

Gloucester County Chamber and the WIB Pledge Support to Encourage Businesses and the Workforce To Thrive

A thriving workforce relies on a flourishing business environment and vice versa. It's the goal of the Gloucester County Chamber of Commerce to nurture both parties.

Les Vail, Executive Director of the Gloucester County Chamber of Commerce, explained the role of the Chamber to the Gloucester County Workforce Investment Board (WIB) at its January meeting. "Our role is to help business grow," he said. "I'm very passionate about that. Everybody needs some help. We want to be the resource to grow your business."

In an effort to determine the needs of area businesses, surveys are conducted by the Chamber periodically. Networking, education and government legislation rank as the top three important issues, Vail said. "Three years ago, Government Affairs ranked dead last in what businesses thought was important," he said. "Last year, it tied for second place with education. Networking is still number one."

Developing better contacts through targeted marketing and networking sessions is a primary resource the Chamber provides. "It's important to develop those close relationships," Vail said. "Free networking events are offered monthly." Vail discussed a new program, "Link at the Chamber," that targets networking groups of Chamber members that meet every two weeks. The members represent 20 different categories of businesses, which have the opportunity to share resources and information as well as showcase their products and services. "Link introduces people into different businesses and provides access to the types of services available," he said.

Access to government resources and legislators also is an important feature of the Chamber. Vail encouraged businesses to visit the Chamber's updated website, www.gloucestercountychamber.com, to access government programs and resources available to them. The website features links to the NJ Department of Labor and the Gloucester County WIB. In addition, various legislative programs are offered throughout the year, including the annual State of the County breakfast, which attracts approximately 300 business leaders. Held annually at Rowan University, the State of the County showcases county, state and federal government officials who deliver news and information of importance to the business and education communities.

Workforce training and education are a priority for local businesses and the Chamber seeks to accommodate that need. It has developed a relationship with the Rowan University Entrepreneurs Forum and is working with them to develop best practices training that can be offered to chamber members. It also has teamed up with a Chamber member who has provided a series of one on one coaching sessions on such topics as Accounts Payable/Receivable, time management and business planning. "Everybody walked out of these coaching sessions with information they could use that day," Vail said. "We'll continue to develop sessions at little or no cost that's important to our members."

In an attempt to support small business owners in the county, the Chamber has created an Affinity Partnership Program that provides a number of employer benefits including a discount prescription program. "I know how important benefits are to businesses," Vail said. "Small businesses can't provide the same benefits to their employees as larger businesses. The Chamber can help with that."

Vail is proud of Gloucester County's progress. "I look out the window of my office in Glassboro and see one of the biggest economic development projects on the East Coast – Rowan Boulevard," he said. Once completed, it will bring 700 jobs to the area. There is also "The Port of Paulsboro project that will result

in the creation of hundreds of jobs,” Vail added. “There is so much happening in Gloucester County. We want to help grow business, but we can’t do it alone. We all must work together.”

“Les has pointed out the importance of partnerships,” WIB Chair Hosea Johnson acknowledged. “We can’t provide all services by doing it alone.”