

# Viewpoint: Chamber Has 'Vision' For A Better Pensacola Future

By Bentina Terry

Where does the future of the Pensacola Bay Area lie? How do we get there? These are the questions we in the Pensacola Bay Area have asked ourselves for years, through good and bad times. The answers, even in the wake of hurricanes, a sagging economy and an oil spill in the Gulf, remain clear.

Our future lies in growth. It lies in more and better jobs for our people and in rising incomes that will fuel a better quality of life for all our citizens. It lies in improving education and reinforcing strong ties within the community. And the way we get there is through economic development. This is the challenge, and the mission, of the Pensacola Bay Area Chamber of Commerce.

We must not forget what we start with here in the Pensacola area — a growing university and state college, tremendous infrastructure with a world-class regional airport, a major highway, deep-water port and rail service and plenty of room to grow — and grow smart. We have the most beautiful beaches, and we have people who are determined to make their own way through whatever life throws us. We have great feedstock, a solid foundation and strong bones.

The real questions now are:

- Is the Pensacola Bay Area Chamber of Commerce a vehicle or obstacle to growth?
- Are we at the chamber going about economic development the right way?
- Are we getting the buy-in we need from our community to make economic development work?
- How can we as a chamber do better?

Step one to moving forward in maximizing our attributes and getting the "right" answers to those questions: Hire new leadership.

Jim Hizer, new chamber CEO, has a sterling resume and proven track record in economic development. He brings new energy and new ideas to our economic development efforts.

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Step two is engaging the business and local elected leadership to "invest" in this effort through a capital campaign — Vision 2015. We have to show them why they should invest. This is not charity work; this has to have a real return. Our goal is to raise \$6.5 million over the next five years, and with that money to add 3,000 new jobs to our community.

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What do 3,000 additional jobs mean? Those jobs mean \$77.1 million in new bank deposits and \$11 million in additional groceries bought each year. They mean an additional \$2 million spent on medical services and almost \$9 million in new vehicles purchased. They mean people buy \$18 million in new homes and spend \$5 million to furnish them. And they mean an additional \$149 million in consumer spending

and \$5.3 million in additional sales tax. Those jobs mean new economic life for the Pensacola Bay Area. We cannot get there alone. Vision 2015 is important, these numbers are important, and you are important to support our exceeding the goal and for renewing the sense that the Pensacola Bay Area is moving forward, building for the future and creating a better life for everyone.

*Bentina Terry is the co-chairwoman for Vision 2015 for the Pensacola Bay Area Chamber of Commerce.*