber.org to reserve your spot.





EXISTING BUSINESS

CONGRATULATIONS

SMALL BUSINESS OF THE MONTH WINNERS



April Small Business of the Month: HANCEVILLE DRUG COMPANY

101 Commercial St. SE April Sponsor: Three Pears
Hanceville, AL 35077
256-352-4110

Year Opened: 1916 | Number of Employees: 8
Chamber Participation: Proud member | Generously donated prizes for Community Forum | Regular attendee at quarterly Business Roundtables in Hanceville
Community Participation: Sponsor local teams, clubs and events including Wallace State Community College and Hanceville public schools | Involved with the increasing number of festivals and events Hanceville now hosts | Satisfy the sweet tooth of community members and visitors alike with 1950s-style soda fountain | Keep citizens healthy with customer-friendly and innovative pharmacy services



May Small Business of the Month: MONOGRAMS PLUS

103 1st Ave. NE, Suite 120 May Sponsor:
Cullman, AL 35055 Freedom Insurance,
256-739-0631 The Gloria Williams Agency

Year Opened: 1999 | Number of Employees: 14
Chamber Participation: Proud member | Fierce competitor with multiple teams at Business After Hours - Game Night at the Goat event | Business Resource Center (BRC) client
Community Participation: Donate or are involved in many community organizations, including Curt's Closet, where they are a drop-off location and host for their backpack drive. This year, they were able to supply 200 backpacks for back to school | Always looking for ways to promote the Cullman area, including partnering with The Link of Cullman County, feeding the homeless and providing Christmas gifts to needy families



BRANHAM ACCESSORIES

June Small Business of the Month: BRANHAM ACCESSORIES - LINE X

101 Arnold Street NW April Sponsor: Chambers Farm
Cullman, AL 35055 & Garden Supply
(256) 775-1719

Year Opened: 2006 | Number of Employees: 9
Chamber Participation: Proud member since 2009 | 2nd Fridays Cruise-In Sponsor & housing study participant
Community Participation: Active member in a number of civic organizations | Recently renovated building and parking lot allows for festival goers to park. They donate all parking proceeds to a local charity. The Branham's provide a number of services, including full tire service, LINE-X coatings, accessories for your vehicle (work or play), and much more! Visit their renovated building for all your vehicle needs!

Deadline approaching for 2019-20 Leadership class nominations



The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center is currently seeking nominations for participants in the 2019-20 Leadership Cullman County class, which will start in September with a team-building retreat. Monthly session topics include education, local government, state government, healthcare, economic development, human services, criminal justice, agriculture and quality of life. Class size is limited to 20 participants. Tuition is \$575, which covers all expenses associated with the program. Deadline to apply is July 31st. To nominate someone (self-nominations are also encouraged), please fill out an application online at cullmanchamber.org/leadershipcullmancounty or call the Chamber at 256-734-0454 for more information. See page 5 for 2018-19 class.



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Chamber releases results of county-wide housing needs assessment

As our community has enjoyed tremendous growth and economic success, our county has understandably struggled to keep up with such a rapid pace. In accordance with the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce's strategic plan, we were tasked with addressing Cullman County's lack of affordable housing, as well as the gap of existing and future middle- and upper-class families.

Through the Chamber's Housing Taskforce, we commissioned the services of an experienced and highly qualified planning group, JQUAD, to assist us in providing our community partners and res-

idents with a comprehensive countywide housing needs assessment. This study was meant to help us understand our area's housing needs and to provide feasible solutions to fulfill them. Our main purpose was to ensure that our businesses be able to retain existing employees and attract additional talent to ensure the Cullman area remains a leader in attracting new business and industry.

The results of the housing needs assessments were unveiled to several community stakeholders and the media over a two-day span in the middle of May. A few notable highlights from the study

concluded that:

- Increased homeownership, utilization of vacant lots and underutilized properties, and decreased vacancy rate of commercial and residential properties are high priorities
- Creating new mixed residential development in areas designated for new housing development and encouraging reinvestment in areas that contain dilapidated housing and vacant lots are essential needs
- Increased development of single-family, updated multi-family, workforce housing and student housing are key priorities for

Cullman County

- Zoning and development regulations should be reviewed to identify ways to encourage the development of mixed-type housing
- Restoring the "basic attributes" that make our communities unique is essential to meeting future housing needs

With the housing assessment complete, the Chamber and Housing Taskforce are proceeding to the next phase, which involves delivering these findings to our community partners, advocating for presented solutions and supporting our partners as they move forward with implementation.

The full report has been published and can be found on the Chamber website at cullmanchamber.org/housing-needs-assessment. For more information, please contact Brittney Hudson, the Chamber's Director of Community Development, at 256-734-0454 or bhudson@cullmanchamber.org.



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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

June Morning Blend shining spotlight on 2nd Fridays

Come join the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center for delicious coffee and great discussion at our monthly Morning Blend, held every third Wednesday from 8:00 to 9:00 a.m. at Rumors Deli near the corner of Main Avenue and U.S. Highway 278. The Chamber staff welcomes members and visitors to attend this free event.

Upcoming speakers/topics include 2ND Fridays (June) sponsored by Camp Meadowbrook - Cullman County Soil & Water, Sheriff Gentry, Cullman County Sheriff's Dept. (July) sponsored by Servpro of Cullman/Blount Counties, Community Arts (August), sponsored by Highland Technical. Coffee and snacks will be provided by Presenting Sponsor Karma's Coffee House. For more information, contact the Chamber at 256-734-0454 or info@cullmanchamber.org.



The Chamber's Morning BLEND

Find out what's happening in the Cullman area

Chamber staff welcomes members and visitors to the meeting room at **Rumors Deli** every month to discuss various topics.

Topic: 2nd Fridays

**JUNE 12
8-9AM**

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TOURISM

Tourism Awards celebrating 'Cullman Stories' for 2019 event

Oh, the stories the Cullman area could tell.

Good thing "Cullman Stories" just so happens to be the theme for the 2019 Cullman Area Tourism Awards, which are slated for June 27 at 8:00 AM. The program will take place at Stone Bridge Farms and include breakfast and the announcement of the winners in the categories listed below.

Business Awards

These awards recognize businesses and events that differentiate themselves by providing exceptional service, anticipating customers' needs and consistently exceeding visitors' expectations.

•Exceptional Festival or Event Award

Recognizes a festival or event that attracts visitors and locals, generates regional and/or

state media attention, and positively promotes the Cullman area.

•Best Attraction Award Recognizes a regional attraction — including museums, performing arts, parks, amusement parks, etc. — that draws visitors and contributes to an outstanding tourism experience.

•Rockin' Retailer

Recognizes a retailer that provides an outstanding shopping experience for visitors.

•Extraordinary Everyday Eatery Recognizes a restaurant offering an outstanding atmosphere and experience for visitors.

Individual Service Awards

These awards recognize hospitality and frontline individuals who consistently deliver warm,



friendly and helpful service, exceed visitors' expectations, anticipate customers' needs, and have received written or verbal feedback about their exceptional service from their colleagues, supervisors or customers.

•White Glove Award Recognizes exceptional service from an individual hotel housekeeping

staff member.

•Silver Spoon Award Recognizes consistent superior service by a restaurant or food service employee.

•Savvy Retail Sales Associate Recognizes excellent customer service from a retail sales associate who has first contact with the public.

•Tourism Professional

of the Year Award Recognizes a person who has made a significant contribution to the tourism industry through more than five years of innovation, inspiration and industry leadership.

The "Cullman Stories" theme is in conjunction with the third-year celebration of the Alabama Bicentennial and will showcase the stories that have helped make the Cullman area such a fantastic tourism destination.

The Cullman Area Tourism Awards are presented by The Community Shop-

per's Guide. The Corporate Sponsor is Freedom Insurance — The Gloria Williams Agency.

Table sponsorships start at \$250 and include reserved seating for eight in a prime location with table signage. Gold, silver and bronze table sponsorships are available.

For more information or to reserve your tickets to the 2019 Cullman Area Tourism Awards, contact 256-734-0454 or info@cullmanchamber.org. Space is limited, and seats will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis.

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United Way of Cullman County

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ADVOCACY

Another year, another successful State of Our Communities

The third annual Chick-fil-A State of Our Communities was held on Friday, April 26 at the Cullman Civic Center, giving area citizens and business members the rare opportunity to learn about education, local government and several other aspects of our community all in one place and day.

The event was presented by the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center's Governmental Affairs Committee and highlighted by three sessions — the State of Education, a community session on weather preparedness and the State of Local Government. There were also breakout areas related to utilities, human services, the Chamber, community partners and services, and the Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!) Trade Show.

Please see Page 2 for a recap of the State of Education session. WBRC FOX6 Meteorologist Matt Daniel was the guest speaker for the community session on weather preparedness, engaging the audience with mobile-based polls and leaving them with a number of helpful tips and resources for when disaster strikes. The presentation was preceded by the replaying of a video produced by the Chamber showing the Cullman area's resiliency following the April 2011 tornadoes. The Cullman Health and Rehab Center served as the session's Premier Sponsor. CPI Technologies, Inc. and Cullman-Jefferson Natural Gas were Corporate Sponsors.

The State of Local Government welcomed a sizeable lunchtime crowd to hear from

a handful of the area's leaders. Cullman County Commission Chairman Kenneth Walker and City of Cullman Mayor Woody Jacobs opened with rousing reports before ceding the floor for comments from City of Hanceville Mayor Kenneth Nail, City of Good Hope Mayor Jerry Bartlett and Town of Colony Mayor Donnis Leath. The session's Premier Sponsor was River Valley Ingredients, while Goodwyn | Mills | Cawood was Corporate Sponsor.

Thank you to all our sponsors, speakers, attendees, vendors, volunteers and everyone who had a hand in this year's Chick-fil-A State of Our Communities!





MEMBER SERVICES

Chamber hopping on SEC train for latest TRC campaign



The SEC is widely known as the greatest conference in all of college football. In case you haven't heard, the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center is considered one of the best in the country, too (see Page 11). That's precisely why we're taking a page out of the SEC's playbook for our upcoming Total Resource Campaign (TRC), playing off a familiar logo and selecting "Support Everything Chamber"

as the theme for the 2019-20 season. Our selfless squad of volunteers will officially kick off this year's membership and sponsorship drive with renewals from July 11-26 before transitioning to open season from August 14-September 27. The TRC was developed to assist members and provide additional services to area business. Offering "at cost" sponsorships provides members with afford-

able marketing options and prime opportunities to engage with the public. Sponsorships are only available to Chamber members. Every business is encouraged to take advantage of the TRC, as well as all Chamber benefits. This year's campaign will be led by Chairman Brian Lacy, of Cullman Electric Cooperative and the Vice Chair of Membership & Marketing on the Chamber's Executive Board of

Directors. TRC Vice Chairs and Volunteers will be announced in a future edition. If interested in becoming a Chamber member or sponsoring a Chamber program or event, please contact Director of Member Services Magan Bartlett at 256-734-0454 or mbartlett@cullmanchamber.org for a list of volunteers.

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2018-19 LEADERSHIP GRADUATES

Philip Clemmons, *JELCO*
Tonya Cupp, *Good Hope Primary School*
Knox Elder, *Cullman Regional*
Jeremy Ferrell, *YELTEK*
Brian Gable, *Servpro of Cullman/Blount Counties*
Kevin Gardner, *Cullman Electric Cooperative*
Cliff Harris, *CH Harris Construction*
Adam Harrison, *Cullman Internal Medicine*
Jimmy Hodges, *Wallace State Community College*
Brittney Hudson, *Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce*
Tammy Lackey, *Listerhill Credit Union*
Garry Marchman, *Cullman County Commission*
Joey Orr, *Cullman City Schools*
Jennifer Parker, *Payroll Services*
Mycah Posey, *Chick-fil-A Cullman*
Megan Smith, *EvaBank*
Ryan Smith, *Wallace State Community College*
Tomeesa Shedd, *Cullman County Soil & Water Conservation District*

GRADUATION SPONSOR:





MEMBER SERVICES

Cullman Chamber earns top-4 finish in national Chamber of Year competition

The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center was recently named one of the top chambers of commerce in the country, placing fourth in its category in the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives' 2019 Chamber of the Year competition. The competition stands alone in nationally recognizing the dual role chambers play in leading businesses and communities. To be honored, chambers must demonstrate organizational excellence and impact key community priorities such as education, advocacy, business development and quality of life.

"This is the first time our chamber has applied for this prestigious award," said Cullman Chamber President & CEO Leah Bolin. "I am so proud of our team. Providing innovative solutions to our local businesses is what we strive for every day. This success would not be possible without the hard work and dedication of our board members, executive leadership, partners, committees and staff who have been instrumental in strengthening our chamber and community."

The Chamber of the Year competition involves a multi-stage process including a detailed operations survey and application. Only select chambers nationwide are asked to compete beyond the operations survey. Chambers were divided into four categories for this year's competition. The Cullman Chamber competed in Category 2.



The application process spans several weeks, with each department submitting detailed information and case studies on programs and initiatives. The purpose of the competition is to bring attention to innovative initiatives and top practices that advance the chambers' mission and work, and to provide deserved recognition to leaders who have distinguished themselves by providing members with exceptional service and results. Projects submitted by the

Cullman Chamber — both in conjunction with its five-year "Converging for Success" strategic plan — were the recently completed Housing Needs Assessment and the wildly successful Business Resource Center (BRC). The primary goals of the Housing Needs Assessment were to provide relevant information assisting local developers in the construction of new housing units and to increase available housing in order to attract new business

and talent.

Geared toward startups and existing business, the BRC — in partnership with the Cullman Chamber and the Alabama Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Network — has been responsible for the creation of 223 jobs, the retention of more than 425 jobs and the closing of \$79 million in small business funding. Making it even more impressive, the BRC has only been in business for two years.

The competition's judges were very complimentary in their notes submitted to the Cullman Chamber, specifically pointing to member engagement, diversified revenue, internal analytics, publications and marketing as highlights.

Chamber Chair Dr. T.J. Franey, of Cullman County Schools, was thrilled at the collective achievement. "What an honor it is for the Chamber to be recognized nationally for its vision, ex-

cellence, and dedication to its members and community," she said. "This speaks volumes about the Chamber's strong commitment to our local businesses and confirms what we already knew ... Leah Bolin, Chamber President, the Chamber staff, the board and our numerous volunteers are not only making a local impact, but they are setting the benchmark for chamber excellence nationwide."

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