

Effingham County Chamber of Commerce 2021 Annual Report



EFFINGHAM
COUNTY
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Chamber Offers Basic Excel Training Class

The chamber and **Savannah Technical College** presented a 4-hour Basic Excel for Business training workshop in January focused on the important skills to help owners or managers organize and use data. **Keith Fletcher** of Savannah Tech's Business and Industry Department led the workshop at the college's Effingham Campus.

Effingham Health System buys IDA, Chamber Building for Doctors' Offices

Effingham Health System in March purchased the building on Highway 21 in Springfield that housed the Industrial Development Authority and Chamber of Commerce. The health system will use the building at 520 W. Third Street for additional doctors' offices. The IDA and chamber began looking for new, temporary office space to occupy together by the end of May.



Direct Mail Ad Brochure Sells Out

The chamber launched an affordable direct mail marketing program exclusive to our members in the spring. Advertising space in the brochure sold out. The chamber distributed a full-color tri-fold brochure to more than 7,000 households in the county area via direct mail during the week of April 12-16.

SIDC and Chamber Host Effingham Diversity and Inclusion Conference

The Savannah Interagency Diversity Council and the Effingham Chamber hosted the first Effingham County Diversity Conference on April 29 at Compassion Christian Church's Effingham Campus. Speakers included **Anne Weisel**, Head of Lower School, St. Andrews School; **Kenny Grant**, CEO of Band of Brothers and Sr. Pastor at Calvary Baptist Church; **LaMeisha Hunter Kelly** (shown), Executive Director of Strategic Business Development & Government Affairs at Effingham Health System; **Wayne Dawson**, Executive Director of Savannah-Chatham Fair Housing Council Inc.; and **April Bracken**, Branch Manager/Consumer Lending Officer at **Renasant Bank**, and **Christy Bracken**, Human Resources Director of Five Star Savannah Square. **Tina Browning**, a chamber Ambassador, chaired the event.



Chamber Welcomes 300th Member

In June the chamber reached 300 active chamber members. **Kelley & Kelley Logistics LLC**, a professional, futuristic freight broker provider, founded in 2020 by owners **Tee Kelley** and **James C. Kelley, III**, were the 300th business member. Chamber membership continued to grow during the year, despite the economic effects of COVID-19 and the Delta variant.

Delta Variant Forces Another Postponement of Annual Meeting and Awards

The Chamber's 35th Annual Membership Recognition Banquet, cancelled in 2020 due to the COVID pandemic, was set to be our first in person event on August 19. As restrictions were reduced over the previous months, the Special Events Committee planned the event to be more than just a meeting; rather, to be a celebration of our members.

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Unfortunately, as **Chairman Ryan Thompson** reported in an email to members, a new wave of COVID wasn't just on the horizon; it was here. The Chamber's Board of Directors voted in July to postpone the event a second time. Thompson said the chamber was "committed to having this event and celebrating your accomplishments soon."

Chamber Addresses Hiring Crisis with Job Fair, Information Campaign

In summer, businesses across Effingham County had "Help Wanted" signs out, but few applicants were seizing the opportunities. In an effort to help members cope with the hiring crisis, the chamber held a Job Fair on June 28 in the gymnasium at the Clarence Morgan Sports Complex in Springfield. Thirteen employers participated.

The chamber also accelerated its posting of job listings for members, both on the online Job Board (www.effinghamcounty.com/jobs) and on its social media accounts.

Board of Directors Welcomes Three New Members

The chamber's Board of Directors added three new members in July, selected from an extremely strong group of nominees. They replaced board members whose terms ended June 30. The new members are:

- **Tina Browning**, At Work Banking & Financial Literacy Program Coordinator for Queensborough National Bank & Trust. Tina is an active chamber Ambassador and a graduate of Leadership Effingham in 2020.
- **Darold Ford**, Procurement Manager, Georgia-Pacific Savannah River Mill. Darold is a member of the mill leadership team and a Leadership Effingham graduate in 2018.
- **Tamela Mydell**, owner of Southern Kafe on 17 in Guyton. As a restaurateur and caterer, Tamela brings a needed small business perspective to the Board of Directors. She has served on the county's Joint Comprehensive Plan Committee in 2019.

The chamber thanks **Freddy Long**, **Carrie Thompson** and **Ed Vance** for their faithful longtime service and leadership on the chamber board.

Chamber Moving Offices to Planned Co-Op Business Center in Springfield

The chamber announced plans in July to relocate its offices to the planned Carlson Business Center in downtown Springfield in 2022, after reviewing several proposals. The Carlson Business Center is a redevelopment of the vacant Co-Op building, led by the **City of Springfield's** Downtown Development Authority and developer **Carlson's Springfield Holdings LLC**. The chamber moved into temporary offices at 119B S. Laurel Street in Springfield until the Carlson Business Center is ready.



Leadership Effingham Returns With Class of 2022

In a step toward getting back to in-person activities, the chamber began accepting nominations for the **Leadership Effingham Class of 2022** in August. Participants learn about Effingham County from professionals in government, healthcare administration, education, residential and economic development, community service and law enforcement. Participants will also collaborate with their class to complete a project of significance for the community. A class of 14 future leaders began monthly classes in October.



Pro Cycling Comes to Downtown Springfield in August

Downtown Springfield and Bike Effingham hosted professional bike racing on August 24 as part of USA Crits racing series. Riders competed in races for cash and prizes on a closed, one-kilometer course starting and finishing near the **Mars Theatre**. The chamber was proud to be a sponsor of the competition.



Effingham Parkway Project Breaks Ground

The long-anticipated Effingham Parkway project became a reality, as shovels started moving dirt at a groundbreaking ceremony on September 10. The project consists of constructing a new two-lane roadway that connects Georgia Highway 30 about 1.5 miles west of Highway 21 and Blue Jay Road.



Community Guide and Membership Directory Published

The Effingham County 2021 Community Guide and Business Directory hit newsstands in August, included in the **Effingham Herald**. Our thanks to the Herald and its staff for an attractive and informative guide to our county, and to the advertisers who made the publication possible.

Chamber Supports E-commerce Referendum to Fix Competitive Disadvantage

The chamber of commerce's Board of Directors urged county voters to approve a referendum on the November 2 countywide ballot to approve an exemption to the *ad valorem* tax on e-commerce inventory held in a fulfillment center. The chamber also promoted renewal of the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) for another six years. The voter information campaign was supported by a contribution from the **Savannah Area Realtors**. Both measures were approved by voters.



Online Election Forums for Rincon Mayor and School Board

The candidates for Mayor of the City of Rincon and for the Board of Education District 2 seat participated in online forum on October 12, presented by the chamber and the **Effingham Herald**. Both forums were streamed live on the chamber's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EffinghamChamber) and uploaded to the chamber's YouTube page (Effingham Chamber)

Thanks to All for a Successful Community Leadership Retreat

The chamber was proud to host the 2021 Community Leadership Retreat in Jekyll Island on October 25 and 26. Our thanks to all the speakers, local leaders and businesspeople who participated. Special thanks to sponsors, **Effingham County IDA, Effingham Health System, Georgia-Pacific, and Georgia Power**, and to **Brandt Herndon, Ryan Thompson, Joe Marchese** and the chamber board for their efforts and guidance to make the retreat a success.

Sen. Jack Hill Honored With Treutlen Award

As COVID pandemic concerns lessened, the chamber continued its return to in-person events with the **2021 Awards Reception** on November 30 at **Local on Laurel** in Springfield. A scaled-down event with light reception food and beverages was highlighted by presentation of the prestigious John Adam Treutlen Award. **Georgia House Majority Leader Jon Burns** announced the late Senator Jack Hill was the award recipient, and presented the award to his daughter, **Dawn Hill Kullberg**.



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Dr. Fran Baker-Witt, Vice Chairman, presented the Small Business of the Year Award to **Greenblade Turf & Sod** owners **Tara and Michael Hart** (*shown right*). **April Brackin**, Branch Manager/AVP at **First Effingham Bank** in Rincon, was chosen the chamber's Beacon Award recipient. The award recognizes the chamber's Ambassador of the Year. The chamber also recognized longtime Office Manager and Membership Coordinator **Becky Shea**, its outgoing board members, its Ambassadors and Members of Distinction. The Reception was sponsored by **Carlson Premier Events**, **Effingham Health System**, **Effingham County IDA**, and **Georgia Power**.



Effingham Chamber Earns Certification From Georgia Chamber Executives Association

We were proud to announce that the Effingham County Chamber earned the **Georgia Certified Chamber** designation from the Georgia Association of Chamber Executives. Only 50 chambers out of more than 150 statewide have been recognized with this distinction. The GACCE presented the Effingham Chamber with a plaque commemorating the designation at its conference in Augusta in November.



The Certified Chamber program was created to facilitate continuing excellence in the chamber of commerce industry and to foster a pro-business environment across the State of Georgia. Chambers must meet high standards for organization, service to their members, professional administration, financial management, communications, and advocacy in order to achieve the designation.

Eggs & Issues Legislative Breakfast Offers Preview of 2022 Legislative Session

The chamber held its annual Eggs & Issues Breakfast on December 8 with **Majority Leader Jon Burns**, **State Representative Bill Hitchens**, and **State Senator Billy Hickman** providing a preview of the 2022 legislative session. The chamber announced its initiative to help develop a definition of "Smart Growth" for Effingham County.

COVID Clouds Parting; Growth a Priority for 2022

The year 2021 was a challenge for businesses and for the chamber, with the Delta Variant dashing hopes for a quick return to normal. It was a year of transition and change, but with encouraging signs for the future. **We are again honored to have played an important role in helping Effingham County businesses survive, thrive, and grow.**

While COVID may never be fully in the past, it's less of a hindrance to "business as usual." Effingham's rapid growth is continuing, presenting challenges to a county that treasures its close-knit, casual character, and its outstanding schools and health services. Effingham's business, government and community leaders need to continue to work together to ensure that the promises of growth can be managed while preserving all that we enjoy about living and doing business here.

