



**FORWARD**  
**WALKER COUNTY**

*The Future is Ours!*

# A Call to Action

Positive economic growth and community well-being always requires long-term strategy, bold approaches and the leadership to make it happen. Walker County public and private sector leaders are in place, willing and able to continue addressing and leveraging the challenges of change through this new *Forward Walker County—The Future is Ours* five-year plan.

Building on the success of the 2007-2011 *Focus Walker County* strategic plan, our 2013-2017 strategy focuses on four key areas:

## Retail and Commercial Growth

Help our existing businesses to not only remain competitive, but to grow and thrive and recruit new retail and commercial companies we want and need to strengthen and diversify our county's business mix.

## Education and Workforce Readiness

Partner with educators and business to improve the quality of K-12 education to help increase test scores and reduce drop-out rates. Assist business and education communities in ensuring that all levels of educational curriculum help meet the existing and future workforce skill sets recommended by business and industry.

## Tourism and Image

Advance the economic welfare of Walker County by building a strong travel and tourism base and to publicize, promote and encourage further development and use of historical, cultural and recreational attractions throughout the county. Continue emphasis on Bass Fishing Tournaments as an economic engine and maximize leverage our position as a member of the Alabama Bass Trail Initiative.

## Leadership and Community Engagement

Emphasize and encourage opportunities for partnerships between the public and private sectors and members of the general citizenry in resolving issues and projects of benefit to our communities.

It is our time to make Walker County all it can and should be—*Forward Walker County—The Future is Ours!*

# Message from The Campaign Co-Chairs

Economic recovery in Walker County is underway and over the next five years will be nothing short of dramatic—especially in view of the soon-to-be-completed Interstate 22.

This growth will bring substantial workforce and retail and commercial opportunities to our county, but with those opportunities comes an equal number of challenges. It is vitally important to balance growth with the impacts of that growth upon community resources, services and infrastructure.

Over the past several months your chamber leadership has been working closely with business, government and other community leaders to ensure that our Walker County communities continue to be a great place to live, work, worship and play—AND operate a business. This **Forward Walker County** five-year plan is the county's road map for orderly, targeted economic growth. The four initiatives focus on Retail and Commercial Growth, Education and Workforce Readiness, Tourism and Image, and Leadership and Community Engagement and are designed to capitalize on our new opportunities while at the same time being able to successfully handle new challenges.

Your investment in these **Forward Walker County** initiatives will result in a return on that investment that translates directly to enhancing the quality of life and well-being of the citizens of Walker County.

We invite you to join us as a Leadership Investor in the **Forward Walker County** five-year plan—***The future is indeed OURS!***

*Glenn Barton, Carol Alexander & Kevin Callahan*



## Retail and Commercial Growth

### *Mission*

The Chamber will expand the tax base and create jobs through the aggressive recruitment, retention and growth of retail and commercial enterprises; while consistently marketing and promoting the area to local, national and international audiences.

*“ In 2004, Jasper was selected as the first expansion location outside our Birmingham market. The community embraced us. We are now a proud community partner, supporting the growth of Jasper and Walker County.”*

*— Paul Liollo  
Jim ‘N Nick’s  
Voted ‘Best BBQ Restaurant’ by  
the Alabama Department of  
Tourism in 2013*



## Objectives

- In partnership with local government, lead the strategic recruitment process of new-to-the-market retail, based on current sales tax leakage and service gap analysis.
- Facilitate a focused effort to diversify the local economic base through the targeted recruitment of high-value commercial entities, in collaboration with local government and higher education institutions.
- Maintain an ongoing “buy local” focus that encourages area residents to keep their sales tax dollars in the community by patronizing local merchants.
- Continue to improve research and local data capability for developers interested in Walker County.
- Work with public agencies to devise plans and ways to make it easy to do business in Walker County.

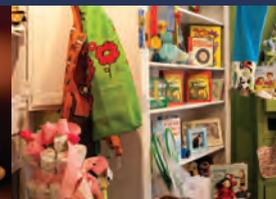


*“We have watched our business grow from a small shop to being voted ‘The Best Place in Walker County to Buy Gifts’. We have come to know and love each and every one of our customers.”*

*— Joan Thornton  
and Carla Kimbrell  
The Very Idea*

## Outcomes

- Partner to recruit three new-to-the-market retail businesses beginning in 2013 that will significantly increase local sales tax revenue and help prevent the need for residents to shop outside of the community.
- Assist with the successful recruitment of a diverse mix of commercial entities so as to create jobs for area residents, reduce the local unemployment rate, grow the tax base and ensure a more stable economic base.
- Continue our successful “Chamber Checks” buy local campaign to increase revenue for local merchants and, therefore, fuel an increase in sales tax revenue.
- Help stimulate new job growth, with a goal of 30-40 new jobs annually.
- Provide residents and tourists more shopping and dining options. Our goal is one new restaurant and two new retail stores each year for the next five years.
- Annually host site selection professionals for a county-wide tour beginning 2014.
- Continue to create and provide suitable information and brochures/packets that highlight the advantages and quality of life in Walker County.
- Annually update the inventory of retail businesses in Walker County in partnership with the county and cities in Walker County and develop desired profiles for each business district.



## Education and Workforce Readiness

### *Mission*

The Chamber will enhance its education and work force development programs throughout Walker County with the intent to assist all citizens in acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge to participate in today's world at work. Further, promote the concept of continuous learning in the general population and encourage collaboration among private sector, educational providers and state training entities to improve education on all levels.

*“The skill sets required of our workforce are robust. An example is our new Epic Electronic Medical Records System that provides a single patient record throughout the Baptist Health System. Partnering with the academic community and the Chamber in workforce initiatives helps individuals to be highly competitive as we choose our future employees.”*

— Dr. Anne Allen  
Walker Baptist Medical Center



## Objectives

- Convene school teachers and administrators, parents, public officials, law enforcement, business leaders and other parties to create a “break the cycle” strategy targeting elementary students as a group, focusing on skills for success and good life choices—with emphasis on staying in school and being drug-free.
  - Shape our future workforce by educating students and parents as to the advantages of today’s technical careers and communicating the skill sets needed and the routes available to master these skills.
  - Advance the skill sets of our existing workforce through skills training partnerships between the Chamber and the county, cities, educational institutions and other entities engaged in creating a workforce that is equipped and ready to go to work.
- Take the lead in convening Bevill State, Walker County and Jasper City school systems, Walker County Center for Technology and Alabama Technology Network to maximize funding for Walker County through the “Career Technical Bond” currently under consideration in the State Legislature.
  - Be actively engaged in the development of Pre-K-16 education policy through consistent interaction with local school administrators.
  - Advocate for and support educational initiatives that have been proven successful in improving test scores and reducing drop-out rates, such as Alabama Math Science and Technology Initiative (AMSTI), Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and The Leader In Me programming.

## Outcomes

- Focus on hands-on, interactive learning experiences providing students real-world information regarding career opportunities. Emphasize technical, manufacturing and professional positions high in math and science skill sets.
- A plan of action that addresses the business community’s current and future workforce needs will be developed by 2014 to be a factor in reducing the area’s unemployment rate and in growing the local tax base.
- Partner with Bevill State and the total education community to implement the plan of action.
- A plan will be developed to offer The Leader In

Me curriculum currently in place in Jasper City Schools, to other elementary schools in Walker County.

- Partner with education officials beginning in 2014 to significantly increase the number of children entering kindergarten who have had a high-quality early childhood education experience.



*“We must stay focused on developing the workforce in Walker County. Bevill State Community College is committed to partnering with both the academic and business communities in the development of innovative educational and training programs incorporating the latest in technological advancement.”*

— Dr. Kim Ennis  
Bevill State Community College



## Tourism and Image

### *Mission*

The Chamber will continue to advance the economic prosperity of Walker County continuously increasing travel and tourism visitor volume. Further, establish an effective destination marketing plan that concentrates on the qualities of Walker County and our region and promotes our area to local, national and international audiences.

*“ I love Walker County. I want everyone to appreciate our home as much as I do. Through the Tourism and Image Initiative we have the perfect opportunity to welcome visitors to Walker County so they can see firsthand what a beautiful, proud, and progressive community we call home.”*

*— Paul Kennedy  
Walker Area Community  
Foundation*



## Objectives

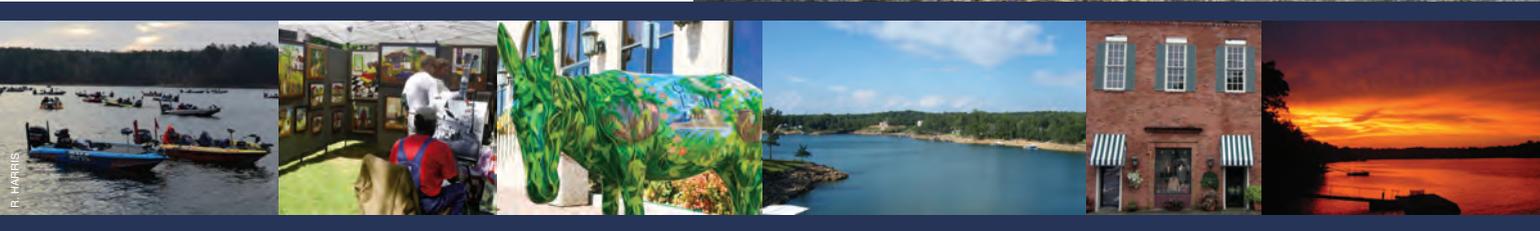
- Position Walker County as not only a good place to visit on the way to or from some other location, but as a primary destination worthy of a multiple day/night stay.
- Continue and increase the advertising plan that includes key travel, fishing and outdoor recreation magazines and other media.
- Participate in consumer/travel/outdoor shows that promote Walker County as a tourist attraction.
- Develop collateral materials that spotlight the characteristics of and the activities within Walker County that appeal to the traveler.
- Investigate the development of a competitive sports and outdoor “experience” marketing program, focusing on both seasonal and year-round activities in Walker County.

## Outcomes

- Produce a marketing and advertising campaign no later than the first quarter of 2014 that promotes the attractions of Walker County.
- Conduct and publicize annual impact studies of major bass tournaments and other tourism events that are recruited into Walker County.
- Continue to develop new collateral materials to promote Walker County based on research of tourism industry trends.
- Attend at least one consumer and travel show per year beginning 2013 that are targeted markets for Walker County.
- Collect and correlate data on the impact of social media and web traffic on tourism and visitors to Walker County, and based on findings, develop new collateral materials to promote the county.

*“The Chamber of Commerce of Walker County is all about partnerships to make our region a destination for tourists and visitors from all around the nation—community leaders, public officials and hundreds of volunteers all working together on programs and events like our bass tournaments—fueling a positive image and adding to the economic well-being of our communities.”*

*— Linda Lewis  
The Chamber of Commerce  
of Walker County*





## Leadership and Community Engagement

### Mission

The Chamber will advocate with the local, state and federal level of government for pro-business legislation that promotes an environment conducive to business needs. Further, the Chamber will help create a community that is attractive to current and potential residents by maintaining a high quality of life and offering a full spectrum of public, private and non-profit leadership opportunities.

*“Partnerships and relationships are vital for any business, and the Chamber is a vehicle for both. Through my participation in Leadership Walker County, I was introduced to the outstanding individuals and personalities that make up a progressive professional environment here in Walker County.”*

— Jack McNeely  
Daily Mountain Eagle



## Objectives

- Partner with all organizations to expand and enhance existing leadership development programs in order to create a pipeline for public, private and non-profit sector leadership opportunities.
- Assist in developing a pool of well-informed,

community-oriented citizens available as future candidates for public office and to give civic, non-profit and economic development organizations qualified prospects to immediately fill volunteer leadership positions.

- Establish the Chamber as the primary voice for business at every level of government and in every public forum.

## Outcomes

- Become an on-going convener with all organizations to fully leverage professionally-managed, engaged and publically-supported non-profit sector entities so as to have a dramatically positive effect on Walker County's quality of life by helping identify and develop plans to address the unmet needs of the community.
- Expand Leadership Walker County, Youth Leadership Walker County, Junior Ambassadors and Job Shadowing programs.
- Develop a Walker County state legislative agenda to advocate with Alabama Senate and House Representatives throughout each year.

- Develop a Walker County congressional agenda to advocate with U.S. Congress members throughout each year.
- Organize an annual legislative trip to Montgomery for chamber members and public officials to conduct face-to-face discussions regarding key business issues.
- Act as the Walker County "clearing house" for legislative activities at city, county, state and federal levels focusing on enhancing a "business friendly" partnership.
- Inform *Forward Walker County* investors in a timely fashion about all bills and legislation that can impact either positively or negatively our pro-business agenda.



*“As an elected official I am in a perfect position to validate the importance of partnerships across the entire spectrum of our communities and the pivotal role the staff and volunteers engaged in the program outreach of our Walker County Chamber of Commerce play in the quality of life we enjoy here.”*

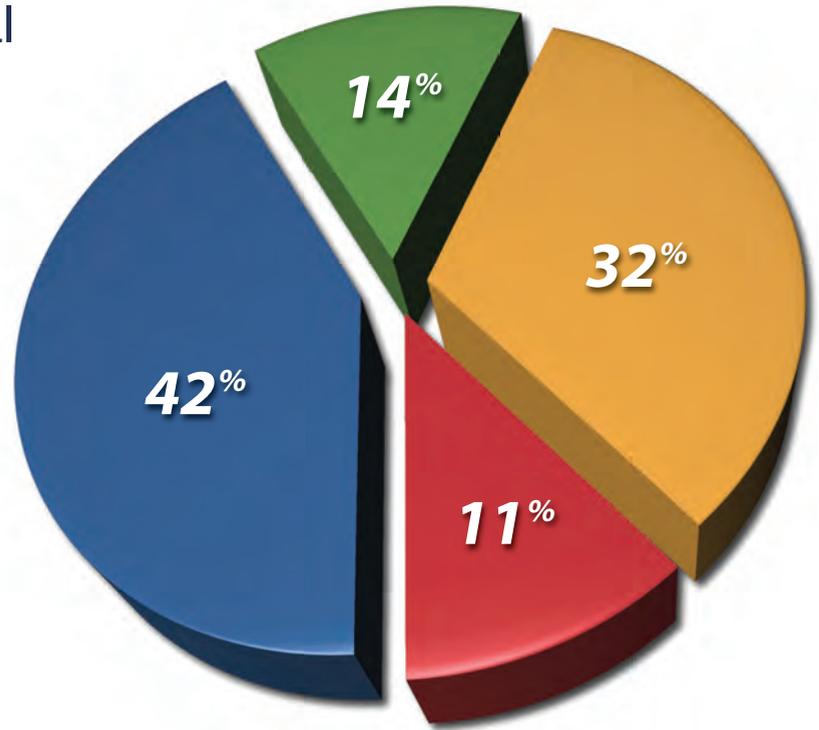
— Jennifer Smith  
Jasper City Council

# The Investment: Our Goal

Annual Budget: \$140,000  
Five-Year Budget: \$700,000

How your investment dollars are spent:

- Retail and Commercial Growth  
\$60,000
- Education and Workforce Readiness  
\$20,000
- Tourism and Image  
\$45,000
- Leadership & Community Engagement  
\$15,000



# Annual Investment Levels

- Community Colleague \$1,000 +
- Growth Partner \$2,500 +
- Leaders Circle \$5,000 +
- President's Council \$7,500 +
- Chairman's Forum \$10,000 +

# Investor Benefits

The investments of companies, organizations and individuals over the next five years in the **Forward Walker County** plan will be used to implement the long-term Business and Community Development Initiatives outlined in our five-year plan.

In return for helping us promote community growth, prosperity and quality of life, investors will receive recognition, special benefits and services such as:

## *Communication on Key Issues:*

- Targeted communication and the opportunity to add input regarding critical community and business issues
- Direct access to the President of the Chamber for counsel and/or communication on key issues that impact your business
- Providing a forum to speak with one voice regarding countywide issues in Montgomery

## *Enhanced Visibility:*

- Introductions to newly recruited business leaders to help position investor businesses
- One-on-one engagement between the chamber leadership and each investor to ensure we are delivering a return on investment
- Exposure to fellow community and business leaders investing in the chamber's economic development efforts
- "Investor Only" invitations to specific presentations and high-level networking opportunities

## *Recognition for Your Level of Support:*

- Recognition as a visionary – clear evidence that you are a major player in advancing the **Forward Walker County** agenda – helping to build stronger communities throughout Walker County
- Participation opportunities on both advocacy and retail/commercial recruiting trips
- Public recognition for your level of support at chamber headquarters, special designation in chamber publications, and at the chamber annual meeting
- Other tailored benefits of specific interest to your business will be developed as part of your ongoing "one-on-one" meetings with **Forward Walker County** leaders



# A Record of Success

## *Economic and Community Development*

- Initiated annual survey of area public and private sector constituents through Retail Strategies consulting firm to analyze leakage and service/business gaps in Walker County
- Implemented program to aggressively market Walker County to developers and retailers for specific retail matches and needs
- Developed and implemented the “Chamber Check” program to encourage consumers to spend their dollars with local retail establishments
- Led team of public and private sector partners to recruit Action Properties to renovate 60,000 square feet of vacant retail space (\$2.5 million construction cost; \$7.5 million annual revenue; 50 new jobs
- Engaged Bayer Properties consulting firm to prepare Trade-Area Study and Retail Site Plan

## *Tourism and Image*

- Recruited and lead coordinator for more than a decade for bass tournaments at Smith Lake—average positive economic impact for the local economy of between \$1.5 million and \$2.0 million for each event
- Obtained Smith Lake designation as one of 11 Alabama waterways on the Alabama Bass Trail
- Partnered with/sponsored workshops with Baptist Medical Center, Walker Area Community Foundation, Red Cross and Salvation Army regarding recovery issue in the tornado aftermath
- Partnered with Bevill State to present Black History month each year
- Produced tourism brochures for the Carl Elliot House Museum and The Bankhead House and Heritage Center

## *Workforce and Education Development*

- Partnered with Bevill State to conduct Career Expos and Job Fairs to bring together employers and job seekers—both unemployed and underemployed
- Produced Walker County Resource and Training Guide
- Sponsored “Leader In Me” curriculum (Steven Covey) at T.R. Simmons Elementary
- Implemented the annual Ground Hog Job Shadow Day –all 9th grade students given actual work place experience
- Sponsor of Bevill State Moon Buggy Project and Robo Camp for High School students
- Sponsor of Walker County Center for Technology Robotics Program
- Partnered with multiple public and private sector entities to produce Youth Leadership Walker County, Leadership Walker County and Junior Ambassadors

## *Governmental Affairs*

- Annual Montgomery Drive-In
- Town Hall meetings throughout Walker County communities
- Established the completion/roadway lighting locations as key legislative issue for I-22
- Hosted forum for Senator Reed regarding High School drop-out rate as a state-wide issue
- Endorsed pro-business candidates in local elections
- Monthly “Donuts and Discussion” sessions regarding issues of concern to the community
- Endorsed the “Rainy day fund” Constitutional Amendment

# Campaign Council

**Pete Ellis**  
*Mayor of Sumiton*

**Honorable Doug Farris**  
*Circuit Judge*

**Edward R. Jackson**  
*Jackson, Fikes, Hood and  
Brakefield*

**Billy Luster**  
*Chairman, Walker County  
Commission*

**Bob Nolen**  
*Pinnacle Bank*

**Sonny Posey**  
*Mayor of Jasper*

**Beth Thorne Stukes**  
*Community Leader*

**Gerald Watkins**  
*Regions Bank*

**W. Haig Wright**  
*Byars and Associates*

# Board of Advisors

**Dr. Jason Adkins**  
*Walker County Board of  
Education*

**Carol Alexander**  
*White Pepper Real Estate*

**Glenn Barton**  
*Scott Crump Toyota*

**Brian Beck**  
*ALAGASCO*

**Buck Buchanan**  
*Fontaine Intermodal*

**Kevin Callahan**  
*Honda of Jasper*

**Dr. Kim Ennis**  
*Bevill State Community College*

**Bert Hendrix**  
*First Bank of Jasper*

**Susan McKinney**  
*Alabama Power Company*

**Jack McNeely**  
*Daily Mountain Eagle*

**Dr. Robert Sparkman**  
*Jasper City Board of Education*

**Walker Wilson**  
*Bank of Walker County*





A five-year strategic initiative

The **CHAMBER**  
COMMERCE OF  
*Walker County*

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