



THE CORNER

A PUBLICATION OF THE SOUTHWEST MOBILE COUNTY CHAMBER

"Stronger Business. Stronger Community."



05.26



President: Leigh West

STRONGER

BUSINESS

STRONGER

COMMUNITY

Dear Chamber Partners,

As we step into the month of May, I'm reminded of a simple truth: everything we accomplish as a Chamber starts with you. Our partners - businesses, organizations, and individuals - are the driving force behind our mission. Your support, your involvement, and your belief in what we're building together are what keep this Chamber moving forward every single day.

Before we look ahead, I want to say what a terrific time we had at the 2026 Business Expo in April. It was an incredible showcase of our local business community, filled with energy, connections, and opportunities. Events like that are a perfect example of what happens when our partners show up and engage, we all grow stronger together.

One of our favorite traditions each year is coming up on May 1 - our Annual Partner Appreciation Crawfish Boil. This is such a fun event and a great opportunity to unwind, connect, and celebrate the relationships that make this Chamber so special. It's our way of saying thank you for all that you do, and I truly hope you'll join us. (You won't be able to miss me - I'll be the gal eating all the crawfish she can!)

We'll continue the momentum with our May Small Business of the Year Awards Luncheon on Wednesday, May 6. This is always a meaningful event as we recognize and celebrate the outstanding businesses in our community. Our finalists represent the very best of our community, and the winner will be announced during the luncheon. We are also honored to welcome Mayor Spiro Cheriogotis as our guest speaker. It will be a great time to connect, gain insight, and celebrate local success.

On Thursday, May 7 at 7:00 a.m., we invite you to join us for the National Day of Prayer. This special gathering is a time for our community to come together, reflect, and lift up our nation, leaders, schools, businesses, and families. It's a meaningful way to begin the day, grounded in faith and hope, and strengthened by community.

Later in the month, we'll host Coffee with the Chamber on May 19 at 7:30 a.m. This is a relaxed and welcoming opportunity to network with fellow Chamber members, share ideas, and build relationships that can make a lasting impact on your business.

As always, I encourage you to stay engaged and take advantage of the many opportunities the Chamber offers. Whether it's attending events, volunteering, or simply connecting with a fellow partner, your involvement makes a difference. You can always stay up to date on upcoming events and opportunities by visiting our website at business.swmchamber.com/events.

And if you ever have questions, are looking for ways to get more involved, or just want to talk Chamber, I'm always happy to grab coffee or lunch. Those conversations are invaluable, and they help shape the future of our organization.

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to the SouthWest Mobile County Chamber. We are proud to stand alongside you, and I look forward to celebrating, connecting, and growing together throughout the month of May.

Warm regards,

Leigh West

Roto-Rooter Plumbing & Water Cleanup

Director, Growth & Brand Strategy

May Events:

1

Partner Appreciation

Time: 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm

Join us for our Partner Appreciation event as we celebrate and thank our valued partners for their continued support and commitment to our community. We look forward to an evening of connection and appreciation.

19

Coffee with the Chamber

Time: 7:30 am - 8:30 am

Our monthly Coffee with the Chamber is a great opportunity to network with other business leaders and representatives. This event is open for both current SWMCC partners as well as prospective partners.

6

Monthly Business Luncheon

Time: 11:30 am - 1:00 pm

Location: John C. Williams Auditorium

Speaker: Mayor Spiro Cheriogotis

Caterer: Naman's Catering

22

TALL Applications Due

Applications for the SWMCC's TALL Scholarship Program are due on May 22nd. Applications can be found online or in the Tillman's Corner Community Center.

7

National Day of Prayer

Time: 7:00 am - 8:00 am

Location: Mobile Police Department Precinct 2

Join us in observance of the National Day of Prayer, a time for our community to come together in reflection, unity, and gratitude. We will gather to lift up our leaders, families, and nation in prayer, joining with others across the country in this meaningful tradition.

25

Memorial Day

In observance of Memorial Day, our offices will be closed as we take time to honor and remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to our country. We will resume normal business hours on the next business day.

18

CAP Meeting

Time: 4:30 pm to 5:30 pm

Location: John C. Williams Auditorium

SMIA hosts a Community Advisory Panel (CAP) Meeting each month. The objective is to provide citizens the opportunity for an open dialogue with industry, to help citizens better understand industry, and to help local industry understand community concerns.

29

June Luncheon Preregistration Deadline

The deadline to purchase an online ticket for the June Luncheon is May 29th at 5:00 pm.

No tickets will be sold at the door.

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May Luncheon:

Speaker:



Spiro Cheriogotis
Mayor of Mobile

Over the past decade, Mobile and Coastal Alabama have experienced unprecedented economic growth and generational investments in public infrastructure, amenities, and quality of life. Mayor Cheriogotis is focused on continuing that momentum while also ensuring that all Mobilians have an opportunity to share in their city's success.

Guided by a commitment to effective and transparent government, Mayor Cheriogotis has prioritized the fundamentals that make great cities thrive — safe neighborhoods, reliable infrastructure, effective public services, a vibrant workforce, and a pro-business climate at City Hall and beyond.

His administration is also committed to advancing transformational projects that will shape Mobile's future for generations, including the completion of the Mobile International Airport, the I-10 Mobile River Bridge, a new waterfront park at Brookley, and the highly anticipated Mobile Arena.

Together with continued investments in parks, public facilities, and community amenities, these efforts reflect Mayor Cheriogotis' vision of a city that nurtures the next generation of Mobilians and welcomes new families eager to plant roots in our community.

Before his election as Mayor, Cheriogotis built a distinguished career in public service and law. After earning his Juris Doctor from the University of Alabama School of Law, he began his career as a prosecutor with the Mobile County District Attorney's Office, where he worked tirelessly to protect citizens and uphold justice. He later served as a defense attorney, gaining a well-rounded perspective on the criminal justice system.

In 2018, he was elected as a District Court Judge in Mobile County and was later selected by his colleagues to serve as Presiding District Judge. His tenure on the bench was marked by fairness, integrity, and an unwavering commitment to public safety and justice. Feeling called to serve in another capacity, Judge Cheriogotis stepped down from the bench in 2025 to run for mayor.

Mayor Cheriogotis and his wife, Lucy Greer Cheriogotis, are deeply rooted in the Mobile community. Married in 2012, they are the proud parents of four children and active members of St. Paul's Episcopal Church. They are active supporters of several local organizations, including the Boys & Girls Clubs of South Alabama, Light of the Village, and the Mobile Lions Club.

Luncheon Sponsors:

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We extend our deepest gratitude to the sponsors of our Small Business of the Year Awards Luncheon, whose generous support makes this signature celebration of local excellence possible. Your partnership helps us honor the outstanding businesses that strengthen and shape our community.

A very special thank you goes to our Presenting Sponsor, Polysurveying, for your exceptional leadership and unwavering commitment to supporting this event. Your continued investment in our organization and our business community is truly appreciated and plays a vital role in elevating this recognition program year after year.

We are proud to highlight and thank all of our sponsors in this month's newsletter for helping bring this celebration to life.

BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

The Southwest Mobile County Chamber is proud to announce the Top Three Finalists for Business of the Year, recognizing outstanding achievement, leadership, and community impact. These businesses exemplify excellence in service, innovation, and commitment to strengthening our local economy and community.



Century Bank — With a long tradition of personalized service, Century Bank delivers comprehensive personal and business banking options, including checking and savings accounts, loans, merchant services, and secure online tools tailored to fit customer needs. Their community-focused approach emphasizes accessibility, consistent service quality, and financial support for local growth.

Dees Pecan Co. — A family-owned Alabama tradition since 1925, Dees Pecan Co. is known for its high-quality pecans, gourmet candies, pecan coffees, and Southern confections. What began as a small retail operation has grown into a destination for locals and visitors alike, offering handcrafted products and gift baskets that celebrate local flavor and heritage.

Hyatt Studios Mobile — Embodying modern hospitality in the heart of Mobile, Hyatt Studios delivers stylish accommodations, contemporary amenities, and exceptional guest experiences. As part of a globally recognized brand, Hyatt Studios enhances local tourism and business travel with thoughtfully designed spaces that blend comfort and convenience.

We are honored to announce that Mayor Spiro Cheriogotis will be joining us at the Small Business of the Year Luncheon to help present the 2026 Business of the Year Award. This event highlights the importance of celebrating and supporting our local business community. Together, we look forward to coming together as a community to recognize our Top Three Finalists and celebrate the achievements, growth, and contributions of our business leaders during this special event.

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The Shoulder of the Central Gulf Coast



Director: Tina Poiroux

Have you seen the new “Welcome to Tillman’s Corner” sign? Every time I pass it, I am reminded of the momentum building across our community and the pride we are collectively investing in its future. It is a visible marker of progress, but more importantly, it represents the spirit of collaboration that continues to grow throughout our area.

The Gateway Initiative beautification project remains one of the most meaningful and forward-looking efforts I have had the privilege to help advance as Executive Director. This initiative is about far more than physical improvements. It is about creating a strong sense of place, fostering community pride, and ensuring that every entrance into Tillman’s Corner reflects the care, value, and potential of those who live and work here.

As we continue this work, I am continually encouraged by the partnerships forming between local businesses, property owners, civic leaders, and volunteers who share a common goal of enhancing our community’s appearance and long-term vitality. From landscaping and signage improvements to broader corridor enhancements, each effort contributes to a more welcoming and cohesive identity for our area. These changes do not happen in isolation—they are the result of consistent engagement and shared investment.

Equally important to this progress is ongoing involvement in Chamber programs and community activities. The Chamber serves as a hub for connection, collaboration, and advocacy, bringing together businesses of all sizes to support initiatives like Gateway and many other efforts that strengthen our local economy. Through participation in networking events, volunteer opportunities, educational programs, and community gatherings, partners play an active role in shaping the direction and success of our region.

I strongly encourage businesses that have not yet engaged to consider the value of becoming part of the Chamber. Partnership offers not only visibility and resources, but also a meaningful opportunity to contribute to initiatives that directly impact community development and beautification efforts. The strength of our work is greatly enhanced when more voices are at the table.

I also encourage continued participation from those already involved—to stay engaged, to share ideas, and to remain active in both Chamber and community initiatives. It is through consistent involvement that we are able to sustain progress and build on the foundation we are creating together.

As we look ahead, I remain optimistic and inspired by what we can accomplish collectively. The Gateway Initiative is just one example of what is possible when a community comes together with intention and pride. Together, we are not only improving how Tillman’s Corner looks—we are strengthening how it feels, how it functions, and how it is experienced by all who come through it.

Best regards,

Tina Poiroux

Executive Director

SouthWest Mobile County Chamber of Commerce



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Rock & Roll Offs

2026 Business Expo - Thank you

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to everyone who helped make this year’s Business Expo a success. This event would not have been possible without the generous support of our sponsors, the participation of our vendors, and the hard work of our volunteers and staff.

A special thank you to our event sponsors (listed alongside this article) for your continued investment in our community and for helping bring this event to life.

We also appreciate all participating businesses for showcasing your products and services, as well as our volunteers for your time and dedication behind the scenes.

Thank you to all who attended and supported the Expo—we look forward to building on this success in the future.



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PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION



At the heart of a strong business community are partners who consistently invest in local people, service, and progress. Hembree Heating & Air Conditioning is a standout example of that commitment in action.

Serving Mobile and Baldwin County since 1969, Hembree Heating & Air Conditioning has built a reputation rooted in reliability, integrity, and long-standing customer relationships. As a family-owned business spanning three generations, they continue to deliver trusted residential and commercial HVAC services with a focus on comfort, efficiency, and quality workmanship. From routine maintenance and system repairs to full installations and emergency services, their experienced technicians are known for their responsiveness and professionalism, helping ensure comfort for homes and businesses year-round.

Beyond their technical expertise, Hembree Heating & Air Conditioning demonstrates what true partnership looks like through their active support of community initiatives, local events, and Chamber involvement. Their continued engagement reflects a genuine commitment to the growth and success of the region. We are proud to recognize their dedication and appreciate the important role they play in strengthening our business community.

GUIDING THE GROWTH



Strong communities are shaped by leaders who serve with purpose, and Chamber Diplomat Rocky Fremin of Rock & Roll Offs is a shining example. As a respected business owner and civic leader, Rocky has made a meaningful impact across Mobile and Baldwin Counties through her commitment to reliability, integrity, and community improvement.

In addition to leading her business, Rocky serves as Vice President of Infinite Opportunities, where she supports initiatives focused on affordable housing, food pantries, veteran and women's homes, and community development. Her dedication to service is evident in both her professional work and her hands-on involvement in efforts that uplift others.

Rocky is also a passionate advocate for environmental stewardship, actively supporting organizations such as Alabama PALS, Alabama Coastal Cleanup, and Keep Mobile Beautiful. Her leadership and volunteerism have earned recognition at the local and state levels, including multiple Governor's Awards for Coastal Cleanup.

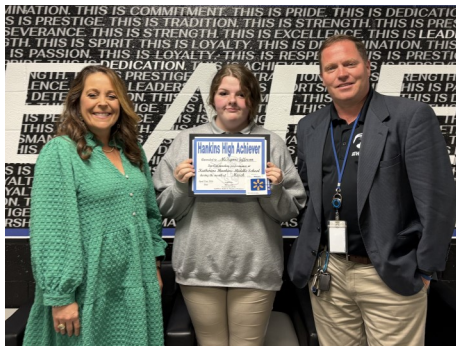
As a Chamber Diplomat, Rocky plays a vital role in supporting and connecting partners, helping to strengthen the business community. Her continued commitment to service, leadership, and giving back makes her a true force in guiding the growth of our region.

Learning Leadership:

Star Student Program:

Each month, the SouthWest Mobile County Chamber of Commerce recognizes students from local elementary schools for their dedication to learning. This Program would not be possible without our Star Student Sponsors. Congratulations to the following students who were recognized on Wednesday, April 1st, 2026:

- **Sutherlyn Mixon** from Bright Academy sponsored by Payroll Vault
- **Asher Woodward** from Cottage Hill Christian Academy sponsored by Brian Lancaster, State Farm
- **Colton Burke** Hollinger's Island Elementary sponsored by Evonik Corporation
- **Mason Jones** from Meadowlake Elementary sponsored by Pilot
- **Makenna Lewis** from Nan Gray Davis Elementary sponsored by BLP Mobile Paint
- **Hayden Parker** from Pearl Haskew Elementary sponsored by Roberts Brothers - The Sessions Team
- **Madelyn Pechar** from W.C. Griggs Elementary sponsored by Alabama Power



Hankins High Achiever:

The SouthWest Mobile County Chamber of Commerce is proud to recognize McKynna Jefferson, a student at Hankins Middle School, as this month's Hankins High Achiever, proudly sponsored by The Grounds.

McKynna is described by her teacher as "the epitome of a perfect student," consistently demonstrating a strong work ethic, responsibility, and a positive attitude each day. She approaches her studies with dedication and can always be counted on, both in the classroom and beyond. Her teacher also shared appreciation for McKynna's trustworthiness, noting she is a dependable student who represents her class well in all situations.

T.A.L.L. Scholarship Program:

The SouthWest Mobile County Chamber of Commerce is proud to celebrate the successful completion of another year of the T.A.L.L. (Tillman's Corner Area Learning Leadership) Program with our recent Commencement Ceremony. This special event recognized the hard work, growth, and accomplishments of our students as they completed the program and were awarded their well-earned scholarships.

Throughout the year, these students have participated in a variety of leadership development sessions, career exploration opportunities, and hands-on experiences designed to prepare them for future success. The commencement ceremony served as a meaningful milestone, highlighting their dedication and the impact of the program on their personal and professional growth.

This program would not be possible without the continued support of our dedicated mentors and volunteers. Their time, guidance, and willingness to invest in the next generation play a vital role in shaping these students into confident, capable leaders. From leading sessions to offering encouragement and real-world insight, their contributions make a lasting difference.

We are incredibly proud of our T.A.L.L. graduates and look forward to seeing the paths they pursue in the future. **Applications for upcoming seniors are open now, with the deadline taking place this month.** The Chamber remains committed to supporting leadership development and providing opportunities that strengthen both our students and our community.



School Supply Drive:

As we prepare for our upcoming Kids Day event, we are proud to once again host our annual School Supply Drive to support local students and families throughout our community. This initiative has become an important part of our outreach efforts, helping ensure children are equipped with the tools they need to start the school year with confidence.

Each year, the Chamber works diligently to prepare and distribute between 800 and 1,200 backpacks filled with essential school supplies for elementary-aged children. For many families, the rising cost of school supplies can be a challenge, and this event helps ease that burden while giving students the opportunity to begin the year ready to learn and succeed.

We invite our businesses, partners, and community members to be part of this meaningful effort by donating new school supplies such as notebooks, pencils, crayons, folders, and other classroom essentials. These contributions go directly into the hands of local children and make a lasting impact on their educational experience.

The School Supply Drive is more than just a collection effort—it is a reflection of the generosity and care within our community. Through Kids Day, we are able to combine a fun, family-friendly event with a purposeful mission that supports the next generation.



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CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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KIDS DAY

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COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

Deputy of the Month:

The Southwest Mobile County Chamber is proud to recognize Deputy Riley Waites of the Mobile County Sheriff's Office for exceptional service and dedication to our community.

Deputy Waites consistently demonstrates professionalism, reliability, and a strong commitment to public safety. Through his daily efforts, he has shown a deep dedication to protecting and serving the citizens of Mobile County, while building trust and strengthening relationships within the community.

His work reflects the values and mission of the Mobile County Sheriff's Office, and we are grateful for their continued service and leadership in the field.



Officer of the Month:

The SWMCC is also proud to recognize Detective Blakely Miles of the Mobile Police Department for outstanding dedication and service to our community.

Detective Miles exemplifies professionalism, integrity, and commitment in every aspect of her work. Through consistent attention to detail, strong investigative skills, and a deep dedication to public safety, Detective Miles has made a meaningful impact in protecting and serving the citizens of Mobile.

Her efforts reflect not only personal excellence but also the high standards and values upheld by the Mobile Police Department.



Brought to You By:

The SWMCC would like to thank Century Bank for sponsoring these programs. We appreciate their willingness to recognize such outstanding members of our community.



THE REAL ESTATE CORNER:



Vernon, California-based Bender CCP plans to open a new Gulf Coast facility in Mobile Commerce Park, expanding to support growing shipbuilding and ship repair activity along the region's waterfront, company officials said. The project includes a 22,000-square-foot machine shop at 5502 Todd Acres Drive in West Mobile which represents a \$4.1 million investment. The company expects to employ up to 10 workers at the site by the end of

the year, with potential for added hiring as operations scale. The facility will provide propulsion shaft machining and other specialized services for U.S. Navy vessels and commercial maritime operators. The expansion marks Bender CCP's first Gulf Coast location, positioning the company closer to key shipbuilding and repair hubs. The company holds certifications from Naval Sea Systems Command, the American Bureau of Shipping and the International Organization for Standardization under ISO 9001 standards: certifications critical to supporting both defense-related work and commercial maritime contracts requiring strict quality and compliance standards.

Aspect Aerospace, a startup based in West Mobile, has secured \$2.4 million in funding to advance ultra-small satellites designed for very low Earth orbit, marking a step for the region's newly emerging technology sector. The funding includes a \$1.9 million Small Business Innovation Research award from the U.S. Space Force. The company's technology aims to deploy as many as 100 circuit board-sized satellites from a single host spacecraft to deliver high-resolution space weather data at lower cost than traditional satellite missions. A spinoff of the University of South Alabama, the company has also participated in gBETA Gulf Coast and is supported by Innovation Portal. Founder and CEO Drew Russ said the company is targeting an on-orbit deployment in early 2027 following validation work with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory.

New South Lumber Co., Inc. is investing \$10.5 million to expand its facility in Axis, continuing a series of capital investments tied to the region's forestry and manufacturing base. The project includes installation of a dual-path continuous dry kiln to increase capacity and efficiency. The company said the expansion will keep more than 250 jobs and strengthen the region's forest products industry, which is still a key component of the local economy. "Canfor's continued investment reflects a strong vote of confidence in Mobile County's workforce and business environment," District 2 Commissioner Connie Hudson said. "This expansion not only supports more than 250 jobs but also strengthens one of our core industries positioning Mobile County for continued growth and long-term success." Construction began in April, with completion expected by June.

For questions or news tips about local real estate, please email ron@hflend.com or call/text 251-219-8914.

By: Ron Sivak

ALL-AMERICAN KIDS DAY

Kid's Day 2026: Community Event Information

The Southwest Mobile County Chamber is excited to share details for Kid's Day 2026, a fun-filled community event designed for families across our area. This year's theme is All-American – "Proud to Play the American Way."

Kid's Day is a free event open to children ages 4–12, featuring over 50 vendors including food trucks, entertainment, a petting zoo wrestling demonstrations, and much more. It's a day focused on family fun, community engagement, and creating lasting memories.

Backpacks & Uniforms:

Free backpacks and school uniforms will be provided for children ages 4–12 on a first come, first served basis while supplies last.

Registration Information:

There is no pre-registration for Kid's Day. All registration will take place on Saturday, July 25th beginning at 9:00 AM.

Parking & Transportation:

Parking is available at First Baptist Tillman's Corner and a trolley will run from beginning at 8:00 AM for convenient transportation.

2026 Kids Day: Vendor Registration Now Open!

The Southwest Mobile County Chamber is excited to announce that planning is underway for the 2026 Kids Day, one of our most anticipated community events of the year!

This family-friendly celebration brings together local businesses, organizations, and families for a day filled with fun, learning, and community connection. From interactive activities and entertainment to hands-on experiences for kids, Kids Day continues to be a highlight for the Southwest Mobile County area. This year's theme is All-American, with the tagline "Proud to Play, the American Way." We look forward to a vibrant celebration that highlights community pride and patriotic spirit.

We are currently encouraging vendors, sponsors, and community partners to participate in this year's event. Kids Day offers a great opportunity to showcase your organization, engage with local families, and support a meaningful community tradition. Space is limited, and early registration is encouraged to secure participation. Join us in making the 2026 Kids Day another unforgettable experience for families across our region!



Volunteer Information:

The Southwest Mobile County Chamber is excited to share a special opportunity to get involved in Kids Day 2026, one of our largest and most impactful community events. To ensure this event runs smoothly and provides a fun, safe, and engaging experience for all families, we are in need of 60–100 volunteers. Volunteers play a critical role in assisting with event setup, activity stations, guest support, and overall event operations. Your time and support help create a welcoming environment where local children can enjoy a memorable day of fun and connection.

We recognize that not every business is able to host a booth at the event, but there is still a meaningful way to participate. Businesses are encouraged to sign up as a volunteer team, providing staff members who want to give back an opportunity to make a direct impact in our community.

Kids Day continues to be a cornerstone event for our region, bringing together families, schools, and local organizations. In addition to activities and entertainment, the event also supports community efforts such as providing backpacks and essential school supplies to children in need, helping ensure students are prepared for success.

We invite you to be part of this important effort. Whether you volunteer individually or as a team, your involvement helps strengthen our community and supports the next generation.

"Proud to Play, the American Way!"

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JOIN TODAY!

Joining a local chamber like the SouthWest Mobile County Chamber of Commerce is one of the most effective ways for businesses to increase visibility, build credibility, and grow within their community. Chamber partnership helps businesses improve their local SEO presence, connect with other business leaders, and gain valuable marketing exposure through directories, events, and social media promotion. Partners also benefit from networking opportunities, business referrals, community partnerships, and advocacy for local economic growth. By joining a chamber, businesses strengthen their online and local reputation while building relationships that lead to new customers, collaborations, and long-term success in the marketplace.



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