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Chamber Alliance Of Lake County

Press Release

For Immediate Release

Chamber Alliance Survey Results Provide a Vision for the Future

(October 10, 2006) The Chamber Alliance of Lake County recently completed its second annual survey of local Chambers on issues impacting businesses and our communities. The survey was conducted independently by the Business Resources Center at Lake Sumter Community College.

Robert Johnson, President of the Alliance noted that, "This is our second survey of Chambers of Lake County to comprehensively survey the business community on major public policy issues. We now have a clearer understanding of how chamber members feel about a variety of issues. Coupling the results of this survey with last year's survey it becomes clearer that the business community supports growth of the community and business opportunities, but does not like many of the effects of growth. There are many issues our Chamber members want the Chambers to focus on."

Survey results include:

- ❖ **97% of respondents believe that Lake County and the local governments in the County should work together with other community partners to establish a 20 year economic development vision for Lake County.**
- ❖ **89% of respondents believe that Florida laws should limit the use of Eminent Domain (forced sale of property) to acquire land be limited to public purposes (i.e. street, public buildings, infrastructure).**
- ❖ **78% of respondents believe that continued growth of housing development in Lake County is important to their business**

- ❖ **64% of respondents support the establishment of a performance arts facility at LSCC in Leesburg at an estimated cost of \$24 million (\$12 million funded locally).**
- ❖ **55% of respondents believe that the lack of affordable housing will affect their company's ability to hire employees in the future.**
- ❖ **63% of respondents do NOT believe the lack of a mass transit system in Lake County will impact their ability to retain employees and attract customers and clients.**
- ❖ **81% of respondents support a Florida constitutional amendment requiring a 60 percent majority vote on constitutional amendments.**
- ❖ **52% of respondents do NOT support a Florida Constitutional amendment requiring all land use changes be voted on by local referendum in lieu of the current local public hearing process.**
- ❖ **64% of respondents stated that the cost of or access to personal property/liability insurance is becoming a problem for their company.**
- ❖ **56% of respondents believe that local Chambers of Commerce should actively support the establishment of an appointed Superintendent of Schools.**
- ❖ **The top five reported negatives impacts on local business reported are:**
 - 1. Lack of Qualified Employees**
 - 2. Cost of Insurance/Taxes**
 - 3. Cost of Gasoline**
 - 4. Over Development**
 - 5. Regulations/Red Tape**
- ❖ **The top five reported positive impacts on local businesses:**
 - 1. Growth**
 - 2. Community Support**
 - 3. Recreation**
 - 4. Affordable Housing**
 - 5. Competition**

Additional insight into the business community can be found in the 2005 Survey results:

- ❖ **59% of survey respondents felt Lake County was growing too fast but 96% felt it was feasible for local governments to use a balanced approach to address growth.**
- ❖ **96% of survey respondents believed that Lake County, local governments, and the School Board should work together to provide schools and roads in a timely manner.**
- ❖ **82% of respondents believe the Chambers of Commerce in Lake County need to be more actively involved in Public Policy issues that affect our County, State, and municipalities.**
- ❖ **73% of respondents believe Lake County Board of Commissioners should financially support and provide incentives for the initial development of a Class A Office Park for the purpose of attracting high wage employers to the County.**

Susan Martin, Executive Director of the Umatilla Chamber of Commerce commented, “the results of these annual surveys provide a wealth of information for our Chamber and will help business leaders focus on some of these issues, and advocate for positive results.”

The survey results will set the tone and direction for the Alliance’s legislative agenda for 2007. This agenda will be the focus of the Alliance’s hosting of the Lake County Days event in Tallahassee on February 7-8, 2007. The event is designed to provide an opportunity to educate the business and community leaders on the legislative issues that will impact Lake County, and to provide an opportunity for business leaders to communicate with the legislature during their stay at the Capitol.

A local issue that has been a part of each annual survey is the need for a 20-year economic development vision. Robert Johnson, President of the Chamber Alliance, recently made a presentation to the Lake County Board of Commissioners on the need for this strong economic development visioning process. This presentation was a follow up on a variety of public presentations the Alliance has made to support this initiative.

The Chamber Alliance identified a variety of reasons for the need for a new economic development vision. The reasons include:

- **The last economic development visioning process occurred in 1993.**
- **The Comprehensive Plan is limited and restricted by State laws as a long-range vision plan.**

- **New Partners and Partnering Opportunities exist today that were not part of the process in 1993.**
- **There are significant demographic changes requiring additional analysis to determine the long-term impact.**
- **There is an opportunity to improve “quality of life” by planning for the future.**

The County Commission expressed their support for this new vision process and directed staff to begin the process by creating a framework to facilitate the visioning process.

“The development of a current economic development vision for Lake County is critical to both the citizens and businesses, and the support of the effort by the Board of County Commission is a great start to the process,” stated Ray San Fratello, President of the South Lake Chamber of Commerce.

The Chamber Alliance of Lake County is comprised of eight Chambers of Commerce in Lake County, representing 3100 businesses and organizations. The Alliance Chamber membership includes the East Lake, Leesburg, Tavares, Lake Eustis, Mount Dora, Lady Lake, South Lake and Umatilla Chambers.

The purpose of the Chamber Alliance is to assist individual Lake County Chambers in communicating with elected officials, and to encourage the participation of individual Chamber members in the legislative process. The Alliance focuses on addressing local issues that are of common concern to businesses throughout Lake County.