

Chamber Raising \$3.8M For Economic Initiative

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The Jackson Area Chamber of Commerce wants to raise another nearly \$1.5 million to help recruit business, retain existing business and help improve the city's public school system.

The chamber is attempting to raise a total of \$3.8 million by April 30 to fund a five-year economic development initiative called "Forward Jackson." The initiative will include ways to market Jackson to outside industry in hopes of creating jobs, help existing industry to retain jobs and improve the public school system to make the city's future workforce more attractive to industry leaders looking to locate businesses, said Chamber President Kyle Spurgeon.

"When we improve education in Jackson," he said, "we will be more attractive to industry across the U.S."

Spurgeon was on the campus of Union University for a Wednesday luncheon, explaining the organization's campaign to about 50 local business owners, bankers, chamber members, and residents.

The chamber is not soliciting individual donations; rather, it is taking its plan to businesses and industry leaders throughout the area and requesting donations to the campaign. All money collected will be overseen and distributed by the chamber.

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The chamber had raised \$2,320,000 in pledges as of Wednesday, said Bobby Arnold, president of the West Tennessee Healthcare System, who also spoke to audience members on Wednesday.

"This is an opportunity to invest in Jackson to create jobs," he said, "to create a better place to live."

The chamber will not be offering tax or other incentives to attract businesses to the area, Spurgeon said; instead, it will focus on marketing and drawing attention to the benefits of living and working in the city and county. The funds raised will be used over a five-year period and will include: \$300,000 for economic development; \$600,000 for community development — which includes public safety and education; and \$200,000 for communication, governance and investor relations, according to a brochure distributed by the chamber at the luncheon.