

# Chamber Sets A Bold Agenda

January 25, 2010

The Greater Greenville Chamber of Commerce has laid out a clear, sensible path toward improving the economic fortunes of Upstate residents in its new Accelerate program unveiled last week. The path includes an ambitious agenda that, if met, will certainly position Greenville as a leader in economic growth in the coming decade.

Success will hinge on a coordinated effort and a cooperative spirit from business and government leaders both in the Upstate and around all of South Carolina. The goal meshes well with efforts already under way and is achievable. But it will require some hard work. If the Upstate has proven anything in its history, however, it's that our region can adapt.

The chief goal of Accelerate is to generate 15,000 new jobs in the area over the next five years to reverse a nine-year decline in per capita income. In that time, Greenville County's per capita income has gone from about 101 percent of the U.S. average to about 91 percent.

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The program depends on support from the community in the form of a \$4 million fundraising effort to support the five-year program. The return on that investment would be tremendous. According to data from the Chamber, if the county's per capita income is brought on par with the national average, an additional \$1.35 billion in income would be earned (and, presumably, spent) in the county every year. That holds a huge potential to improve everyone's quality of life.

To improve the area's income, the Chamber has laid out a series of ambitious and sensible goals. Among its ideas:

- Increasing the region's voice in Columbia on pro-economic policies, something the Chamber's already begun with its Upstate Chamber Coalition. It also hopes to give regional businesses a greater voice in policy-making.
- Reducing airfares at Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport. The key effort in this area is an ongoing push to bring a discount carrier to GSP. The Chamber isn't alone in this effort that's also being championed by local and state government and businesses that rely on the airport.
- Helping employers market Greenville to attract talent to the area; supporting "high-impact" recruiting projects by employers.
- Improving K-12 school performance and increasing the number of college-educated adults in Greenville County. Education is one of South Carolina's most limiting factors when it comes to improving the economy. This needs to be a statewide effort and it will be essential for the Chamber to work with state groups that share this very important goal.
- Positioning Greenville as a national center for entrepreneurial excellence. The NEXT Innovation Center is an important step forward on this goal. The Chamber needs to continue working with groups such as the Upstate Angel Network; the South Carolina Research Authority; visionaries like John Warner, founder of the annual InnoVenture conference; and the state's research universities to ensure Upstate entrepreneurs have the resources they need to succeed. None of these are new goals. But stating them as part of a coordinated effort supported by the entire business community is important. All of us have a stake in this agenda.

*Continued on next page*

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Page 2

It's encouraging to see the Chamber present a concrete plan for improving the economy. It's a plan that deserves the community's support through fundraising and other assistance; and it's worthy of support from state and local government leaders who can influence policy to improve the economic climate of the Upstate and all of South Carolina.

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