Almost four years ago, I wrote an article entitled, “The Fat Lady Hasn’t Sung.” In it, I talked about past successes and the future hope of our community and our chamber of commerce. Since that time, I have had the opportunity to get to know many of the leaders who have driven those successes; men like Chester Freeman, Ray Buchman, Roy Drinkard, and Clark Branch. Clark left this world for his heavenly home only a few short weeks ago, but he left behind a remarkable legacy from which we all benefit. Henry Kissinger once said, “The task of a leader is to get his people from where they are to where they have never been.” Thanks to Clark and others like him, Cullman is in a place it has never been. We are enjoying a quality of life that many communities are still trying to attain. Low unemployment and crime rates, outstanding amenities and recreational opportunities, coupled with top notch healthcare and education, should make us all stop and thank God for His blessings. We have included a few memories of Clark in this month’s newsletter. I hope you enjoy walking down memory lane.

Merry Christmas from the chamber team: Leah, Jackie, Cecelia, Magan, Ben, Debbie and Natalie.

Do You Remember the Fat Lady?

LEAH BOLIN
CHAMBER PRESIDENT

Joey Shadowens, a student at Sacred Heart School, created this awesome shoebox project for his class. We are honored that he chose the Chamber to represent his project on a building in the area that supported the community. Joey said he picked the Chamber for his project “because my mom helps them, and she has fun and likes it.”

Joey has watched his mother, Stefani Shadowens, complete the Leadership Cullman program and participate in the TRC. Stefani also always tells Joey about the Chamber’s Community Luncheon speakers and events. “He is so amazed at all that I have gotten to be a part of by just helping the Chamber. He knows how the Chamber plays a big part in the community and is the hub of Cullman!”

Project on Community featuring Chamber
The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce’s Community Luncheons will be taking a break during the months of November and December as we celebrate the holidays with our families. Stay tuned, though! We will resume our monthly sessions in January with our special guest speakers - our state legislature.

Come out and hear what our representatives are up to when Senator Paul Bussman and Representatives Ed Henry, Randall Shedd and Corey Harbison update us on the latest happenings from the capitol. Join us on January 22, 2016 for this special kick-off luncheon, which will be held at the All Steak Restaurant in the Banquet room from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Tickets are $15 for Chamber Members and $20 for future members. Call 256-734-0454 to reserve your seat. Thanks to our 2016 Presenting Sponsor: Shirley Quattlebaum - State Farm & our Monthly Sponsor, Weichert Realtors - Carter & Company.

January 2016 Community Luncheon

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Youth Leadership Cullman County November Session

The 2015-16 Youth Leadership Cullman County class had their fourth session on Monday, Nov. 16th. The session was “Quality of Life Day.” The class learned about non-profit work, several local agencies, and volunteerism through the aspect of service learning, and how all of this together equates to quality of life for citizens in the Cullman community. The itinerary included visits to Cullman Caring for Kids, First United Methodist Church’s Knapsacks for Kids program, the CCCDD (Margaret Jean Jones Center), The Link of Cullman County, United Way of Cullman County, and a luncheon and tour of Cullman Regional Medical Center. The youth greatly enjoyed this day and appreciated the opportunity to learn about several levels of quality of life in the Cullman area. Thank you to our following sponsors for their support and investment in our youth: “Quality of Life Day” Sponsor - Comfort Care Hospice & Comfort Care Home Health; Breakfast Sponsor - Youth Advocate Programs, Inc.; Lunch Sponsor - Medical Arts Living Well Natural Store; and Cullman Regional Medical Center for their gracious luncheon and tour. These monthly sessions aim to educate the youth and increase awareness on issues of interest happening on a local, regional and national scale.
Halloween & Hospitality - Membership Development Day We Love Our Members!

We at the Chamber loved our Halloween visit this year. For the second year in a row, we dressed up and handed out candy to our members to show them how much we appreciate them. And this year, we let our Chamber members pick out our costumes! The survey results showed the most votes for an old classic - we dressed up as the Evil Queen and Snow White and the seven dwarfs! We visited as many people and places as we could throughout the course of the day. We would like to thank our membership for their support and investment in the Chamber and the Cullman community.

UPCOMING BUSINESS SEMINARS

GRANT WRITING SEMINAR
FRIDAY, JAN 8th, 2016 Are you a non-profit and looking for grants as a part of your fundraising plan to sustain your community or faith-based organization? If the above describes your situation, this workshop is for you! It will cover the basic elements of understanding and preparing a grant proposal in an atmosphere that’s interactive, informative, and engaging. This workshop is especially designed for agencies or organizations with limited staffing or little experience writing proposals. Overcome the fear and intimidation often associated with grant-writing and walk away with tips and tools to get started. The presenter, Mr. Derek Lane, is the owner of Lane Consulting Group. He helped launch over a dozen non-profit organizations and secured $60 million in successfully funded grants through foundations and federal agencies. He has assisted community and faith-based agencies around the country with organizational and resource development needs and looks forward to providing similar support to help build the capacity of organizations in central Alabama. 1:00 - 4:00 pm, Chamber. Cost: Chamber members $20; Future members $25

ANTI-THEFT SEMINAR
TUESDAY, FEB. 23rd, 2016. Anti-theft and loss prevention seminar for Cullman area retailers. This event is especially designed for retailers interested in providing greater safety and security for their establishment. Presenters will share helpful suggestions and legal guidance on what to do when suspicions arise. 5:30 pm, Chamber. Cost: No fee to attend.
If you did not make it to the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce – Governmental Affairs Committee forum, here is a brief synopsis of the major events. The forum was held on November 9, 2015 at 5:30 p.m. in the Freedom Insurance Room of the Chamber. The topic of the forum was the makeup of the Cullman County Commission. State Senator Paul Bussman opened the meeting by welcoming members of the public in attendance and thanking them for their involvement in the process. He then made it clear that he called this meeting specifically to hear from our citizens who were willing to state their position publicly on the topic. Senator Bussman also made himself available for questions at the end of the forum for those who preferred to speak with him privately.

It was standing room only with approximately 60 people present. There were 11 men who signed up to speak at the microphone. The opinions shared publicly, with respect to the makeup of the commission, were closely divided with six speakers for moving to a five commissioner system and five speakers for keeping the current three member system. There were valuable questions posed by both sides that brought a broad perspective of ideas to the table. Another part of the commission discussion included whether the Associate Commissioners should remain full-time employees or transition into a part-time role. The speakers were also divided on this issue.

When asked about the forum, Senator Bussman said, “Overall, I gained some very valuable input from the public. I greatly appreciate the Chamber of Commerce for hosting the event. I also want to thank those in attendance for their involvement and willingness to share their position with me. It will be very useful as we move forward.” Senator Bussman closed by thanking Representatives Harbison and Shedd for being there. Representative Henry regretted being unable to attend but was in Montgomery on important business for the district. The forum was a great opportunity for the Governmental Affairs Committee to facilitate an event for the citizens of Cullman County to interact and participate in their government through meaningful discussion. The Committee is committed to preserving and facilitating citizen involvement in the governmental process for the betterment of Cullman County. This type of open and transparent process is what preserves and legitimizes government of, for, and by the people. May God continue to bless Cullman County.

By Daniel Moss
/Carmen Moss

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Small Business of the Month - November 2015

The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce and this month’s sponsor, Jack’s Western & Outdoor Wear, would like to congratulate Business Solutions of Cullman for receiving the Small Business of the Month award for November. Business Solutions of Cullman has been a part of Cullman since 1954. Originally they were part of The Cullman Times and went by the name Cullman Times Office Supply. In 1997, they moved to their current location at 414 3rd St SE and remodeled the old East Side Shell service station. With the move, their name was changed to Bryan Business Solutions, Inc. After the tornadoes of April 2011, Mrs. Betty Bryan sold the business to the current owner Steve Singleton, and Business Solutions of Cullman, LLC was formed. Their current staff has been here through all these changes still offering the same friendly, quality service.

Selection for the Small Business of the Month is made through an open nomination process. Each month, a sponsoring business helps celebrate and acknowledge the small business winner. If you have a local business you would like to nominate for their outstanding service, please contact Ben Smith at bsmith@cullmanchamber.org.

In order to qualify as a Small Business of the Month winner, businesses must meet the following criteria:

- Must have fewer than 100 employees.
- A member in good standing with the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce.
- Is active as a volunteer or frequently participates in Chamber functions.
- Maintains a creative, innovative, or unique approach to business.
- Provide superior customer service and/or products.

Monthly winners will be entered into nomination for the Small Business of the Year award which will be presented at the annual meeting of the Chamber. Congratulations once again!

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By Daniel Moss
/Carmen Moss

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The 2015-16 COC Adult Leadership Class, sponsored by Anytime Fitness, held its monthly meeting on Nov. 3, 2015, to learn more about health care in Cullman County.

“I feel like we only began to scratch the surface in terms of the intricacies of the health care world,” said class member John Richter, senior pastor at St. John’s Evangelical Protestant Church. “The needs are truly overwhelming, even in a community of our size.”

The day started when Melissa Edge with Hospice of Cullman County discussed the critical role hospice care plays for many Cullman area residents.

The class boarded a CARTS bus and visited the Good Samaritan Health Clinic, where director Jolanda Hutson gave a tour, and a visit to the Folsom Center for a tour from Hannah Brown and Jennifer Graves with USA Health Care.

“The Folsom Center is probably the nicest facility I have ever been to as far as a Nursing home/assisted living,” said class member Amy Handley, revenue office for the City of Cullman. “I fought back tears the entire time! That was also the first time I have ever been in the Good Samaritan Health Clinic and it amazed me how nice and clean and welcoming it was.”

The next stop was Cullman Regional Medical Center, where the group had lunch, met with CEO James Clements and received a tour from Lindsey Dossey, marketing and public relations manager for CRMC.

“Due to the fact I had not been to the hospital in my short time in Cullman, it was eye opening to see that a regional medical facility could have the advancements in care and in their operating process that could challenge much larger facilities in larger cities,” said class member Lane Butcher, division manager at Cullman Cabinet & Supply Co.

The last stop of the day was the Reid House where Chris Van Dyke, executive director for Mental Healthcare of Cullman, gave the class a tour of the year-old facility and discussed “Every place we went and each person we met was interesting but personally, the information gained from visiting the Mental Health Care facility was the most informative and helpful,” Butcher said. “Health care in Cullman has many levels and many facets but all of them seem to work together to support each other and in turn, supports the community.”

Thanks to Chick-fil-A for providing Breakfast and Visiting Angels sponsoring November’s health care focused session.

November’s meeting marked the second out of eight classes in this year’s program. Class members have studied Agriculture (October) and Health Care (November). Remaining lessons include Local Government (December), Criminal Justice (January), Quality of Life (February) State Government (March), Education (April) and Economic Development (May).
Come join us in the morning on Wednesday, December 16th for delicious coffee and great discussion at our Morning Blend, held every third Wednesday of each month from 8:00-9:00 a.m. in the common room at the Chamber. Chamber staff will welcome members and visitors to the chamber building every month to discuss the hottest topics in business and share tips, ideas and viewpoints. The Chamber’s Morning Blend is presented by Starbucks and is sponsored by Culpepper Real Estate. Thank you to our sponsors for their investment in the Cullman community!

**4th Quarter Industry Tour - Royal Technologies**

On November 12th, 2015 the Agriculture, Business and Industry (ABI) Committee of the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce hosted its 4th Quarter Industry Tour at Royal Technologies, sponsored by REHAU Automotive, LLC. Ben Smith, Director of Small Business & Workforce Solutions at the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce, commented that the tour “provided significant insight into one of the many industrial entities that help promote economic stability throughout our community.”

Royal Technologies is an advanced engineering and manufacturing company serving industries as diverse as automotive, furniture, and consumer products. By utilizing advanced molding, value-added assembly, and advanced fabrication techniques, Royal is able to manufacture an incredibly wide variety of items that range from integral skin polyurethane foams, to molded cup holders that fit inside your Ford F150.

Royal structures itself as an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) company, and as such their employees share a tremendous sense of pride and ownership in the work they do every day. Royal Technologies’ goal is to perform better than they did the day before and adopt a mission to deliver a perfect product, on time, under cost control without compromising the environment.

Royal’s philosophy of conserving natural resources and protection of the environment is demonstrated by their commitment through continuous improvements in areas such as prevention of pollution, compliance to all applicable regulations, health and safety, and Quality Management Systems.

Royal Technologies of Cullman just celebrated its five-year anniversary on December 2, 2015. They currently provide jobs to 120 full-time employees. Thank you for being a part of the Cullman community and providing excellent employment opportunities to the area.
As promised in last month’s edition of our Eyes of Progress newsletter, we have collected all our check presentation pictures from our Paint the Town class winners! A big ‘Thank you!’ to Webb Wheel for sponsoring an event that cultivates and nourishes an appreciation for the arts in our community. We had a great turnout this year with over 26 area classrooms participating. As you can see, their artwork speaks for itself. Each winning class took home a monetary award, and the overall winner had a class meal provided by Chick-fil-A. Winning classes were awarded a total of $1,500.00 to go toward school art supplies. Congratulations again to Vinemont Elementary, Cullman Middle School, St. Bernard Preparatory School, St. Paul’s Lutheran, Cold Springs Elementary, and Hanceville High School.