

2015 In Review

Presented to the
Greater Aiken Chamber of Commerce
November 19, 2015
By Bart Blackwell
2015 Chair



Continued the momentum

- ▶ The Aiken Chamber's 2015 program of work continued its second year of a multi-year process that creates viable, proactive mechanisms that drive **Economic Vitality** initiatives.

- ▶ Reawaken and re-engage the general public and business community about the needs necessary for business growth and job creation
- ▶ Raise awareness of the fact that business climate is the #1 factor of a successful community
- ▶ Allow businesses to grow and thrive
- ▶ Free businesses from excessive taxes, unnecessary regulations, and onerous local government processes



Key talking points

Clear, effective communications with Chamber members, elected officials, and the general public

Key Economic Vitality Initiatives from 2015



Business and Community Development

- ▶ Evaluated the first year of the Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!), further refined a strategy for future recruitment, and recruited students for the 2016 class. YEA! is a nationally recognized program that transforms middle and high school students into real, confident entrepreneurs during the academic school year.
- ▶ Added year #2 to the annual community benchmarking process to aid in community decision making to measure the Aiken community's programs, processes, performance, efficiencies, and effectiveness. The 2015 process evaluated the community's progress.

YEA!

Benchmarking

Business and Community Development

- ▶ Completed an aspirational cities tour with 48 business and community leaders.
- ▶ Traveled to Greenville, SC, and Winston Salem and Raleigh, NC.
- ▶ Best practices, innovation, vision continuity through leadership changes
- ▶ Worked with the City of Aiken to develop a vision statement that will serve as the basis of a roadmap for a successful economic future for Aiken.

Aspirational Cities

Vision

Public Affairs

- ▶ Successful ordinance change for the development of downtown structures
- ▶ Mayoral forum for business community
- ▶ 1% hospitality tax passed for economic development
- ▶ A Business Vitality Mgr. was hired for City of Aiken based on the Chamber's recommendation of adding the position



Business Perspective

Membership Services

- ▶ Launched new website – mobile friendly
- ▶ Added 10 new no-cost business education seminars through a partnership with SCORE
- ▶ First Friday Means Business breakfast sold out every month.
- ▶ Members dues spent wisely – Clean audit



Benefits of Membership

- ▶ State of Our Community
- ▶ Guide to Government
- ▶ Women In Business
- ▶ Business Academy
- ▶ Aiken's Makin'
- ▶ First Friday Means Business
- ▶ Business After Hours Ambassadors program
- ▶ Annual Dinner
- ▶ Industry Appreciation Golf
- ▶ Cost of Living Index
- ▶ Ribbon Cuttings
- ▶ Membership Recruitment
- ▶ Database management
- ▶ Financial management
- ▶ Website development
- ▶ Information services
- ▶ ----- and 1,001 other things



Existing Programs Continue

2015 Initiatives, model programs,
and daily operations