



# Kinston-Lenoir County Chamber of Commerce

## 2007 Kinston-Lenoir County Chamber of Commerce Annual Report

Chairman Tom Vermillion and the Executive Committee implemented an ambitious Program of Work last year. The following are highlights:

The year began with the Annual Meeting and Banquet announcing the Ambassador of the Year and the Citizen of the Year and was attended by over 150 members.

Internal office procedures were updated and the finance committee met on a regular basis. The Chamber upgraded its technology by purchasing a dedicated server system, computers and software. The ChamberMaster database system was introduced during the last quarter of the year offering members a variety of new benefits designed to help market and grow their businesses. This new system included a program that attempted to reach each member by phone to update their contact information and explain the additional benefits that are now included with membership.

A series of five planning sessions were conducted in November. Many members participated in this program to reassess the activities of 2007 and to plan for 2008.

### Member Services

The new ChamberMaster Database system offers our members additional benefits. Their online directory listing can additionally include a description, business hours and directions. They can also add or delete representatives and correct email addresses plus add "keywords" that will help users to find their listing faster and easier. They can post employment opportunities and business discounts or deals. Both "Hot Jobs" and "Hot Deals" are accessible to the public on the Chamber's website.

In November a new member campaign drive recruited over 40 new members. The chamber ended the year with a total of 675 members, which is an increase over last year.

Special efforts were made in the area of retention with ongoing courtesy calls by Chamber staff and Ambassadors. The new database system can be used to organize and track the retention program with a promise of statistical data that will report trends and results.

In addition to the many Business After Hours hosted by members, Business Before Hours continues to have a place to meet the needs of businesses and individuals that find it easier to schedule such activities during morning hours.

The Chamber's now bi-monthly newsletter that is published in the Free Press has proved to be an effective communication tool that informs both members and the general public about Chamber activities, programs and benefits.

The Membership Services Committee and Ambassadors assisted with over 20 ribbon-cutting celebrations and ground breakings. Members of the committee helped with various Chamber functions, including the Festival on the Neuse, Administrative Professional Luncheon and all the Business Before and After Hours. The Ambassadors continue to be vital to the Chamber's success.

The 2007 Membership Directory was distributed throughout the year.

Weekly email "Quick Updates" and press releases continued to keep members informed and a very active speakers bureau remained in place.

### Economic and Community Development

The Chamber's website, [www.kinstonchamber.com](http://www.kinstonchamber.com), continues to be a source of information and important links for businesses and individuals looking to relocate in our area. Relocation packages are mailed out on a regular basis. The Chamber also connects certain inquires to County Economic Development, The Pride of Kinston and others as needed. In 2007 the Chamber of Commerce distributed its premiere issue of Images of Kinston-Lenoir County, a high quality glossy magazine filled with community content with portrayals of quality of life that will empower key economic development agencies a useful tool to promote the area. ImagesKinston.com is a website that can be used electronically when courting out of town businesses and professional talent and includes valuable information and links as well as a virtual issue of the Images of Kinston-Lenoir County magazine.

The Chamber hosted an informative Economic Development Breakfast panel featuring Adrian King, Pride of Kinston Executive Director, Mark Pope, Lenoir County Economic Development Executive Director and Al Delia, President and Chief Executive Officer for the North Carolina Eastern Region Development Commission.

The interactive Community Calendar that was introduced last year is now used by a large number of civic groups, individuals, organizations, churches and schools.

## **Education Foundation/Committee**

The Chamber formulated a new Education Committee that will oversee the Lenoir County Education Foundation. New committee members represent all levels of education in our county. This reorganization of efforts included updating the by-laws, adoption of a mission statement and identification of goals and programs. Communication with the Lenoir County Public Schools has been enhanced and a variety of support efforts are in place. These support efforts included community awareness and communication, a very successful Business Before Hours and the use of Chamber email blasts as well as fundraising programs. 2007 Fundraising efforts supported the Newspaper in Education program in partnership with The Free Press and provided much needed school supplies and backpacks, for area children in need.

## **Legislative Affairs**

The Chamber hosted three Government Affairs panel discussion breakfasts in 2007 featuring local, county and state government. The respective governmental representatives presented current issues and future challenges giving the public the opportunity to ask questions.

The Chamber actively participates in the North Carolina Eastern Region Chambers of Commerce group, which crafted a regional legislative agenda that was presented to the General Assembly in Raleigh. This group continues to monitor results and is preparing for a 2008 agenda. We also planned for and scheduled an Economic State of the Region program that is open to all our members and governmental officials in January 2008.

The Executive Committee of the Chamber reviewed and adopted support letters as deemed necessary throughout the year.

## **Business, Industry and Tourism**

The Chamber sponsored an updated business expo called Living the Good Life in partnership with Lenoir Community College and Lenoir Memorial Hospital. With over 60 vendors and 600 participants it promises to be the County's new signature event for area businesses to market their products and services.

Training was provided to businesses and individuals through a cooperative program between the Chamber and the Small Business Center of Lenoir Community College.

The Chamber continued to administer the Tourism Development Authority and the Kinston-Lenoir County Convention and Visitors Bureau

The Manufactures Road Show continued visits to several member industries by the President, Chairman and others.

The newly organized Manufacturing and Industry committee hosted a roundtable discussion with key employees from area manufacturers. The information gathered will be used to identify the committee's goals for 2008.

## **Special Projects**

A newly organized committee met on a regular basis to oversee the Chamber's key events. The Chamber of Commerce hosted programs and events such as the Office Professionals Luncheon, Leadership Lenoir, the Pinnacle of Achievement Banquet and more.

In April the Festival on the Neuse complete with a variety of activities attracted hundreds of people and families. The Festival on the Neuse continues to be a crowd pleaser with the help of several community partner agencies and groups.

The Small Business Awards program recognized several businesses in 2007 at the noon Rotary meeting.

## **The President's Club**

The Kinston-Lenoir County Chamber of Commerce President's Club sponsorship program began in 2007. President's Club Sponsorship provides businesses the opportunity to demonstrate their community involvement while receiving expanded visibility. Seventeen businesses choose to go the extra mile in its financial support of the Chamber demonstrating their commitment to the Chamber, its members and the community. The Chamber's goal is to provide programs and activities that make a significant difference to our members. The President's Club gave the Chamber the additional funds that were needed to accomplish these goals and be a vital component of our local business community's success. Thanks to the President's Club members the Chamber was able to complete the many projects and activities outlined in the 2007 Plan of Work.