

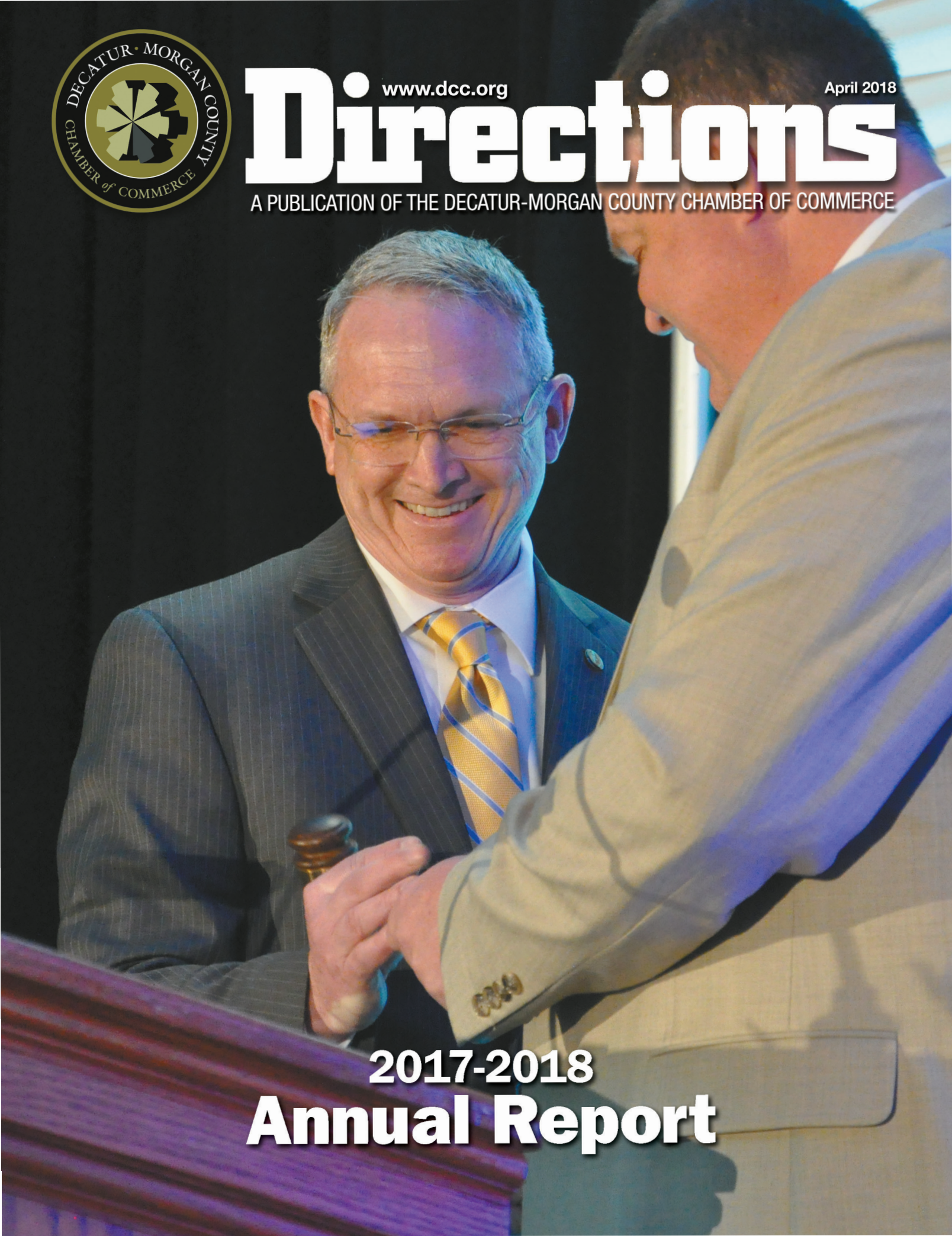


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April 2018

Directions

A PUBLICATION OF THE DECATUR-MORGAN COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



**2017-2018
Annual Report**



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189750-1



Being a part of the Chamber gives us a sense of belonging that is very hard to find. By joining the Chamber, we have gained a priceless network of friends who quickly became family and are an invaluable resource to us. As a small business, it is important to have stability and direction, and we have been given an endless supply of both since joining the Chamber in 2012. The staff are all so friendly and they are a great source for guidance and encouragement. I don't feel we would be seeing the success we are seeing after five years in business without the help provided by our local Chamber family. That is why we belong.

Clarence Roberts
Founder and President
1st Impression Cleaning Services



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Tim Lovelace
Renasant Bank
Chairman of the Board

W^A Word from your chamber

A year ago, I heard John Joseph in a speech make the observation that Decatur-Morgan County may be in the middle of a rebirth and we don't even realize it. In a recent conversation, John agreed that today we can say for sure that we are in the middle of the emergence of our area as one of the South's most vibrant communities.

Following on the heels of new high schools in Hartselle and Priceville, in the next year we will open two new high schools in Decatur. The Austin Black Bears will turn on the Friday Night Lights for the first time in their own stadium. Decatur High students will walk to class across a beautiful skywalk with a view of Delano Park and the famous Red Raider water tower in the background. It's a striking symbol of the old meeting the new. And it is not just facilities. Decatur is buzzing about our dynamic new superintendent, Dr. Michael Douglas, and his student-focused plans for improving our system.

Soon, the Cook Museum of Natural Science will bring a quarter of a million visitors to our downtown as one of the south's newest destination attractions. Students will continue to paint, sculpt and perform in our \$20 million Alabama Center for the Arts in downtown. It's one of the best new art facilities in the nation. Many of you were involved in crafting One Decatur, a comprehensive development plan for our community that provides us a guide book for specific actions we can take to improve and grow.

Recently the icing was put on the cake by the announcement of the new Mazda-Toyota assembly facility that will bring 4,000 new jobs to the area with more to come from suppliers and support industries.

Our elected officials are engaged, businesses are excited and citizens are optimistic. We are all encouraged but know we still have challenges.

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The Chamber Board

Executive Committee

Chairman of the Board

Tim Lovelace, Renasant Bank

Chairman of the Board-Elect

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Raul Piers, First Commercial Bank

Yvette Rice, LLVE, Inc.

Nathaniel Richardson, Jr., Decatur
Morgan Hospital

Kelly Thomas, Courtyard by
Marriott (President, Decatur Jaycees)

Terry White, Edward Jones

Chairman Long celebrates teamwork at State of the County address

On Feb. 20, the Chamber welcomed Commission Chairman Ray Long to kick off our new year of "State of" events with the State of the County Address. Presented by **Huntsville International Airport** and held at the DoubleTree by Hilton Decatur Riverfront, the breakfast event attended by more than 175 people included Chairman Long discussing growth in jobs, navigating tight budgets, the work of his department heads and other commissioners, as well as what he sees on the horizon for 2018. The Chamber is very thankful for the strong relationship we have with the commission and the work they do to create a vibrant business community.



More than 175 members and guests attended the State of the County Address.



Elected leaders from across Morgan County gathered to hear from Chairman Ray Long and his State of the County Address.

continued on page 6

State of the County continued



Chairman Ray Long discussed successes and opportunities from the past year during his annual State of the County Address.

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**HUNTSVILLE
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State of the City focuses on successes, regional partnerships

On March 27, the Chamber of Commerce hosted the annual State of the City Address featuring Mayor Tab Bowling. Presented by **Huntsville International Airport** and held at Ingalls Harbor Pavilion in Decatur,

Mayor Bowling discussed the importance of collaboration and partnership in community success. Just as important, however, he believes in sharing a regional vision for north Alabama in the fields of economic development

and infrastructure. More than 250 in attendance - including elected officials from neighboring communities - heard Bowling talk about the need for a long-range plan for roads supporting the soon-to-arrive Mazda-Toyota assem-



Decatur Mayor Tab Bowling welcomed more than 250 members of the business community during the State of the City Address.

State of the City continued

bly facility in the Greenbrier area, as well as suppliers who will also locate in our region. He also highlighted the continued efforts of downtown development, residential recruitment, community development and the work between the City and our school sys-

tem. The Chamber's public policy initiatives are a critical part of the work we do to improve our business community and quality of life. We appreciate our relationship with the mayor's office, the City Council and the entire City of Decatur team.

Presenting Sponsor



**HUNTSVILLE
INTERNATIONAL
AIRPORT**



Ingalls Harbor Pavilion again served as the host site for the annual State of the City Address.



Decatur Mayor Tab Bowling shares with the audience, during the annual State of the City Address, his plans to drive development of the I-565 widening to support regional economic development.



More than 250 attended the annual State of the City Address.

Ribbon Cuttings



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New Members

We thank the following businesses and organizations who made new commitments to our area by their investment in the Chamber. We look forward to serving you!

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ATI Physical Therapy
Bailey Harris Construction
Check N Go
Chicken Salad Chick
Cooks Building Supply
Country Financial - The Keith
Skelton Agency
High Point Market
Lawlers Barbecue #11

Modeling and Ministry, LLC
Next Move Real Estate
Onin Staffing
Potter Eye Care
Publix Store #1609
Residence Inn by Marriott Decatur
Restore Your Niche
Ruag Space USA
S&ME
Second Read Books
Sigh Photo Booth

Sons of Confederate Veterans
State Farm Insurance - Jason Palmer
Agency
Steelcase
Superior Scaffolding & Insulation, Inc.
Valley Feed Landscaping Supply
Whisk'D Cafe
Woodforest National Bank
Yellowhammer Logistics Services

A Word from Your Chamber continued

What we have is a once in a century opportunity to address these challenges and we have to get it right. So what are we going to do?

The strength of your chamber has been in its ability to get citizens, business, and government in the same room and on the same page to accomplish common goals. After months of talking to our citizens we have decided now is the time to take bold steps and to make a hard charge at the four areas that everyone agrees are game changers.

I am excited to announce "The Partnership," a plan for empowering Decatur-Morgan County to focus on education, talent development, residential growth and regional cooperation. To lead this effort – along with the chamber board and staff – we have recruited four local business and industry rock stars.

Decatur Morgan Hospital President Nat Richardson has rebuilt and run a hospital at the same time. He will lead our education efforts coming along side our superintendents and other stakeholders to work to improve test scores, drop-out rates and other key education initiatives.

In 3M Plant Manager Michelle Howell, we have a dynamic high energy leader that will work with business, educators, and government to train a dynamic talent pool that is work ready as part of our talent and workforce development initiative.

Jack Fite of Fite Building is a Decatur success story who has become known throughout the state. He will lead the efforts to bring new rooftops – both residential and commercial – to Decatur.

Joe Wheeler Electric President George Kitchens is gifted in working with multiple stakeholders and will take this to a new level working with our neighboring communities and businesses on taking full advantage of the opportunities Mazda-Toyota will bring.

This is a great plan with great leaders, but what will make it successful is who we are together. The true heart of Decatur and Morgan County is not something that is a narrative but something you have to experience.

On Saturday of Mothers Day weekend, go watch the Dragon Boats race on the

Tennessee River at Point Mallard. A few weeks later on Memorial Day weekend, go back and watch the balloon races. If you watch closely you realize both these events are about more than boat and balloon races.

Christmas parades, Depot Days, Third Fridays, Spirit of America, Carnegie Carnival, River Clay, Riverfest... the list goes on and on. All these examples show what sets our area apart and drives us all to live in Decatur and Morgan County. We "get" community. We know how to live, work, and play. Most importantly as our Citizen of the Year Murphy Brown has demonstrated to us, we know how to take care of each other. We understand that we are better together.

We have the opportunity as never before. We know the issues, we have the leadership and we have a plan. We still need you. We will be twisting arms and calling in favors. We need your network, we need your influence, we need your investment, and most importantly we need your energy. Please take our call.

Renewing Members

The Chamber would like to thank the following members who reinvested in Decatur and Morgan County by renewing their Chamber membership.

1st Impression Cleaning Services	Cricket By The Creek	Integrity Electric, Inc.	River City Equipment Rental & Sales, Inc.
Advanced Manufacturing Systems, Inc.	Decatur Career Center	ITW Sexton	River City Pharmacy
AFS Foundation & Waterproofing Specialists	Decatur Decorating Center	J & M Cylinder Gases, Inc.	Riverside Senior Living
Alabama Smile Builders - Paul Bishop, DMD	Decatur Dermatology, PC	J. Felton Davenport, DMD	Rogers Group, Inc.
Alabama Technology Network	Decatur Downtown Redevelopment Authority	Jani King of Huntsville	S&ME
Alliance HR	Decatur Heritage Christian Academy	Jimmy Smith Jewelers	SA Recycling
Alliance Sand and Aggregates, LLC	Decatur Jaycees	JIT Services, LLC	Sam's Sports Grill
AlphaPet, Inc.	Decatur Optical Dispensary	JMBL DBA Holaway's Foodland 814	Satterfields' Auto Tech
Alton Consulting Technologies	Decatur Public Library	Kiwanis Club of Decatur, Alabama	South Limestone Cooperative
American Midstream, LLC	Decatur Shopping Center	Label-Aid Systems, Inc.	Southern Development Council, Inc.
American Red Cross Morgan-Lawrence Co. Chapter	Decatur Truck & Trailer Sales	Lee Company	Southern Staffing
Anderson Office Interiors, LLC	Domino's Pizza	Liberty Learning Foundation	SouthernLINC Wireless
Annunciation of the Lord Catholic Church	DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Decatur Riverfront	Linde Gas	SPC Restoration, Inc. (formerly Stephen Pate Construction Company, Inc.)
API Digital Communications Group, LLC	Downtown Dawgs	Lineage RCS Decatur	St. Ann School
Ascend Performance Materials	Early Services, Inc.	Majestic Construction	St. Peter Baptist Church
AT&T Alabama	Family Security Credit Union	Marx Optical	Stifel
Automatic SMP	Feralloy	McBride Richardson, PC.	Stovall Marks Insurance, Inc.
Baymont Inn & Suites	First Bible Church	McComm Group, Inc.	Systems, Security & Network Solutions, Inc.
Beltline Electric Motor Repair	Fite Building Company, Inc.	Megabrook Processors	Talley, Mauldin, & Peete, PC
Best Western - River City Hotel	Five Guys Burgers & Fries	Mental Health Association in Morgan County	The French Door Salon & Day Spa
BHIP Medical Services	Flemons Properties	Mitchell Computer Services, Inc.	The Light House
Bramlett Automotive Buick, GMC, Kia	Fountain, Parker, Harbarger & Associates	Morgan County Association of Realtors	The Perry Company, Inc.
Calvary Assembly	FSI - Fleet Services, Inc.	Nephrology of North AL, PC	The Rack Pack Decatur
Cara Elizabeth Photography	Funding Solutions, Inc.	Next Move Real Estate	The Sherwin-Williams Company
Champion of Decatur, Inc.	GBW Architects	North Alabama Electric, Inc.	Traditions Bank
Charles B. Langham	GKL Companies	North Alabama Glass Co., Inc.	University of Alabama System
City Cafe	Glee Interiors	Open MRI of Decatur	UPS
Community Free Clinic of Decatur-Morgan County	H. R. Moore Company, Inc.	OSCO, INC.	Walmart Neighborhood Market
Container Recycling, Inc.	Hampton Inn	Paul Davis Restoration	Wayne Farms Decatur Further Processing W
Contracting & Materials, Inc.	Hardwick Law Firm, LLC	Peck - Glasgow Agency, Inc.	Westminster Assisted Living & Memory Care of Decatur
Contractor Service & Fabrication, Inc.	Hardy Chiropractic	Petty Machine Works, Inc.	Wilks Tire & Battery Service, Inc.
Corum's Building & Farm Center	Harris, Caddell, & Shanks, PC	Pill Box Pharmacy	Window World
Country Cottage	Hill Development Co., LLC	Plum Tree Shopping Center	Winsett Financial Group
Courtyard by Marriott	Home Pest Control	Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 760	Woodmen Life
Crestwood Medical Group	Hospice of the Valley, Inc.	PNC Bank	Your Transmission Man, Inc.
	Housing Authority of Decatur	POLYPLEX USA	
	Indorama Ventures Xylenes & PTA LLC	Premier System Integrators	
	INEOS Styrolution America, LLC	Price-Denton Endodontics, LLC	
	Integrated Corporate Solutions	Real Estate Showcase/ Publications Press	

Career & Workforce Expo highlights opportunities, action plans

The annual Career & Workforce Expo - presented by gold sponsor **Joe Wheeler EMC**, as well as silver sponsors **3M**, **GE Appliances**, a **Haier Company**, **Nucor Steel Decatur**, **Redstone Federal Credit Union** and **Toray Carbon Fiber America** - welcomed more than 1,000 area high school students to Calhoun Community College to learn about careers and opportunities in our area following high school. Your Chamber is committed to preparing the next generation of learners and leaders in our community and equipping them for success in whatever path they choose. The Expo is a collaboration with the Chamber, Morgan County Economic Development Association, Greater Limestone County Chamber of Commerce and Calhoun Community College.



More than 1,000 area students learned about career opportunities from local industries at the annual Career & Workforce Expo.

Presenting Sponsor



During the Career & Workforce Expo, students had the chance to discuss with professionals subjects they should study in school to prepare for certain careers.



Career coaches from event host Calhoun Community College were on hand to discuss career paths during the Career & Workforce Expo.

Networking opportunities provide value to members

In February and March, the Chamber continued providing opportunities for members to connect and develop relationships among business and community leaders. In February, **Tennessee Valley Pecan Co.** hosted the Chamber's monthly networking event, Coffee & Cards, at their retail store on Bank Street in downtown Decatur. More than 50 people stopped by during the come-and-go event, enjoyed some wonderful refreshments and learned more about "The Nut House." In March, the **LPL Financial** office of Dewayne Eddy also hosted a Coffee & Cards event at their newly renovated offices on 1st Ave. in downtown. Not only did the crowd of more than 50 guests enjoy seeing the building, but it gave Eddy and his team an opportunity to discuss their long list of financial products for college savings, retirement and investing. Networking opportunities are a member benefit with the Chamber, and we encourage our members to take advantage of these chances to build your business and develop relationships in the community.

Presenting Sponsors



More than 50 Chamber members and guests visited "The Nut House" during the February Coffee & Cards event hosted by Tennessee Valley Pecan Company.



LPL Financial in downtown Decatur welcomed more than 50 guest to their newly renovated office in downtown Decatur for the March edition of Coffee & Cards.

Leadership classes travel to Montgomery, future career opportunities

Because of winter weather in January, the Chamber's Equip program – made up of 32 eighth grade students from across Morgan County – doubled up their gatherings in February to make sure students got the full benefit of the class. In early February, the new spring session kicked off with a training session with Horizon Point focusing on goal setting and discussing careers they think one day they would like to pursue. Later in the day, the group traveled to Decatur Laser Tag for ice breaker and team building exercise designed for students to get to know one another and work together to achieve stated goals. The kickoff session was sponsored by **Decatur Heritage Christian Academy**. A week later, the same group gathered for the regularly scheduled February class. During the session, the group toured the GE Appliances, a Haier Company manufacturing facility to learn about assembly facilities and opportunities in manufacturing. Later in the morning, the group toured the Morgan County Jail in Decatur to discuss careers in law enforcement and the types of education and certification needed to work in the field. After lunch, the group visited Decatur's Global Tech, a welding facility known across the country for its training programs and producing high-quality graduates.

The March gathering of the Chamber's Equip Student Leadership class – made up of 32 eighth grade students from across Morgan County – focused on careers in utilities and infrastructure, as well as healthcare and computer information systems (CIS). Students started the day at Decatur Utilities with meetings highlighting gas, sewer and wastewater infrastructure within the DU team, and discussed the types of subjects one would need to study to prepare for those professions. They also talked about lineman work, and how studying electricity and circuitry is critical to the field. Students then traveled to the Decatur Campus of Calhoun Community College for lunch and a presentation by Dr. James Payne, dean of Calhoun's Business and CIS programs. Following lunch, students toured several departments on campus, including health sciences, computer networking and business administration. Equip is presented by **Nucor Steel Decatur**.

Excellence in Leadership, the Chamber's leader development pro-

gram for business professionals, focused on economic development and state government for their February and March classes. In February, the day began with a panel discussion on how economic development works in our area and in the state. The panel featured Jeremy Nails, president of Morgan County Economic Development Association; Rick Paler, executive director of the Decatur Downtown Redevelopment Authority; John Seymour, president and CEO of the Chamber; Wally Terry, director of development for the City of Decatur; and John Joseph, executive director of the Decatur-Morgan County Entrepreneurial Center. The group discussed strategies for industry recruitment, the role of incentives in attracting development and how regional partnerships are vital to recruitment success. After playing an economic development "board game," the group toured the GE Appliances, a Haier Company manufacturing facility to learn about the impact of the assembly center on our local economy and innovations in manufacturing. After lunch at the



In February, Equip students toured the GE Appliances, a Haier Company facility to learn about careers in manufacturing.



The spring session of Equip Leadership features more than 30 students from across Morgan County learning about opportunities available following graduation.

E-Center and a presentation by Athens State University on the value of building consensus in leadership, the group did a windshield bus tour of retail, tourism and economic development sites across Morgan County featuring staff members of Decatur Tourism commentary and insight.

In March, Excellence spent two days in the State Capital meeting with legislators, business leaders, members of the Morgan County delegation and touring attractions important to our state history. Day one – presented by **United Launch Alliance** – began with a tour of the Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Facility just outside of Montgomery to learn about our state's automotive industry and the role it plays in our economy and in workforce training. Later in the day, the group observed the Alabama Legislature in session, followed by a question-and-answer session with members of our area delegation. Day two started with breakfast,

presented by **Valley Budweiser**, and a presentation by Drew Harrell, executive director of the Alliance for Alabama's Infrastructure. He discussed the critical state of Alabama's roads and bridges, and the impact it has on recruiting jobs and industry to our region. After tours of the Museum of Alabama and Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church, the group returned to the House of Representatives for a meeting with Clay Redden, public information officer for the House, and a discussion about the legislative process. During lunch, presented by **Huntsville International Airport**, the group heard from Bill Canary, president of the Business Council of Alabama, discussing the state of the business community across the state. Excellence is presented by **Nucor Steel Decatur**.

Edge Student Leadership, the Chamber's curriculum for 10th and 11th graders, met in February and focused on criminal justice and the

role it plays in our community. The group met with Morgan County Circuit Judges Steve Haddock, Jennifer Howell and Glenn Thompson, Morgan County District Judges Brent Craig, Charles Langham and Shelly Waters; Morgan County District Attorney Scott Anderson; and Morgan County Circuit Court Clerk Chris Priest, to discuss their positions and how they decided to step into those leadership roles earlier in their lives. After sitting in the gallery and observing a trial, the group met with Decatur Police Chief Nate Allen to talk about the role of officers in the community and in schools. Following lunch and a tour of the Morgan County Jail, the group prepared for and took part in a mock trial guided by Judge Shelly Waters. Students played the role of jurors, judges, witnesses, defendants and prosecutors.

In March, the group also traveled to Montgomery to learn about the role of state government in our day-to-day

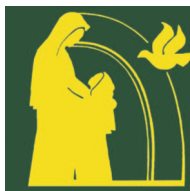
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In February, members of the Edge class took part in a mock trial as part of their focus on the criminal justice system in Morgan County.



As part of their March trip to Montgomery, members of the Edge class toured the state legislature and sat in on active sessions.



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Annual Meeting celebrates service, introduces “The Partnership”

On April 10, the Chamber celebrated a year of accomplishments, celebrated servant leaders in our community, and celebrated what’s ahead for Decatur and Morgan County during the 87th Annual Meeting. Presented by **Redstone Federal Credit Union**, the event served as an opportunity to recognize two leaders in our community. Vanessa Johnson of State Farm – Patrick Johnson Agency was honored with the Rosie Hennessy Award, which recognizes a member of the

Chamber’s Commodores – our community ambassadors – as an exemplary member of the group. Murphy Brown of the Decatur Morgan County Minority Development Association was named the Miss Athelyne C. Banks Citizen of the Year, honoring faithfulness and service to the community in the model of Miss Banks.

Also, outgoing Board Chair Patrick Johnson shared his “State of the Chamber” address while handing

off the chairmanship to incoming Chair Tim Lovelace. During his address, Lovelace announced “The Partnership,” the Chamber’s five-year plan to address education, talent and workforce development, residential recruitment and regional partnerships. We are grateful for the more than 300 people who attended the lunch, we look forward to another exciting year ahead, and we encourage you to be a part of the work we’re doing in our community.



Murphy Brown, founder and executive director of the Decatur Morgan County Minority Development Association, was named the Miss Athelyne C. Banks Citizen of the Year during the 87th Annual Meeting.



Simpson’s Florist of Decatur served as the Floral Sponsor for the 87th Annual Meeting.



Patrick Johnson, the Chamber’s outgoing board chair, shared his “State of the Chamber” address during the 87th Annual Meeting.



Dr. William Sims (right) presented the Miss Athelyne C. Banks Citizen of the Year Murphy Brown with a plaque during the 87th Annual Meeting.



Vanessa Johnson (center) received the Rosie Hennessy Award, which recognizes a member of the Chamber's Commodores – our community ambassadors – as an exemplary member of the group.



Tim Lovelace, the Chamber's incoming board chair, announced during his address "The Partnership," a five-year plan focusing the Chamber's work on education, talent and workforce development, residential recruitment and regional partnerships.

Presenting Sponsor



Save the Date!

Breakfast & Biz

May 4 / 7:30 a.m.
The Magnolia Room

Presented by Redstone Federal Credit Union

Small Business Awards Celebration

May 17 / 11:30 a.m.

Doubletree by Hilton Decatur Riverfront
Presented by Redstone Federal Credit Union

Summer Welding & Electrical Technology (SweETy) Camp

June 4-7

Hosted by Calhoun Community College
Presented by Indorama Ventures

Summer Welding & Electrical Technology (SweETy) Camp

June 11-14

Hosted by Priceville High School
Presented by Contractor Service & Fabrication Inc.

The Clay Shoot Classic

June 22 / All Day
Limestone Preserve, Ardmore, Ala.

Leadership continued

lives. The group traveled down early and arrived for a tour of the Rosa Parks Museum, and then met up with the Excellence class for the legislative

process meeting with Clay Redden and lunch with Bill Canary. Later in the day, the class toured the Museum of Alabama and Dexter Avenue King

Memorial Baptist Church. Edge is presented by **Nucor Steel Decatur**.



During their February program focusing on economic development, members of the Excellence class played a “board game” involving retail and industry recruitment strategies.



As part of their trip to Montgomery, members of the Excellence class toured the Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Facility and learned about the auto industry in Alabama.

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YP Leadership Luncheon plays role in capital campaign planning



Fred Mickelson of Funding Solutions led a young professionals focus group in February to mine for ideas to include in the Chamber's five-year plan.



More than 40 young professionals from Morgan and Madison Counties took part in the focus group supporting the Chamber's five-year plan.

"What do you want to see in your community?" "Where does Decatur-Morgan County need to improve?" "What is working that we need to continue?" Those were the three areas of discussion during the Chamber's YP Leadership Luncheon in February, presented by **Ascend Performance Materials**. Fred Mickelson, the Chamber's strategic planning consultant from Funding Solutions of Austin, Texas, facilitated the one-hour focus group with more than 40 young professionals to gather input for the Chamber's upcoming five-year plan of work. Feedback included ideas on how to improve entertainment in our downtown area, residential availability, shopping and dining options, transportation and outdoor activities. The group also shared topics that are working well for the attraction of young professionals, which included public art events like Carnegie Carnival and the River Clay Fine Arts Festival, strong school systems, locally owned restaurants and shops, and walkability in our city center. The Chamber recognizes the critical need for young professionals to be part of the planning and strategy for our community's future, and we continue to seek ideas on which the Chamber can focus.

Presenting Sponsor



YP Leadership Luncheon addresses community healthcare, strategic planning

On April 17, Nat Richardson – president of Decatur Morgan Hospital – shared with more than 30 young professionals the state of healthcare in our community during the April gathering of the Chamber’s YP Leadership Luncheon series. Richardson, who oversees in his position the Decatur Morgan main campus, Decatur West campus, Parkway campus and two joint venture surgery centers, discussed with the group the current economic conditions of healthcare and the challenges they face at the hospital each day. They include controlling costs, reimbursement rates,

insurance coverage issues and the role healthcare plays in residential recruitment for an area. Richardson also discussed the recent announcement of Huntsville Hospital Health Systems, of which Decatur Morgan is a part, injecting \$20 million in capital for upgrades to the Decatur Morgan campus. Upgrades will include more private rooms, a new MRI suite, waiting and reception areas and a newly designed emergency department. Also part of his talk was the steps he and the System board took in developing a strategic plan to meet the needs of the patients and the community, and

how the success of an organization depends on the quality of planning and collaborating.

The YP Leadership Luncheon series is an opportunity for members of the under-40 crowd across Morgan County to both connect and socialize while developing their leadership skills. The series is presented by **Ascend Performance Materials of Decatur**, as well as April lunch sponsor **Kiwanis Club of Decatur**. The next YP Luncheon will be held in late June.



The YP Leadership Luncheon is a networking and leadership development opportunity for the under-40 crowd of Morgan County.



Richardson shared with the group of more than 30 the steps he and the System board took in developing a strategic plan to meet the needs of the patients and the community.



The YP Leadership Luncheon series gathers every other month to discuss development topics with community leaders.



Nat Richardson, president of Decatur Morgan Hospital, discussed with more than 30 young professionals the challenges and successes of healthcare in our community.



More than 30 young professionals gathered to hear from hospital President Nat Richardson about the state of healthcare in Morgan County.

Presenting Sponsor



April Lunch Sponsor

**Kiwanis Club
of Decatur, Alabama**

April networking event opportunity to learn about new residential development

Presenting Sponsor

RE/MAX PLATINUM

On April 11, Chamber member Kim Hallmark of Re/max Platinum welcomed more than 50 people to The Cupboard in downtown Decatur for the Chamber's Coffee & Cards April networking event. The come-and-go gathering served as a launch event for Bank Street Station, an urban residential development located on lower Bank Street. The six-house development is currently in pre-sales and meets an expressed demand from the community: upscale, newly built, located in the city center and in a walkable urban community. Attendees had the chance to meet the builder and developer, see the site map, floor plans and what will be available on the property. Learn more about the development by visiting their website: <http://bankstreetstation.com/>



Across the street from Magnolia River on Bank Street, the six-home development will feature a first-of-its-kind urban residential opportunity in Decatur.



BANK STREET STATION
A COTTAGE COMMUNITY IN DECATUR, ALABAMA
ARCHITECTURE BY
D J A D

Bank Street Station is set for development on lower Bank Street and will feature six homes.



More than 50 people came to the April Coffee & Cards to learn more about Bank Street Station.

Business Development

Jerry J. Baker, Vice Chair

The Decatur-Morgan County Chamber of Commerce is a well-oiled machine that runs continually in an effort to make our community, our state and nation better. The breath and gravity of the organization navigates throughout every facet of society (e.g. cultural, business leadership, government, community leadership, and more), impacting it in a positive way. There are several words that describe this well-oiled machine; excellence, cultural relevance, peak-performance, community impact and education. There is no other organization that impacts our area with such cross-sectional reach. Having been a part of several Chambers over my professional career spanning more than 40 years, this Chamber is the best!

In the area of business development, throughout 2017, the Chamber continued propagating the message to its members and the community to shop local. I believe we have seen lots of growth within our retail business space because of our community support. Several new examples of thriving businesses: a Marco's Pizza franchise opened on Sandlin Road SW; Chicken Salad Chick at the mall on the Beltline; and Publix's at the Point Mallard Center on Hwy. 67. These businesses will impact our community for many years to come. There are other new businesses coming around the corner, including Chick-Fil-A located on Sixth Ave., Panda Express next to Krispy Kreme on the Beltline and several others.

Each year, the Chamber receives nominations from its membership for business and community leader's awards. I was very proud to have experienced the celebration of the small business professionals of the year – issuing the Baker-Cook-Jones award; the Lynn C. Fowler Non-

Profit Professional of the year and the Arthur Orr Young Professional Award. Last year's recipients were Ellen Didier, founder and president of Red Sage Communications; John Joseph, IV, director of Decatur Corridor Development, Inc.; and Rev. Larry Franks, executive director of First Priority of Greater Decatur, respectively. At this event, we were all inspired when we heard about the business successes, love for Decatur and the investments they are making in our community.

The One Decatur initiative is by far, one of a kind. It has been a great success in collecting data points from our community concerning the development, capital improvements and economic impact affecting Decatur. The Chamber has been strategic in its efforts and sponsorship of One Decatur. I am really excited about three of our most critical concerns being addressed by this initiative; targeted industries, housing market, and land use initiatives. In essence, having a specific priority on soliciting specific businesses to build and grow in Decatur area enhances the quality of life for the residence. Also, soliciting builders to build premium properties with great amenities to sell or lease, will help Decatur attract professionals to live and work in our community. The land-use component specifically addresses the plans necessary to create a quality community; sensible maps, integrated infrastructures, help identify impact zones and the condition for a progressive community like ours – amenities like parks & recreation, fun waterways, and destination tourism to name a few.

Breakfast & Biz, covered great topics like "When does Google love you? When everyone else does!" presented by Heather Boozer; "No

More Workplace Boredom," presented by Mary Ila Ward; and "Lone Nut or Brilliant Leader?" presented by Kathy Neyman; and "Seven Social Media Myths and How to Get Past Them" by Chris Pettit. All these topics and presenters were strategically selected to enhance our business leaders.

The 2017 Annual Women in Business celebration was a home-run! Lee Marshall, a 20-year news veteran and CEO of Kids to Love, was the keynote speaker for the luncheon. She moved many to tears as she shared stories of kids, their needs and the tenacity of many to answer those needs. Lee's call to action inspired us to serve, give and pray for those on the front line, fighting for our greatest resource – our children. Crystal Brown, vice president of business and investor development for our Chamber, was also honored at the event with the 2017 Athena Leadership Award, given to women in business that serve their community and improve the quality of life for others. An amazing achievement for an amazing leader.

Our Chamber is a lean, well-run organization with exceptional team members. In fact, I am often amazed at the number of projects conducted or coordinated by this group, giving the appearance of having staff 10 times the actual size. We must also thank our partners for their continued support and the exceptional volunteers that serve on the board and other committees.

Community Building

Ashley Ashwander, Vice Chair

There is so much to be excited about in Decatur-Morgan County! From events to openings to healthcare improvements, the Decatur Morgan County Chamber of Commerce has been a partner in making our community a great place to live, work and play.

Community events have become plentiful in Decatur and Morgan County. From Kiwanis' Pancake Day to the Alabama Jubilee, plus River Clay Fine Arts Festival, 3rd Friday Downtown Decatur, Riverfest, Carnegie Carnival, Soulstock and The Market on Bank, it seems there is always something going on in Decatur-Morgan County. Our friends at the Decatur-Morgan County Tourism are to be commended, along with our many area leaders, for planning and presenting so many events, meetings, tournaments, and

attractions that give the residents of Decatur-Morgan County something fun and unique to enjoy with their family and friends.

With our many events, workforce development initiatives, leadership programs, and networking opportunities, the Chamber continues to work in attracting young professionals to our area. Our bi-monthly networking event, YP Leadership Luncheons, have been held at many local event locations throughout the year and have provided a great way for those in the under-40 age group to meet and learn about other events, charities and civic organizations in our area. These YP events have been well attended and we are thrilled to continue these luncheons. We are also proud of a new YP event that is

off to a fabulous start, MoCo Meet-Up, and is a partnership between many organizations including the Economic Development Association, Jaycees, DDRA and the Chamber.

Our State of Healthcare meeting was also a great success. Both Nat Richardson and David Spillers did an excellent job updating us on the progress taking place at Decatur Morgan Hospital and we are excited for the future of such a vital healthcare provider to our community. We appreciate the Huntsville Hospital System's commitment to our local healthcare campuses.

We hope you take advantage of the wonderful events and resources in our area and enjoy making Decatur-Morgan County your home.

Finance

Jeffery Brown, Treasurer

In the last year the Chamber has worked to fulfill its mission and commitments to membership while at the same time ensuring the funds provided by our members are utilized in a manner to allow the Chamber to reach its fullest potential.

Year to date, the Chamber has been able to increase income while simultaneously reducing expenses. A key focus of the Chamber staff has been on member retention and development, and the result has been evident in the membership numbers for the year. The Chamber has worked to bring in new members as many new businesses have opened in our community. These businesses value the assistance and services provided

to them by the Chamber, and as a direct result, membership in the Chamber is strong.

The Chamber continues to use its revenue to support its ongoing programs in leadership and networking, business development, workforce and education, public policy, and community development. In addition, the Chamber is continually seeking out new and innovative approaches to modify existing programs or develop new programs relevant and beneficial to membership and our community. The thirteenth annual Total Resource Campaign (TRC) has recently concluded, and has once again been successful in generating sponsorships and funding for ongoing chamber events and programs in

the year ahead. The TRC funds are integral to many existing Chamber programs, allowing members to focus their marketing budgets to fulfill their marketing goals, while positively impacting our business community and quality of life.

The Chamber is transparent in the management of its finances. To ensure accountability, each year the Chamber's financial statements are audited by an independent CPA firm. The Chamber received a clean (unqualified) audit opinion in 2017. During this past year, Chamber programs have operated well within budget while simultaneously demonstrating improvement in their offerings.

Leadership & Networking

Kent Lawrence, Vice Chair

The Chamber's Leadership and Networking series continue to stand out in our area as two programs of work that benefit our membership and the future of our business community. These programs are highly regarded in the business community due to the networking opportunities they afford and the development of the participants.

The Chamber continues to offer premier opportunities for residents young and old with which they develop themselves and serve in the community. Two highlights from Excellence in Leadership, the program for business professionals, stand out as examples of the quality of the programs. In November, the Excellence class – as part of their day focusing on education – engaged with a panel featuring the superintendents from our three local systems: Dr. Michael Douglas from Decatur City Schools, Dr. Dee Dee Jones from Hartselle City Schools, and Mr. Bill J. Hopkins from Morgan County Schools. Each school leader shared their own approach to leadership and the style with which the develop strategy for student success. Yet, each was quick to discuss with the room of more than 35 Excellence participants how they could not be successful without collaboration, partnership and relationships – all of which improve the lives of stu-

dents. During the annual trip to Montgomery, the group for the first time toured the Hyundai assembly facility to learn about the work of the automotive industry in our state and the role it plays in our economic development footprint.

Edge Student Leadership also consisted of more than 35 10th-11th graders from across Morgan County who competed in a blind application process from more than 110 applicants. This program mirrors our professional programs and is instrumental in the development of these young students' leadership qualities. Exposure to subjects like healthcare, economic development, education, state and local government, poverty simulation and area history help create in students the understanding of being a well-rounded citizen and how to be involved in the community. This program continues to be a model of youth leadership development in our region.

Networking opportunities have always provided our members the chance to connect with others in the community, and those connections are vital to promoting the strong business community. Each month, members continue to enjoy Business After Hours or Coffee & Cards hosted by local businesses. Our Commodores, our community ambassadors, are made up of more than 40 positive, civic-

minded volunteers who attend numerous ribbon cuttings, groundbreakings and other events throughout the year. They are our "hands and feet" in Decatur-Morgan County, and we cannot do the work we are called to do without them!

Together, the leadership and networking programs help to connect, orient and inspire participants to become effective leaders and contribute to our area. If you are looking for an opportunity to connect in the community and be an asset to your organization, leadership and networking are two examples where it is easy to reach that goal.

Public Policy

Wade Weaver, Vice Chair

The efforts of your Chamber's public policy committee continue to work towards and advocate for legislation that encourages business and job growth for our region.

Each year, the committee develops the Chamber's three Public Policy Agenda – state, local and federal – to reflect positions on issues impacting a wide range of topics in the business community. As they do each year, the committee held three separate meetings to address each area, building a consensus of membership sentiments about topics like health-care, infrastructure, tax reform, economic development, education and workforce development just to name a few. Each meeting is open to the entire membership, and we encourage you to participate when the

meeting schedule is announced each fall. Once completed and approved by the Chamber board, agendas are presented during visits to Montgomery and Washington, D.C., as well as to our mayor and commission chairman. When conversations about where the Chamber stands on issues arise, the agendas are where we direct members and non-members alike.

As mentioned earlier, annual trips to Montgomery and Washington, D.C., to meet with our respective delegations give us time to both present agendas, but also an opportunity to express with a unified voice the needs of our local business community. The face-to-face time with lawmakers and those in positions of influence is invaluable in representing our members.

Annual State of the City, State of the County and State of the State breakfasts give members the environment of hearing directly from lawmakers about the status of business and quality of life issues that affect us each day. The Chamber couldn't advocate for our members the way we do without healthy relationships with our delegations, as those relationships are vital to our community success.

Now more than ever, it is critical the Chamber speaks with a united voice. The interests of the Morgan County business community and our membership directly impact our area's quality of life. With healthy relationships on all levels of government, we can be the change we want to see.

Workforce & Education

Willie LaFavor, Vice Chair

The Chamber made a critical decision several years ago to invest as much time and effort as needed in our current workforce, while at the same time to work equally as hard to produce a highly trained and highly competitive workforce for the future. Well, folks ... the future has arrived in Morgan County and we are prepared to meet it head on.

The last time I wrote to you, I talked about the collaborative persistence of working towards the common goal of making Morgan County a place where businesses thrive and potential businesses want to locate. As I look back

on 2017, I continue to be amazed at the alliance we have built here in Morgan County between educators and industry leaders.

The Chamber continues to support every step of the way by partnering with and encouraging teachers in our area school systems of Decatur City, Hartselle City, and Morgan County. Teachers new to these school systems are welcomed at our "Annual New Teacher breakfast" where they quickly learn that our community leaders support the important role they play in educating and graduating those who will become our future employees.

"Partners in Education" continues to support every school within Decatur City, Hartselle City and Morgan County. Connecting each school with a company partner has afforded our students access to higher quality facilities, supplies and funding.

Parents, do you know how educators measure your child's success? In a world where so many pathways are viable options, how is a parent to know how to direct the children? With that question being asked so often, the Quality Education Committee wrote and produced a brochure to send home with every Kindergarten

continued on page 24

Workforce & Education continued

Willie LaFavor, Vice Chair

through 8th grade student within Decatur City, Hartselle City and Morgan County. It gives parents a tangible checklist in language they can understand and use to assess their child's skill level and it lays the groundwork for success at home.

"Teachers on Tour" is a new program the Chamber is ramping up that will allow educators a real-world view of industry and how their curriculum can be shaped to give students a head start on a career in industry or a skilled trade. With many teachers attending, we had great collaboration, discussing the many details which impact our students in being truly prepared for the workforce.

Other programs that were once start-ups have now become great traditions as they continue to expand and grow. SWEtY (Summer Welding & Electrical Technology) Camp, our 4-day hands-on camp for high school girls, has nearly doubled in attendees in the past two years. The girls were able to hear first hand testimonies from past attendees and how the SWEtY program had impact on their career direction. Applications for the June sessions are available at the Chamber and with school counselors.

Endless Opportunities!!! While exhausting, yet so rewarding, the event has become one of my personal favorites. Getting to watch our 8th grade students seek out potential career options, with so much intensity and passion, was all the encouragement we needed to continue building the program. This year it was a true regional effort with vendors coming from Morgan, Lawrence, and Limestone Counties to provide interactive presentations that help young people discover a career option right

here in their own backyard. We doubled student participation in 2017, going from 1,500 to 3,000 8th graders coming out to this unique "hands on" career fair. 2018 dates will be October 18 and 19.

"Equip" is another opportunity for 8th grade students to explore careers that may or may not require a college degree. In 2017, a total of more than 50 students participated over two semesters in a mix of lectures and tours of companies. After completing the class, the students have a better understanding of the expectations as they prepare to enter the workforce.

Many of our local companies use "Work-Keys" as a testing platform to ensure that potential employees are truly prepared to enter the workforce. This led the Chamber to a vital partnership with local organizations to promote the Decatur-Morgan County area and to pursue a higher level of recognition as an ACT Work Ready Community. Recently, I learned that we are now just over 91% in reaching our goal of 100% compliance, which will certify our area as the only Credentialed ACT Work Ready Community in North Alabama. I'm confident we will reach 100% in the very near future!

Last fall, the Chamber hosted a "Road Trip" to investigate and learn from the successful program at Tuscaloosa Career and Technical Academy. Nearly 30 people attended and it was a representative cross-section of our community with city and state officials, educators from area schools and community colleges, industry leaders as well as the Career Center coming together to observe and discuss what will work for our area. The outcome is that we

have already laid the groundwork and more for something very similar here in the Decatur-Morgan County area. Successful programs are in place at Brewer High School and Decatur High Schools. As we gain momentum, other high schools and career tech programs will come on line.

The Chamber hosted a Career and Workforce Expo in February that was attended by 1800 students. You've heard a lot from the media about the Mazda-Toyota plant coming to Limestone County. Our area will benefit from this new industry. While others may see the Tennessee River as a divider, at the Chamber we see that bridge serving as a connector. We will all benefit from industry growth in our region!

In closing, I encourage you to partner with your Chamber to continue influencing our direction. Our Workforce and Education is ever evolving. We must be willing to invest the necessary efforts and always encourage our community to be its best. Today's future is tomorrow's reality so let's continue to invest in our tomorrow!



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